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**The Thesis Committee for Brittany Anne Linton  
Certifies that this is the approved version of the following report:**

**A Strength Based Approach Examining Resiliency in College Students  
from Single-Parent Family Structures**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:**

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Alissa Sherry

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Delida Sanchez

**A Strength Based Approach Examining Resiliency in College Students  
from Single-Parent Family Structures**

**by**

**Brittany Anne Linton, B.A.**

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## **Abstract**

### **A Strength Based Approach Examining Resiliency in College Students from Single-Parent Family Structures**

Brittany Anne Linton, M.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Alissa Sherry

According to recent data, approximately eighteen percent of children under age 18 live in single-parent households. The majority of research has focused on negative outcomes associated with one-parent households in comparison to their two-parent counterparts, including poor academic performance and increased delinquency rates in children. The current literature neglects to evaluate potentially advantageous factors resultant of being raised in a single-parent home. The proposed study utilizes an exploratory positive psychology approach to investigate levels of resiliency and adaptive skill sets present in college students raised in single-parent households in comparison to the degree of cumulative risk encountered. Analyses of these variables will be completed through ordinary least squares multiple regression. Furthermore, parenting style will be examined as a potential moderator of resiliency. Finally, this study proposes the adoption of a new paradigm in ongoing investigation of this unique population.

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## **Introduction**

The social structure within the United States in the last several decades has undergone a significant shift regarding composition of families. Greater numbers of American family structures are taking alternative forms to the “normative” two-biological-parent household, including the inclusion of step-parents, blended families, same-sex parent households, and parents that may be committed but never legally marry. Similarly, parental separation, divorce, and partner-free adults are not uncommon familial environments for children in modern society, resulting in a considerable increase of the percentage of children living in single-parent households. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), the percentage of husband-wife family households fell below 50 percent (48 percent) for the first time since data collection on families began. Subsequently, single-parent households comprise approximately 18 percent of all American households, which is an increase from 16 percent in 2000 and 15 percent in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) and reportedly, 27.2% of children under the age of 18 lived with one parent in 2007 (Phillips, 2012). As diverse family structures have slowly become more prominent since the 1980s, research interests have responded in kind.

Since the 1970s, research of single-parent households has by and large focused on the associated negative outcomes (Hanson, 1986; Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan & Anderson, 1989). Results from research primarily related to juvenile delinquency, inadequate sex role identification with the single parent, drug or alcohol abuse, poor

school achievement, sexual promiscuity, and limited parental supervision (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan & Anderson, 1989; Barber & Eccles, 1992; Murry, Bynum, Brody, Willert & Stephens, 2001; Rodgers & Rose, 2002; Roberts, Lewis & Carmack, 2011). Studies directed at identifying apparent deficiencies of single-parents oftentimes possess a value orientation that provides positive appraisal to traditional nuclear family structures while perpetuating negative stereotypes of the “broken home” (Barber & Eccles, 1992). However, recent literature investigating between group differences of two and one-parent family homes demonstrates that controlling for family income results in these apparent differences dissolving and having limited significant effect on adolescent well-being (Barber & Eccles, 1992; Rodgers & Rose, 2002; Phillips, 2012). It would be difficult to argue that single-parent homes do not encounter unique difficulties and hardships that are not as commonplace in two-parent households, such as a greater role strain placed on the parent. However, neglecting to identify the potential strengths that single-parent families possess undermines the possibility to utilize inherent skills already present when trying to enact change through intervention strategies. Additionally, the assumption that all children emerging from these households are unsuccessful is a gross overgeneralization, when many children can have positive experiences (Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996; Gilligan, 2000; Chen & George, 2005).

Sole focus provided to dysfunctional or pathological aspects of the family structure creates detrimental barriers to reinforcing and building upon “what works well” in the family. Subsequently, the past few decades of research has moved away from conceptualizing the single-parent household as deviant or abnormal (Hanson, 1986;



Barber & Eccles, 1992; Taylor, Casten & Flickinger, 1993; Rodgers & Rose, 2002; Phillips, 2012). Instead many studies are working to find how individuals in single-parent households manage to adapt and cope to their difficulties. Studies shifting away from a disease model of single-parenthood are often grounded in positive psychology, a facet of the field that works to build on people's strengths to enhance their well-being. Positive psychology involves "identifying and nurturing [one's] strongest qualities, what they own and are best at, and helping them find niches in which they can best live out these positive qualities" (Seligman, 2005, p. 5). The pivotal construct of resiliency surfaced from the positive psychology orientation and can be instrumental in facilitating understanding of the single-parent family structure.

Current research views resilience as a psychosocial response and a facet of what can be considered overall wellness in response to adversity. Gilligan (2000) discusses the integral role that parents and other influential adults have on resiliency formation in children, through the stability of the caregiver relationship, and reinforcing of self-esteem and self-efficacy. While parents face their own unique set of stressors in working to maintain a single-parent household, their ability to maintain healthy parent-child relationship behaviors and interactions beneficially influence factors of resiliency. Parenting styles have the potential to mitigate many of the stressors that families may inherently encounter and enhance children's resilience and coping through appropriate modeling.

Among current existing empirical work, parental involvement and resiliency have consistently been variables of psychosocial interest – independent of each other - in

studies involving single-parent family structures. Within literature, there is an absence of how single-parents' involvement may positively influence children's coping and resilience. Furthermore, there is minimal understanding of the impact of single-parentedness on overall development outside of young children and adolescents. Presumably, given rising divorce rates in the 1980s and 90s, there now exists a substantial cohort of young adults, ages 18 – 25, which were raised in these diverse family structures that can critically reflect on their childhood and upbringing. These retrospectives can provide valuable insight into the lived experience of children in single-parent homes and highlight both distinctive positive and negative aspects, helping to distinguish the commonalities and differences many single-parent families encounter. Clinically, results can present a more comprehensive picture of the adversities families face and behaviors they utilize to adapt accordingly, as well as useful information to develop strategies for strength-based interventions.

The proposed study is an exploratory investigation of resilience in a sample of college-aged young adults with single-parent families of origin. Parenting styles will be examined in particular, in addition to resiliency traits endorsed by participants relative to perceived degree of difficult conditions the family endured. A review of the literature will also include focus on unique factors of single-parent structures, influence of parenting styles, and the construct of resiliency and its relations to positive psychosocial outcomes. Ordinary least squares regression analyses will determine if perceived difficulties of the single-parent upbringing and parenting styles serve as predictors of resilience. Parenting

styles will be examined as potential moderators of the relationship between adversities experienced and resilience in children from single-parent households.

## **Integrative Analysis**

### **SINGLE-PARENT FAMILY STRUCTURES**

Single-parenthood can be resultant of various situations, including death of a parent and un-partnered adults who may elect to have children on their own. Commonly though, single-parenthood is often the result of a divorce or separation of two-biological-parents that had been married. Subsequently, the majority of existing literature focuses on divorced and separated single-parents, and predominately single mothers.

### **Research History & Societal Context**

Following World War II, rising divorce rates in America drew attention to families that no longer followed the traditional family model. Statistics at the time indicated that 50 to 60% of children born during the 1980s would live in a single-parent family at some point before the age of 18 (Barber & Eccles, 1992; Murry et al., 2001) prompting family researchers to investigate the potential “negative effects of father-absence on male children in single mothers homes” (Hanson, 1986). From that point, the preponderance of research topics drew correlations between single-parent homes and children’s maladjustment in comparison with their dual-parent household peers. The majority of these studies found between-group differences that reported overwhelming negative consequences for children and adolescents originating from a single-parent home, including increased delinquency rates (Stephenson, Blakely & Nichol, 1973; Touliatos & Lindholm, 1980; Putnins, 1984; Anderson, 2002; Boutwell & Beaver, 2010), poor academic achievement (Shinn, 1978; Rosenthal & Hansen, 1980; Shreeve et al.,

1986), and increased drug and alcohol use (Brook, Whiteman & Gordon, 1985; Flewelling & Bauman, 1990; Turner, Irwin & Millstein, 1991). Additionally, early researchers focused on the seemingly disproportionate impact of single-parenthood on the African-American community, considering “nearly 53% of African-American children under the age of 18 live with a single parent” (Roberts, Lewis & Carmack, 2011) and examined the environmental influences of inner-city and urban settings on African-American adolescent development, particularly gang-violence and adolescent pregnancy. By the mid 1990s, American society had formulated negative stereotypes of single-parent homes; households were most likely headed by women, typically African-American, and would produce unsuccessful adolescents with little likelihood of upward mobility.

Following this period, researchers attempted to identify mediating effects that could account for apparent disparities and highlighted the importance of family economics. In particular, proposed differences for single-parent structures and limited academic success were attenuated with the introduction of socio-economic status (Marsh, 1990; Battle, 2002; Phillips, 2012). Literature gravitated towards externalizing factors that could account for negative outcomes of psychosocial development, such as economic deprivation, in lieu of pathologizing the family structure itself.

Murry et al. (2001) argue that historically two major paradigms have shaped the field and research. The first suggests that “aspects of family formation that differ from those of never-divorced, two-parent nuclear families are detrimental to children’s development” (Murry et al., 2001) prompting studies to focus on proposed deficiencies, disadvantages, and disparities for children in single-parent versus two-parent families. As

discussed above, research in the 1970s through 1990s overwhelmingly concentrated in this realm of between-group comparisons. The second paradigm implies that socio-economic status was a likely culprit that provided the most comprehensive explanation for the differences between the two family structures. Studies controlling for demographics, such as income, provided greater contextual understanding of how multiple circumstances confronting single-parents contributed to child well-being, not just parental composition alone. The majority of the literature discussed thus far conforms to these paradigm distinctions.

Both paradigm approaches demonstrate the comparative differences between family structures. Undoubtedly, single-parent families encounter different adversities that two-parent families do not have to consider. Understanding the situational characteristics of single-parent families has implications in identifying risk factors and adaptive capabilities of parents and children alike.

### **Profile of the Single Parent**

Family economics are oftentimes strained for families undergoing marriage dissolution, including experiencing loss of any additional income provided by the partner, divorce expenses, and difficulty obtaining regular child support payments (Barber & Eccles, 1992; Bray & Hetherington, 1993; Richards & Schmiede, 1993). Additionally, non-working parents prior to divorce or separation may be confronted with employment difficulties in having to re-enter the workforce. Generally all single-parents, regardless of any previous marital status, will also face the difficult task of matching employment positions to be more amendable to needs of the new family structure (Heath & Orthner,

1999; Minnotte, 2012). Overall job instability and underpaying employment may require welfare support (Barber & Eccles, 1992; Richards & Schmiede, 1993; Heath & Orthner, 1999) and multiple changes of residences (Bray & Hetherington, 1993). Families are likely to face difficult overall economic conditions, impacting other facets of family development.

Single-parents typically experience difficulties in attempts to juggle employment and parental responsibilities simultaneously without additional partner support. This can lead to task overload and role strain (Weiss, 1979; Richards & Schmiede, 1993) particularly for single-mothers who typically take on greater responsibility for childcare than the non-custodial male partner despite any child rearing arrangements (Bray & Hetherington, 1993). Limited parental supervision and monitoring can occur due to parents' work schedule, which has correlated to higher incidences of adolescent delinquency and risk-taking behavior (Cookston, 1999; Heath & Orthner, 1999). Single-parents also are forced to carefully allocate their time between their various demanding roles, leaving little chance for sleep much less leisure-time (Richards & Schmiede, 1993). Temporal demands can also make socializing difficult, resulting in possible limitations in social support, increased feelings of isolation, and creating barriers to investing in romantic partners. However, research indicates that a majority of single-parents find parenting becomes easier over time as they gain greater organizational skills and fall into a family routine (Bray & Hetherington, 1993; Richards & Schmiede, 1993). Similarly, previous work has reported that single-parent families regain greater normalcy and

routine after two years with overall improved functioning of the family structure (Rodgers & Rose, 2002).

Approximately 13% of all U.S. households are headed by single mothers and 5% headed by single fathers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Work exploring sex-differences in parenting behaviors amongst single-mothers and single-fathers completed by Dufur, Howell, Downey, Ainsworth and Lapray (2010) indicated that single-mothers and fathers do not differ upon gender in terms of degree of care and parenting involvement, which supported previous findings. Propensities for slightly different resource provisions based on parental gender have been reported, where single-mothers provide “greater levels of interpersonal resources to their children” and single fathers “provide greater economic resources” (Dufur et al., 2010) however children did not have significant distinctive outcomes for academic or social variables in parental gender comparisons when controlling for economics (a greater likelihood of academic success is attributed with single-father families because of increased economic status).

Finally, single-parents have faced societal judgment and stigma due to the negative associations interwoven in the narrative over the past few decades. However, with the steady increase and stabilizing rates of single-parent families (Minnotte, 2012) and the declining proportion of two-parent households as discussed earlier, there is an increased probability that the American public has encountered single-parents at some point. Similarly, divorce is no longer an abnormal occurrence as it was forty years ago possibly attenuating social stigma (Barber & Eccles, 1992). Furthermore, alternative family structures are more commonplace as contemporary societal marital expectations



shift to accommodate a broader definition of “family.” Therefore, socially derived strife or shame reasonably has lessened amongst single-parent families with the normalization of the family structure, although there is not prevalent literature.

These accounts of single-parenthood originate predominately from self-reports of parents and assumed logistical difficulties proposed by researchers. Narratives of growing-up in single-parent family structures from a child’s perspective were not found during review of the literature. Characteristics of unique circumstances encountered by children would add depth and clarity in conceptualization of family structure experiences and would aid in identifying commonalities and differences amongst single-parent families.

## **PARENTING STYLES**

Parenting styles are widely believed to be imperative in contributing to “fostering healthy developmental trajectories” and “promoting adaptive educational, social, and behavioral functioning” (Sheridan, Eagle & Dowd, 2005), allowing researchers to analyze the relationship between behaviors and attitudes of parents and child outcomes (Domenech Rodríguez, Donovanick & Crowley, 2009). The family system provides the opportunity for children to acquire skills through modeling and providing learning experiences from birth onwards. Parenting styles are best defined as interwoven parenting behaviors, goals for childrearing, and attitudes expressed towards children that create an overall emotional environment (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Domenech Rodríguez, Donovanick & Crowley, 2009) to support skill development aligned to parental values. Four parental style categories have been developed by theorists: authoritarian,

permissive, authoritative and neglectful (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Sheridan, Eagle & Dowd, 2005; Domenech Rodríguez, Donovanick & Crowley, 2009). All four are comprised of varying degrees of dimensions related to warmth, demandingness, and autonomy granting (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Domenech Rodríguez, Donovanick & Crowley, 2009).

Definitions of parenting styles are fairly common and well articulated in parenting related research literature. Authoritarian parenting is characterized by low responsiveness, high levels of authority and control, and limited autonomy granting. Permissive parents are identified through demonstrations of high levels of warmth and allowing greater freedoms for children to regulate their own rules and activities, with low demandingness and limited rule enforcement. Neglectful parenting practices are low in warmth, control, and autonomy granting. In contrast, authoritative parenting techniques balances permissive and authoritarian through emotional support and constructive communication, high demandingness with appropriate boundary setting, and high autonomy granting to allow the child structured freedom.

Authoritativeness has been demonstrated to correlate with successful child outcomes such as greater competence, independence, self-esteem, academic success, positive social relationships, and lower psychopathology (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Murry et al., 2001; Sheridan, Eagle & Dowd, 2005; Domenech Rodríguez, Donovanick & Crowley, 2009). Additionally, authoritative parenting that incorporates positive and consistent discipline has been associated with increased resiliency in children (Sheridan, Eagle, & Dowd, 2005; Swanson, Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant & O'Brien, 2011). For these

reasons, understanding the parenting practices employed by single-parents can illuminate family processes that support the entire family system.

### **Single-Parenting Behaviors**

As discussed above, difficulties that arise related to the nature of divorce or separation include economic instability, decreased parental supervision, and possible increases in conflict (with previous partner or children) due to disruption to the family system. However, children living in single-parent homes exhibit improved child well-being and adjustment compared to their peers from two-parent households that contain ongoing marital strife and conflict (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagen & Anderson, 1989; Bray & Hetherington, 1993). Subsequently, while single-parent structures may face initial transitional difficulties, they provide improved emotional family climates over likely previous family relational conditions. Parents that can limit children's exposure to acrimonious interactions between separated parents and avoid criticism of the other parent to the child also contribute to healthy adjustment (Bray & Hetherington, 1993). Moreover, adolescent well-being improves with fewer exposures to marital or romantic transitions in single-parent households (Bachman, Coley & Carrano, 2012). While single-parents can engage in romantic relationships, findings emphasized that parental consistency and limiting multiple attachments to other adults would protect children from further disruptive family transitions.

Similar to findings in general populations of parenting styles and child outcomes, work focusing on single-parents has shown that authoritative parenting contributes to greater propensity of positive outcomes. Taylor, Casten & Flickinger (1993) evaluated

the influence of kinship support on single-parenting strategies used by African-American single-mothers. The study determined that when mothers have social support from family, they are more likely to use authoritative practices and engage in more positive interactions with adolescent children. Likewise, positive adjustment in children has been associated in families with single-mothers and fathers that demonstrate authoritative dimensions of warmth, communication, support and consistent control (Bray & Hetherington, 1993).

Previous studies have demonstrated that greater overall health for single parents and their children, including mental and physical well-being, is associated with improved communication skills (indicating greater parent-child alignment) and broader social networks (Hanson, 1986). Communication has been shown to provide a protective factor for children in single-parent families, as previous research has reported that children spend more time talking with parents in single-parent households in comparison with two-parent families (Roberts, Lewis & Carmack, 2011) and that parent-child communication in a single-parent structure can lead to both strengthening the relationship overall in addition to acting as a protective factor against risk behaviors (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000; Roberts, Lewis & Carmack, 2011).

## **RESILIENCE**

Resilience is widely defined as the adaptive ability to recover from negative experiences and situations by utilizing multiple strategies and resources to successfully cope with adversity (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000; Wright & Masten, 2005). Resilience is also considered the “achievement of positive developmental outcomes and avoidance of

maladaptive outcomes under adverse conditions” that might “impair normal development” (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005). Resilience is the culmination of protective factors that allow adaption to occur and supersede risk factors that are present in the adverse situation.

Resilience requires two criteria: first, the presence of a significant threat to an individual’s development, and second, that positive adjustment and functioning of the individual resumes despite the presenting risk (Wright & Masten, 2005). Risk factors are defined as characteristics in a situation that predict a negative outcome for a specific criterion, presence of psychopathology. Conversely, protective factors are “quality of a person or context or their interaction that predicts better outcomes” particularly in the fact of risk (Wright & Masen, 2005). Protective characteristics of resiliency that have been identified in previous studies include humor, creativity, insight, independence, and adaptability. Optimism also exists as a primary characteristic and marker of a resilient individual (Gillham & Reivch, 2004; Greeff & Ritman, 2005) in addition to reportedly high degrees of self-esteem and self-efficacy (Hauser, Vieyra, Jacobson & Wertlieb, 1985; Greeff & Ritman, 2005). Previous studies evaluating characteristics of a resilient nature indicate that resilient adolescents generally demonstrate higher intelligence, greater problem solving skills and positive relationships with peers (Hauser, Vieyra, Jacobson & Wertlieb, 1985; Fergusson & Lynskey, 1996).

One traumatic event is not automatically associated with poor outcomes but instead the cumulative effects of ongoing stressors evolve into what is considered to be “cumulative risk” (Gilligan, 2000; Goldstein & Brooks, 2005; Wright & Masten, 2005;

Chen & George, 2005; Stoddard, Zimmerman & Bauemeister, 2012). Similarly, a divorce does not automatically dictate that children will likely experience negative outcomes. Instead, negative outcomes are attributed to the cumulative risk factors presented by the ongoing stressors that conflict and divorce present, in addition to how well the family structure navigates and adapts to transitions (Wright & Masten, 2005). In evaluating adolescent development in at-risk youth, Stoddard, Zimmerman and Bauermeister (2012) identified protective factors to determine the extent they mitigated and lessened the likelihood of violent behavior in what were considered high-risk environments. Coping strategies were found to moderate the impact of the negative effects of cumulative risks on violent behaviors, indicating that interventions focused on developing protective factors may assist in counteracting cumulative risks that adolescents are likely to experience.

Instead of focusing on the severity of risk factors and basing functioning on perceived deficiencies, studies in resilience seek to highlight and predict adjustment and stress hardiness, which are perceived as better indicators of overcoming adversity than traditional pathology models. Within wellness models, resilient adaptive functioning aids in the developmental desire to cope and re-establish homeostasis as best as possible however resilient tendencies are not present in every individual and do not manifest in every situation (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005). Subsequently, individuals can encounter similar life circumstances but only a portion will utilize resilience mechanisms, depending on various traits and states. Substantial empirical data supports autonomy, social capital, and optimism as dimensions of resiliency that act as protective processes.

## **Autonomy**

Autonomy marks a transitional period during adolescent development that incorporates the advancement of greater individuation, independent-functioning, decision-making, and self-reliance (Sessa & Steinberg, 1991). High levels of autonomy indicate that an individual is self-determining and independent, possess greater capabilities to resist social pressure, better able to regulate their behavior without external controls, and evaluate oneself utilizing personal standards (Ryff & Singer, 2001). Healthy autonomy development transpires when parents maintain parental control and monitoring of child's behavior yet encourage children to think and act independently.

Sessa & Steinberg (1991) proposed that adolescent autonomy is shaped in two different fashions in single-parent families. First, family transitions prompted by divorce or separation can instigate autonomy process due to changing inter-family relationships. Second, newly restructured families create new contexts for developmental tasks. Greater responsibility is normally placed upon the child due to single-parents' reliance upon the child to complete household tasks and make family decisions that would most likely be shared in a two parent household. Subsequently, there is a greater likelihood for children to have increased exposure to independently carrying out household chores, participating in family decisions, and greater opportunity to operating independently with less direct parental supervision (Weiss, 1979; Barber & Eccles, 1992; Rodgers & Rose, 2002).

These household tasks can include preparing meals, housecleaning, laundry, and even financial contributions such as adolescent part-time employment or a greater awareness of family financial circumstances. Although adolescents may not directly

contribute to overall household expenses, they may take on greater responsibility for their own expenses, such as transportation, clothing, or entertainment. Children from these households may also encounter greater flexibility in negotiating household rules, responsibilities, or freedom. Reasonable expectations of responsibility for these tasks can contribute to an increased sense of independence and competence (Weiss, 1979; Barber & Eccles, 1992; Rodgers & Rose, 2002) and delivered in an authoritative and supportive parenting structure, children may develop greater self-esteem and autonomy (Barber & Eccles, 1992).

### **Social Capital**

Existing literature routinely emphasizes the importance of social support as a protective factor in resilience building. Social capital, especially as it pertains to solo-parents, is the aptitude for one to connect to other social support systems to enhance social resources (Murry & Brody, 1999). Particularly for adolescents, relationships with competent adults capable of modeling prosocial behavior in addition to positive peer influences has been linked to positive resilient outcomes (Masten & Reed, 2005). For example, research has indicated the positive role that other adults can play for African-American adolescents in lower-income single-parent homes, indicating that adolescents are more likely to be self-reliant and fewer demonstrations of problematic behavior if they experience social and emotional support from adults other than their parents, specifically kin (Taylor, Casten & Flickinger, 1993; Murry et al., 2001). Peer relationships have been found to be especially useful in reinforcing resiliency in addition to educational environments that provide additional social outlets and non-parental



adults, such as extended family or teachers (Hauser, Vieyra, Jacobson & Wertlieb, 1985; Rodgers & Rose, 2002). The addition of positive extrafamilial adult relationships provides salient role-modeling, support, and additional supervision that the single-parent is limited in providing due to additional demands placed on their time to support the family. Extrafamilial relationships increase the likelihood that children will adopt positive socially adaptive behaviors that nurture healthy adjustment to risk.

### **Optimism**

Gillham & Reivich (p.1, 2004) define optimism as the general “tendency or disposition to expect the best.” Individuals who generally maintain an optimistic outlook have been linked to greater overall success in arenas such as work and school, fewer mental health concerns, better physical health, and greater relationship satisfaction (Gillham & Reivich, 2004; Taylor, Larsen-Rife, Conger, Widaman & Cutrona, 2010). Additionally optimistic individuals are better protected from stressors and possess the ability to draw upon their own resources to functionally adapt to stress (Deater-Deckard, Ivy & Smith, 2005; Taylor et al., 2010). Optimism has been indicated in previous work to be the most salient characteristic contributing to overall resilience for single-parent structures that lost a parent to death (Greeff & Ritman, 2005). Dispositional optimism has also been shown to help moderate the impact of economic adversity on African-American single-mother families through bolstering of maternal resiliency (Taylor et al., 2010). However, empirical work assessing the influence of optimism in single-parent structures is limited and merits further investigation.

## **RESILIENCE AND SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES – PROPOSED STRENGTHS**

The single-parent family can be a context that promotes competence and independence and helps strengthen the individual against later stressors (Barber & Eccles, 1992). Parents can also promote healthy adaptive functioning through modeling of characteristics of resilience in their parenting behaviors in interactions with children (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000; Greeff & Ritman, 2005; Sheridan, Eagle & Dowd, 2005). Oftentimes, children’s sense of self-esteem, autonomy, competency, communication styles and problem solving capabilities are linked to caregivers (Hauser, Vieyra, Jacobson & Wertlieb, 1985; Best, Hauser & Allen, 1997; Heppner & Lee, 2005). Similarly, modeling optimism can reportedly instill the characteristic in children because “adolescents and adults who report that their parents were caring and affectionate report higher levels of hope” (Gillham & Reivich, 2004). Overall, although limited, earlier bodies of research indicated that adolescents from single-parent homes perceived themselves to have greater self-sufficiency, responsibility, greater self-reliance, and a greater number of skills than their peers from two-parent families (Barber & Eccles, 1992). Additionally, greater maturity through being forced to “grow up” (Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan & Anderson, 1989).

Consequently, through the transmission of resilient skills and behaviors, single-parent households can become families of resilience that nurture positive adaptability in youth. Research focused on evaluating the parenting strategies and goals of single African-American mothers described parents actively seeking to “teach their children the values, morals, and behaviors that they need to survive and to succeed” (Brodsky &

DeVet, 2000) and a desire to “raise a contributing member to society” (Roberts, Lewis & Carmack, 2011). Growing up with a solo-parent presents children and adolescents with a unique set of challenges, thus allowing for the development of productive skills and coping strategies.

As discussed above, two schools of thought (Murry et al., 2000) have dominated empirical work examining single-parent households. Review of the extant contemporary literature (Ardelt & Eccles, 2001; Gillham & Reivich, 2004; Greeff & Ritman, 2005; Robert, Lewis & Carmack, 2011; Phillips, 2012) indicates that a third paradigm has begun to evolve steadily over the past decade with three substantial characteristics in conceptualizing and studying single-parent families. First, studies focus on establishing what positive traits and behaviors solo-parents demonstrate and associated positive outcomes in children. Second, work typically does not make comparisons of family structures – eliminating a sense of hierarchy – and instead focuses on heterogeneity within single-parent families. Finally, definitions of what constitutes a “single-parent” have broadened from divorced single-mothers exclusively to evaluating what unique characteristics may differentiate single-mothers from single-fathers.

However, there are still some shortfalls of this approach. Most of the research does not clearly define what period of time children are living within a solo-parent headed household, therefore not giving a clear indication of how long children are living in possibly strained family conditions and during which influential developmental years. There would arguably be a distinct difference in varying degrees of outcomes if a child

has been living with their single-parent since birth versus in the final formative years of adolescence.

Although African-American single-motherhood is no longer the gold standard to define single-parenthood, diverse family structures continue to increase. Single-parents who never had additional partner support after the birth of children possibly communicate different parenting values, such as increased independence, than parents who separate partway through childrearing. Similarly, when additional non-custodial parents are not part of the picture for children, there could be marked differences in exposure to conflict if biological parental arguing does not occur. The definition of “single-parent” warrants further expansion and investigation of how structuring of the single-parent household itself is not monolithic.

Finally, outcomes are based on young child or adolescent performance on various measures of academic performance, disciplinary records, reports of drug or alcohol use, or perceived social relatedness with peers based on teacher and parent reports. This form of evaluation may be insufficient though in determining if there are unique characteristics, skills, or behaviors that develop from single-parent structures that traditional measures associated with two-parent homes may mask. Older populations of single-parent children likely possess greater cognitive functions to make these comparative distinctions of how their upbringing may have differed from two-parent structure counterparts. Because single-parenthood has increasingly become more normative and accepted, there is now a larger population to access of children originating from single-parent structures to assess for any defining characteristics.

## **Proposed Research Study**

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The primary purpose of this study is to conduct an exploratory investigation of the psychosocial factors that influence resiliency in college students raised in single-parent family structures. More specifically, it aims to examine what specific parental behaviors and interactions with children act as protective factors to possibly moderate resiliency that carries on into emerging adulthood despite risk factors present in single-parent structures. Ordinary least squares regression in addition to moderation analyses will be conducted to discover what specific skills young adults have adopted to adapt to family structural concerns. Information derived from this retrospective study will contribute to understanding specific resiliency traits that originate from single-parent families that are unique to the conditions of the structure, informing clinical interventions directed at strengthening single-parent families to limit adverse impact of cumulative risk.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

*Research Question 1.* Is there a relationship between adversities faced during childhood in single-parent households and present resilience in college students?

*Hypothesis 1.* It is anticipated that extent of cumulative risk encountered during childhood will be positively associated with extent of resilience in college students.

*Rationale 1.* Surprisingly, the current field of study lacks substantial empirical analysis investigating the degree of resiliency in relation to cumulative risk encountered. Therefore, this study is exploratory in nature to obtain greater understanding how adversity can reasonably predict healthy coping and elucidate factors that affect outcomes

into young adulthood. Historically, resilience literature has focused on academic success as a positive outcome firmly linked to high levels of resiliency, including the college environment (Elias, Parker & Rosenblatt, 2005). However, rarely have evaluative studies extended past high-school to measure ongoing resiliency demonstrated by academic success in higher education settings for children of single-parents (Taylor et al., 2010). This study concentrates on college students' success from single-parent homes working under an assumption that the population already harbors significant coping skills to successfully finish high-school and advance to college. Subsequently, young adults from solo-parent family structures presumably have marked resiliency, and it is critical to clarify how family structure positively or negatively contributed to student's position of educational attainment.

Adaptive skills acquired and exhibited arguably are proportionate to the degree of risk exposure in the family structure. Unfortunately, a paucity of research related to measuring risk in comparison to resiliency is seemingly not present in current literature. However, for a college population, reasoning would suggest that the greater number of risk factors encountered throughout upbringing would require equivalent appropriate coping techniques to combat and surmount cumulative risk to ensure academic success. Murry & Brody (1999) have noted that there are well-established risks that are associated with one-parent households, including economic hardship, limited supervision, and a lack of additional social support. The compounding of risks results in higher levels of cumulative risk (Wright & Masten, 2005). Similarly, protective factors that contribute to resiliency include autonomy, social connectivity, and optimism (Wright & Masten,

2005). The foundational definition of resiliency points towards the notion that students would attain necessary means to effectively manage cumulative risk (Brodsky & DeVet, 2000). Thus, it might be hypothesized that for students that have faced substantial cumulative risk and manage to pursue college, adaptively developing high levels of overall resiliency to compensate would account for their abilities.

*Research Question 2.* Does parenting style moderate the relationship between adversity in childhood and resilience?

*Hypothesis 2.* It is expected that the relationship between adversity in childhood and college student's resiliency depends on parenting style employed by single-parent. Furthermore, it is anticipated that authoritative parenting styles and cumulative risk in childhood will have a stronger and more positive interaction in their effect on resiliency for college students than other parenting styles.

*Rationale 2.* Murry & Brody (1999) propose that authoritative parenting, which encourages warmth yet consistent discipline, may promote resiliency in youth through modeling and teaching of critical skills. Through positive parental influence, children are presented with the opportunity to adopt similar behaviors that help to ameliorate the impact of risks present in the single-parent structure. After controlling for socioeconomic status, years spent in a single-parent household, and level of risk present during childhood, it is expected that parenting style will serve as a strong moderator of resiliency.

*Research Question 3.* Do students of single-parents perceive their upbringing to be an overall positive influence on their life?

*Hypothesis 3.* Students identified as resilient will have increased positive appraisal for their family structure experiences.

*Rationale 3.* Students that demonstrate high resiliency conceivably maintain a level of optimism, a key dimension identified in resilience and positive psychology literature (Gillham & Reivch, 2004). Optimism is theoretically thought of as being comprised of a continuum that includes the ability to stay positively focused on current and future events, but remembering positive outcomes of past events as well (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994). Subsequently, students who internalize optimistic cognitions and positive appraisals of the future would be arguably be able to transfer those abilities to their childhood. A positive outlook on life, a positive view of the self, and a perceived sense of meaning and life are all protective factors and exhibited characteristics found in children with high resiliency (Wright & Masten, 2005). Furthermore, students that can critically evaluate their upbringing by noting both the hardships and successes they encountered, and understanding how those experiences shaped them, demonstrate emotional maturity (Wright & Masten, 2005).

Understanding how young adults reflect on their childhood and family of origin provides additional information that has yet to be extensively studied. Review of the field indicates that currently there is a gap in research knowledge requesting children of single-parents to comment on how they believe their childhood has impacted them. This research question is designed to start preliminarily exploring that gap. Positive appraisals from resilient students could indicate that the difficulties encountered in single-parent families still yields benefits that can be outwardly acknowledged instead of solely



measured through psychological parameters that may not be as salient or readily apparent to students.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

### **Preliminary Data Analysis**

Preliminary data analyses will be conducted prior to main analyses which include least-squared multiple regression and additional moderation analysis. Prior to testing statistical significance the researcher will examine if the assumptions for the determined statistical procedures are met, which include establishing normality, linearity between variables, homoscedasticity, independence of error, and lack of multicollinearity. Additionally, descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, and range will be computed. Reliability will be conducted on all constructs and will move forward with a Cronbach's  $\alpha = .80$  or greater, implying the constructs work well for the sub-population under investigation. Participants with missing data will not be included in analyses.

### **Main Analysis**

Main analyses will include ordinary least squares multiple regression with additional moderation analysis.

*Hypothesis 1.* It is anticipated that extent of cumulative risk encountered during childhood will be positively associated with extent of resilience in college students.

*Analysis 1.* A multiple regression of ordinary least squares will be conducted to test the relationship between risk and resilience, after controlling for key demographic variables, including number of years in single parent home. Respondents' cumulative risk

will be entered as the independent variable into the regression model, and degree of resiliency as the dependent variable. Both variables will be treated as interval data. After establishing that the assumptions for least-squared regression have been met, the strength, direction and significance of relationships will be examined that have been measured by Revised-Stressful Life Events Scale (R-SLES) to determine cumulative risk and a composite score of Responsibility and Independence in Adolescence Scale (RIAS), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) to account for overall resiliency. It is anticipated that at the .05 level there will be a significant positive relationship between cumulative risk experienced in childhood and degree of resilience present in young adulthood.

*Hypothesis 2.* It is expected that the relationship between adversity in childhood and college student's resiliency depends on parenting style employed by single-parent. Furthermore, it is anticipated that authoritative parenting styles and cumulative risk in childhood will have a stronger and more positive interaction in their effect on resiliency for college students than other parenting styles.

*Analysis 2.* To test the proposed moderation, cumulative risk will be treated as a continuous variable and will be mean-centered to reduce multicollinearity and parenting style will be effects coded as a categorical variable. Parenting style will be measured by the Parental Bond Instrument (PBI). Cumulative risk and parenting style (i.e. risk\*parenting) will be entered as independent variables into the regression model, along with resiliency as the dependent variable. If the full model with the interaction is significant at the .05 level, then a respondents' membership within the high resiliency

group is associated with having experienced higher levels of risk in childhood and that this effect is moderated by parenting style. To provide additional interpretation of the results, and following recommendation by Aiken and West (1991), the model will be probed for authoritative/ non-authoritative parenting. Two new conditional moderator variables will be created and the researcher will run separate regressions incorporating these new variables. Predicted probabilities will be plotted to display the location and size of interactions.

*Hypothesis 3.* Students identified as resilient will have increased positive appraisal for their family structure experiences.

*Analysis 3.* Ordinary least squares regression will be conducted to test this hypothesis. Resiliency will be entered as the independent variable into the regression model and appraisal of family structure will be considered the dependent variable. It is expected that appraisal, measured by the last three items in LOT-R will be positively associated with resilience as operationalized by RIAS, MSPSS, and LOT-R (excluding the last three items) at the .05 level.

## **METHOD**

### **Approval by the Human Subjects Committee**

The proposed study will follow guidelines and standards established by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Texas at Austin.

## **Participants**

Participants in this study will include undergraduates raised in single-parent family structures for two-years or more before the age of 18 years. Participants will be found through convenience sampling from subject pools and simple-random sampling through email distributions. Participants recruited from subject pools will be from the Educational Psychology and Psychology Departments of the University of Texas at Austin and will receive course credit to fulfill undergraduate research requirements. Other participants will be recruited through using university email distribution lists.

To ensure appropriate power, or the probably of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is false, a minimum sample size of 151 will be necessary to obtain a minimum power of .80 for all analyses. G\*Power version 3.1 was used to determine an estimate sample size allowing for the minimum number of participants to detect an effect size of .12 that is significant at an alpha level set to .05 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009).

## **Procedure**

Web based data collection will be used to increase overall participation, increased accessibility, and ensure anonymity. Demographic questionnaire and all measures will be completed by participants through an online survey.

## **Measures**

*Revised Stressful Life Events Scale (R-SLES)*. Current methodological approaches to measuring the construct of risk heavily rely upon checklists that assess major life events, such as traumatic events (Naglieri & LeBuffe, 2005). Retrospective degree of risk

will be measured through the compilation of a number of items that comprehensively examine the history and social circumstances of childhood up to age of 18 years or leaving the parental household. Murry & Brody (1999) in previous work identified three key risks associated with African-American single mothers, including a parental education level less than 12 years, sustained parental unemployment, and birth of first child in the family structure before maternal age of 17 years. Three items assessing those risks will be used in addition to Sandler and Block's (1979) Stressful Life Events Scale (SLES), a scale Murry & Brody (1999) also included in their study of single-parents.

The SLES is a 32-item life event schedule that are considered beyond a child's control so as not to be confounded with child's adjustment. Each item is independently rated as being desirable (e.g., "Improvement in parent's financial status."); undesirable (e.g., "Child a victim of violence."); or an ambiguous event to determine the stress value of identified life events (e.g., "Marriage of parent to stepparent.") Following Sandler and Block's (1979) scoring protocol, scores from scale are total number of events that occurred during upbringing, in addition to sum scores for each number of desirable (D), undesirable (U), or ambiguous (A) events endorsed by participants on checklist. Two additional items were added by researcher to assess for parental alcohol or drug abuse.

*Responsibility and Independence in Adolescence Scale (RIAS).* Autonomy for this study will be assessed through items related to household responsibility and parental control during adolescence, employing a similar design to research evaluating autonomy and adult identity formation for adolescents in single-parent structures (Benson & Johnson, 2009). Items for household responsibility will include on average the number of

times participants believed they contributed to household chores on a weekly basis, including laundry, cleaning, and cooking. Higher scores indicate greater independence and responsibility. An additional item will ascertain whether participants were involved in part-time employment before leaving the house and any financial responsibility they held. Benson & Johnson's (2009) measure for parental control consists of a Likert-scale ranging from 1 to 7 of seven items that asks if adolescents were allowed to make their own decisions for independent actions such as setting a weekend curfew, clothing selection, and amount of time spent watching television. Higher scores reflect greater parental control and less autonomy. Reliability for the parental control scale has been reported as  $\alpha = .63$  (Benson & Johnson, 2009).

*Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet & Farley, 1988). The MSPSS is a 12-item scale designed to distinguish perceived social support from family (e.g., "I get the emotional help and support I need from my family."); friends (e.g., "I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows."); and a significant other (e.g., "I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.") Respondents use a 7-point Likert scale (very strongly disagree to very strongly agree) for each item. Internal reliability for MSPSS with a college student population has been reported as  $\alpha = .91$  for the total scale (Dahlem, Zimet & Walker, 1991).

*Life Orientation Test-Revised* (LOT-R; Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994). The LOT-R is a 10-item measure used to assess individual differences in generalized optimism, including future-focused expectations. Maintaining the theoretical approach that optimism and pessimism exist on a continuum, there are no "cut-offs" for the

measure. Participants respond on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 “I agree a lot” to 5 “I disagree a lot” on items such as “I hardly ever expect things to go my way.” On a previous study investigating maternal optimism in single-mother African-American families (Taylor et al., 2010) reliability was reported as  $\alpha = .69$ . Scores will be recoded so higher scores signify high levels of optimism.

Three additional items will be added for the purpose of the current study to understand how participants perceive their overall childhood experience, such as “Experiences in childhood provided me with useful skills I use now as an adult.” The researcher created these items for exploratory purposes of identifying any relationships between positive appraisal of adversity experienced in childhood and overall resiliency.

*Parental Bonding Instrument* (PBI; Parker, Tupling & Brown, 1979). The PBI is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure the subjective retrospective experience of parenting up to 16 years of age. It is one of the most consistently used measures of parenting style for clinical and non-clinical groups to accurately ascertain the influence of parental behaviors on adult outcomes and has reportedly had test re-test success in a 20-year longitudinal study (Wilhelm, Niven, Parker & Hadzi-Pavlovic, 2004). The PBI is comprised of a total of 25-items representing two scales termed “care” (e.g. “Enjoyed talking things over with me”) and “overprotection” (e.g., Tended to baby me”), with 12 and 13-items respectively for each scale. Not all items are scored in the same direction, however higher scores are associated with more “care” or “overprotection.” Cut-off scores based upon parental gender are used to separate “high” or “low” categories for care and protection, and to categorize parents into different quadrants such as “high care

and high protection” or “high protection and low care.” The PBI was originally generated using a population of university students (Parker, Tupling & Brown, 1979).

*Demographic Questionnaire.* The demographic questionnaire developed for this study will obtain information for the student regarding participant’s sex, age, race/ethnicity, class standing, cumulative grade point average, and major. Demographic information pertaining to the parent will also be obtained regarding sex of parent, age, race/ethnicity, income bracket, and employment status. Family structure information will include number of years spent in single-parent structure, number of additional siblings, interactions with non-custodial parent, and presences of cohabitating or re-married partner of parent. These demographic characteristics will be controlled for in subsequent analyses.



## **Discussion**

### **LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The present study is designed to be exploratory in nature, but as such, has significant limitations. While ordinary least squares multiple regression has the ability to create useful predictive models for analyses of the wide array of variables, strong statements of causality cannot be made because of possible underlying constructs not yet identified or reviewed in this study. Additionally, the variables in question were larger constructs comprised of smaller dimensions that could be mediating factors of the overall regression model. Further research with this population should consider the potential mediating influences of other protective factors associated with resiliency such as self-esteem, behavioral and emotional regulation strategies, and cognitive abilities. These variables in conjunction with the dimensions analyzed in this study could impact the relationship between adversity in childhood and resiliency and the beginning exploration of the relationship between resiliency and positive appraisal of adversity.

Additional research should attempt to evaluate and utilize psychometrically sound measures. Although apparently useful in terms of face validity, many of the measures used in this study were admittedly not psychometrically robust. Many of the measures were adopted and revised to better fit the needs of this research, however comprising of validity and reliability is due in part to the limited number of scales currently available that actively assess for risk or resiliency. Review of existing measures and literature (Naglieri & LeBuffe, 2005) indicated that previous researchers have also adopted or

created scales to better meet research needs, however few measures are fully developed and psychometrically tested to result in credibility. While the topic of resiliency has been influential in propelling positive psychology forward, greater work needs to occur in empirically testing and validating standardized means of detection.

Further concerns for the proposed research relate to the study participants and methods of report. The study is intentionally designed to obtain data from a population that theoretically should be rate fairly high in overall resiliency due to academic success. However, it is completely plausible that highly resilient individuals may not have the opportunity or means to pursue college because of the very risk factors, such as economic instability, that college students are seemingly able to overcome. Arguably, resiliency should not be measured on the limited outcome of academic standing and should ideally encompass other socially productive arenas such as occupational success. In effort to broaden generalizability of research findings to the broader socioeconomic population, studies should consider evaluating other large institution structures such as professional companies or vocational organizations to determine how single-parent children fare in other environments of potential success.

Following this focus on participants, all responses in the study are based upon retrospective self-report. It is possible that social desirability and inaccurate memories may skew results, especially if respondents are compelled to defend their family structure in the face of social scrutiny and negative stereotyping of single-parent households. One method of remedying this apparent situation would be to provide self-reports to young adults and their parents, considering parents might have better factual recall of events and

family circumstances than their children. However, this would likely result in a decreased response rate, especially because data would be dependent upon pairing parent-child responses. A longitudinal study could also prove effective that follows children and adolescents into adulthood and tracks resiliency growth over time, instead of the current proposed cross-sectional analysis.

### **CLINICAL AND THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Current studies probing the relationship between adversity and resilience in single-parent homes are limited when it pertains to young adult populations. Most research to this point has focused on children, adolescents, or the parents themselves, unintentionally missing out on a portion of these family structures that has undergone the lived experience. This study was designed to provide meaningful analysis and build upon previous knowledge in resilience and single-parenthood literature by looking at new dimensions in current discourse. Through identifying possible strengths present in single-family structures that are cultivated in college students, new insights can arise focused on the adaptability and positive potential of diverse families. Furthermore, highlighting the influence of parenting style on these positive attributes provides greater opportunity for clinical interventions directed at variables that are within a single-parents control. This study attempts to conduct a multidimensional analysis of the various factors that potentially contribute to high resiliency despite cumulative risk. This is in order to illuminate the success that parents and children can achieve in what have historically been perceived as difficult family environments.

To this point, the majority of research focused on single-parent structures has wallowed in the presumed inevitable failings ensuing from a poor mother raising children alone in our society (Barber & Eccles, 1992). However, focus has gradually shifted to celebrating what the family does right and how solo parents and their children have coped with and overcome difficulties (Murry et al., 2001). This study contributes to building this bridge of work composed of single-parent families, parenting behaviors, and healthy psychological outcomes in the form of resiliency. Furthermore, as stated earlier, the proposed study hopes to draw attention to a burgeoning new paradigm shift in this field of work through dissecting the homogenous construct of a “single-parent family” by understanding what that structure is comprised of through the eyes of the children that were raised in that family.

Gaining further knowledge of the concrete resiliency mechanisms at play in single-parent homes will help practitioners assess strengths and communicate those strengths back to families they interact with. Parents and children who are reassured that their family structure has inherent value and benefit may consequently hold greater optimistic beliefs and engage in pro-adaptive behaviors, further reinforcing protective factors and building family resiliency. In empirically studying the complex nature of resiliency and how young adults have utilized the lessons they learned in from their parents to their advantage, clinicians can promote healthy parental behaviors and skills to keep the cycle of positive progress moving forward. Interventions provide the chance for every parent and child to be successful despite adversity, regardless of how many parents are present.

## Appendix – Research Measures

### REVISED-STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS SCALE (R-SLES)

#### Revised - Stressful Life Events Scale (R-SLES)

	Event	Desirability
1*	Family moved to a new house	A
2	Birth of a brother or a sister	A
3	Brother or sister had serious trouble	U
4	Death of a parent	U
5	Custodial parent began work	A
6	Serious illness requiring hospitalization of brother or sister	U
7	Marriage of parent to stepparent	A
8	Addition of a third adult to family	A
9	Divorce of parent	U
10	Child changed schools	A
11	Serious illness or accident requiring hospitalization of child	U
12	Marital separation of parents	U
13	Increase of arguments between parents (or cohabitating adults)	U
14	Decrease in arguments between parents (or cohabitating adults)	D
15	Change in parent's occupation required increased absence from home	U
16	Serious illness or accident requiring hospitalization of parent	U
17	Discovery by child of being an adopted child	A
18	Family member victim of violence	U
19	Death of child's close friend	U
20	Child separated from family for two weeks or more	A
21	Death of brother or sister	U
22	One parent arrested or in serious difficulty with law	U
23	Improvement in family's financial status	D
24	Death of a grandparent	U
25	Brother or sister leaving home	A
26	Child acquired visible deformity	U
27	Worsening of parent's financial status	U
28	Loss of job by parent	U
29	Parent became involved in counseling or therapy	A
30	Parent's mood or feeling about life became worse or much worse	U
31	Parent's mood or feeling about life became better or much better	D
32**	Parent heavily drank alcohol	U
33	Parent engaged in drug use	U
34	Custodial parent completed high-school education	D

35	Parent was under 17-years old when first child of family was born	U
36	Parent was unemployed or under-employed majority of time	U

U= undesirable; D = desirable; A = ambiguous

\* Items 1 -31 were originally created by Sandler & Block (1979)..\*\*Items 32 - 36 were added by researcher

**RESPONSIBILITY AND INDEPENDENCE IN ADOLESCENCE SCALE (RIAS)**

**Responsibility and Independence in Adolescence Scale (RIAS)**

**Instructions:** Read each item and indicate how often you participated in the tasks below between the ages of 13 and 17. There is no right or wrong answer. To ensure your answers can be used, please respond to the statements as written, and circle the appropriate number.

	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all	Occasionally	Once a week	2-4 times a week	5 or more times a week
1) I would do laundry for myself or the family					1 2 3 4 5
2) I would cook for myself or for the family					1 2 3 4 5
3) I would clean the household					1 2 3 4 5
4) I would take care of additional household chores or errands					1 2 3 4 5

**Please indicate if you or your parent made more of the following decisions.**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Strongly Agree	Mostly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Somewhat Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1) I was allowed to select my own clothes							1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2) I could decide what food I wanted to eat							1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3) I could select the TV shows I wanted to watch							1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4) I could set my weekend curfew							1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5) I could watch television or stay online for as long as I wanted							1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6) I could socialize with any friends I wanted to							1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7) I could decide my bedtime on weeknights							1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Did you have a part-time job before the age of 18 while living at home? Yes No

If you marked yes, did you:

Purchase a majority of your own clothes, food, or entertainment expenses (i.e. movies, music, or social activities). Yes No

Contribute to household expenses or help support the family? Yes No

Do you currently finance the majority of your college expenses, either through work-study, part-time jobs, scholarships, or loans you are expected to repay (not your parent)?

Yes No

**MULTIDIMENSIONAL SCALE OF PERCEIVED SOCIAL SUPPORT (MSPSS)**

**Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)**

**Instructions:** We are interested in how you feel about the following statements. Read each statement carefully. Indicate how you feel about each statement.

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	
	<b>Very Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Mildly Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Mildly Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Very Strongly Agree</b>	
1)	There is a special person who is around when I am in need.							SO
2)	There is a special person with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.							SO
3)	My family really tries to help me.							Fam
4)	I get the emotional help and support I need from my family							Fam
5)	I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.							SO
6)	My friends really try to help me.							Fri
7)	I can count on my friends when things go wrong.							Fri
8)	I can talk about my problems with my family.							Fam
9)	I have friends with whom I can share my joys and sorrows.							Fri
10)	There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.							SO
11)	My family is willing to help me make decisions.							Fam
12)	I can talk about my problems with my friends.							Fri

The items tend to divide into factor groups relating to the source of the social support, namely family (Fam), friends (Fri), or significant other (SO).



## LIFE ORIENTATION TEST – REVISED (LOT-R)

### Life Orientation Test – Revised (LOT-R)

**Instructions:** Please be as honest and accurate as you can throughout. Try not to let your response to one statement influence your responses to other statements. There are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers. Answer according to your own feelings, rather than how you think "most people" would answer.

	1	2	3	4	5
	I agree a lot	I agree a little	I neither agree nor disagree	I disagree a little	I disagree a lot
1)					
2)					
3)					
4)					
5)					
6)					
7)					
8)					
9)					
10)					

Items 2, 5, 6, and 8 are fillers.

Additional items were added for purpose of study:

11)	Experiences in childhood provided me with useful skills I use now as an adult.	1	2	3	4	5
12)	Overall, despite difficulties in childhood, I have a positive outlook on my experiences.	1	2	3	4	5
13)	I wish I could re-write history and change my family and background	1	2	3	4	5

**PARENTAL BONDING INSTRUMENT (PBI)**

**Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI)**

**Instructions:** This questionnaire lists various attitudes and behaviors of parents. As you remember your MOTHER (or FATHER) in your first 16 years, place a tick in the most appropriate box next to each question that describes your parent.

	<b>Very like</b>	<b>Moderately like</b>	<b>Moderately unlike</b>	<b>Very unlike</b>
1. Spoke to me in a warm and friendly voice				
2. Did not help me as much as I needed				
3. Let me do those things I liked doing				
4. Seemed emotionally cold to me				
5. Appeared to understand my problems and worries				
6. Was affectionate to me				
7. Liked me to make my own decisions				
8. Did not want me to grow up				
9. Tried to control everything I did				
10. Invaded my privacy				
11. Enjoyed talking things over with me				
12. Frequently smiled at me				
13. Tended to baby me				
14. Did not seem to understand what I needed or wanted				
15. Let me decide things for myself				
16. Made me feel I wasn't wanted				
17. Could make me feel better when I was upset				
18. Did not talk with me very much				
19. Tried to make me feel dependent on her/him				
20. Felt I could not look after				

myself unless she/he was around				
21. Gave me as much freedom as I wanted				
22. Let me go out as often as I wanted				
23. Was overprotective of me				
24. Did not praise me				
25. Let me dress in any way I pleased				

**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Demographic Questionnaire**

**Instructions:** Read the items below and (a) circle the letter that best describes **you**, or (b) write in the information that most accurately reflects **you**.

**1. Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Gender**

- a. Woman
- b. Man
- c. Transgender

**3. Race/Ethnicity**

- a. Black/African American
- b. White
- c. Asian
- d. Hispanic or Latino
- e. Biracial (Specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Other (Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Class Standing**

- a. Freshman
- b. Sophomore
- c. Junior
- d. Senior
- e. Graduate Student
- f. Other (Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**5. College cumulative GPA**

- a. 4.0 – 3.5
- b. 3.49 – 3.0
- c. 2.99 – 2.50
- d. 2.49 – 2.0
- e. Below 2.0

**6. What is your major?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Read the items below and (a) circle the letter that best describes **your parent**, or (b) write in the information that most accurately reflects **your parent**.

**1. Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Gender**

- a. Woman
- b. Man
- c. Transgender

**3. Race/Ethnicity**

- a. Black/African American
- b. White
- c. Asian
- d. Hispanic or Latino
- e. Biracial (Specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Other (Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

**4. What you believe to be your parent's annual income:**

- a. Less than \$25,000
- b. \$25,000 - \$50,000
- c. \$51,000 - \$75,000
- d. \$76,000 - \$100,000
- e. Above \$100,000

**5. What your parent's occupation?**

---

**Instructions:** Read the items below and circle the letter that best describes **your family**.

**1. How long did you live with a single-parent?**

- a. Less than 2 years
- b. 2-3 years
- c. 4-5 years
- d. 5-10 years
- e. Entire childhood (approximately 15 or more years)

**2. Do you have other siblings?**

- a. None
- b. 1
- c. 2
- d. 3 or more

**3. Did you interact regularly with a non-custodial biological parent?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**4. Did your single-parent re-commit or re-marry while you were still living at home for at least a year?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

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