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The Coping Behaviors of Adult Children After Treatment for Parental Alienation

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Walden University

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Anissa Michaud

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Walden University
2020

Abstract

The Coping Behaviors of Adult Children After Treatment for Parental Alienation

by

Anissa Michaud

Dissertation Abstract Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

High conflict divorce and the alienation of a parent after a divorce causes minimal mental health issues and unhealthy coping skills in children. Without treatment programs that focus on PA, psychologists will continue to only treat the symptoms or rebuild the family system rather than treating the individual's with healthy coping skills. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to compare personal experiences from adult male and females suffering with parental alienation after a parent's high conflict divorce. Bowen's theory of family systems was used as a theoretical approach to understand the comparisons of adult children on the basis of emotional unity as described in complex interactions within the family unit. There were 5 adult children participants in the study that were taken from open-ended interview/questionnaire designed by myself, about an individual's coping behaviors after a high conflict divorce and treatment for parental alienation. After the interview questionnaires were completed a software program MAXQDA was used to correlate the themes of interest on the basis of emotions (i.e. anger, closed off, or anxieties). From the software, a determination was made that there were significant similarities of coping behaviors among the five participants, that included abnormal coping behaviors taught by the family dynamics. The social change for this study created an understanding to what a child experiences through high conflict divorces into their adulthood. This offers an awareness for clinical professionals and the legal system to take notice what really happens to children in high conflict divorces. The dynamics of the study created the purpose for social change among clinicians about the effects of parental alienation has on adult children from high conflict divorce during their childhood.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Problem

Introduction

Parental alienation (PA) is commonly seen in high conflict divorce. Parents attempt to make a child chose sides either consciously or unconsciously. The tactics include alienating the child from the parent through manipulation, overheard discussion about the other parent with negativity, punishments, or rewards. Court custody cases determine the best interest of the child in high conflict cases with an evaluation from a clinician (American Psychological Association [APA], 2016). Some clinicians may not have heard of parental alienation or the nature of the impact that high conflict divorce has on a child. Without a clear indication or a true description in the *DSM-5* manual, clinicians use a common evaluation of the family structure to report to the court the results found during the evaluation. If the child is given custody to the parent who alienates the child from the other parent, the result can be irreparable damage to the psyche into adulthood. The purpose of this study was to explore how the adult child is coping with childhood trauma of high conflict divorce and the presence of PA.

Background

Parents of divorce with high levels of conflict display behaviors of retribution, hostility, and animosity toward each other; however, the victim is the child (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). The alienating parent will publicly use the child to reject the target parent with false claims of abuse or resist dual parent relationships. Alienating parents of at-risk children can affect the livelihood of the child within multiple factors, such as behavioral problems, identity issues, and difficulties in school (Godbout & Parent, 2012). Some

cooccurring behaviors include depression, aggression, the use of alcohol, or other legal or illegal drug use (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012).

Dallam and Silberg (2016) analyzed 27 custody cases where courts placed the child in custody of the alienating parent with allegations of abuse, only to reverse the court's order for the protection of the child. Childhood reunification with the non-alienating parent can be a negative experience (Dallam & Silberg, 2016). Treatment should require voluntary support counseling and allow the child to mature and heal the relationship without any interference from the court or mental health professionals (Lowenstein, 2015). Traditional therapy is not an option for treating the child with parental alienation because of the many underlying issues surrounding the symptoms causing cooccurring behaviors in the child (Darnall, 2011).

There are a lack of effective treatment options that mental health professionals use when the focus is on reconnecting the child with the parent instead of treating the symptoms or cooccurring issues about parental alienation. Some techniques for treating PA include the Family Reflections Reunification Program (FRRP). FRRP works on treating the alienated child with a success rate of 95% over a year of studying (Reay, 2015). The High Road Family Reunification (HRFR) treats the alienated child with a 4-day educational therapy that focuses on resolving the impact of negative behaviors influencing the effects between relationships of the other parent and child (Childress, 2015). Although the use of HRFR therapy approach creates healthier alienation, clinicians should complete a full analysis, including an evaluation of the parent when available. Although the above treatments have success for rebuilding the family dynamics, children still suffer from the effects of PA into adulthood.

Problem Statement

Gardner defined PA from an increase in cases involving allegations of child abuse from mothers against fathers as a means to prevent visitation or interactions with the child (as cited in Bernet, 2010). Gardener defined PA as when one parent alienates another parent or family members through manipulation, punishment, or consequences often seen in high conflict divorces between parents (as cited in Bernet, 2010). To determine if PA is present, Gardener (year) designed a scale of eight symptoms to include hatred against the target parent, absurd rationalizations for the hatred, lack of ambivalence towards the targeted parent, the child's decision to reject the other parent as an act taken on the child, lack of guilt in the treatment of the alienated parent, using borrowed phrases or scenarios from the alienating parent, and denigration extended to the targeted parent's extended family members. Although *DSM-5* included PA under classifications of other conditions, a clear understanding of the diagnosis breakdown including the 18 symptoms of PA is not available (APA, 2013; Bernet, 2016). The effects of PA during childhood cause depression, aggression, lack of self-efficacy, problems with future relationships with others, interference with future roles as parents, emotional immaturity, and connection with the target parent (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). Determining if a person meets the requirements of parental alienation would require an evaluation from a mental health professional in comparison to Gardner's scale of eight symptoms.

Fidler and Bala (2010) discovered the occurrence of PA in 11 to 15% of divorces involving children. Lowenstein (2015) stated how how psychologists use different treatment approaches that include parental attachment theory (PAT) or symptomatic

treatment. The purpose of PAT is to rekindle relationships with the absent parent or alienating parent (Lowenstein, 2015). Symptomatic treatment revolves around the symptoms the person faces from the divorce or PA (ie., depression or anger issues). Attempts to indicate approaches for treatment can prove difficult and without adequate treatment or support of the courts, children grow into adults with life difficulties, such as self-identity as to who they are as an individual during adulthood and external or internal behavioral issues (Godbout & Parent, 2012). Plenty of resources are available to explain the effects and plausible treatment opportunities but there is a lack research regarding first-hand experiences for coping behaviors of adult children after treatment for PA.

Purpose Statement

The process of divorce causes high levels of stress involving all parties, in particular for children during stages of development. Reay (2015) indicated that PA is a form of child abuse, showing how parental alienation interferes with the child's ability to cope effectively. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the direct experiences of adult survivors from high conflict divorces. Understanding an individual's process for coping behaviors among adult survivors creates evidential reliability and validity behind the prognosis of PA or the effects of high conflict divorce.

Significance

Questions remain from experts on the validity of PA (Rowen & Emery, 2014). Coping behaviors among adult children show a pattern signifying which treatments prove or disprove as successful. Mental health professionals or individuals in the legal system gain awareness about the risks for children in high conflict divorces. Challenging home

conditions, such as problematic divorces during a person's childhood, are cause for acute stressors that impact the individual's adaptation between parents and managing life experiences. The levels of resilience depend on the individual's natural abilities to sustain levels of stressors from mild to severe (Rowen & Emery, 2014). When legal professionals and clinicians gain a perspective on the problematic issues surrounding high conflict divorces, the system changes the focus of child custody to strive for positive coparenting and prevent future occurrences of PA.

Theoretical Framework

Bowen's theory of the family systems theorizes human behavioral views of the family as an emotional unity and the thinking as a means to describe complex interactions of the unit (as cited in Titleman, 2014). Family roles affect the individual's thoughts, actions, and emotions when people live under the same emotional skin (Titleman, 2014). A change of any members of the family functioning can predict reciprocal changes for functioning among other members of the family (Titleman, 2014). When tensions rise or are heightened between parents, this could negatively impact the unity and teamwork among family relationships, explaining negative coping behaviors of children who use poor coping behaviors, during and after their parent's divorce.

I used the phenomenological approach to explore commonalities between participants through the use of narrative experiences (i.e., events, actual, or imaginary) during high conflict divorce of parents during childhood. The phenomena of explaining coping behaviors for individuals who sought treatment can assist professionals in mental health care by learning new techniques to address a person's adulthood. To offer more validity and reliability to the study, I compared the participant's answers taken during the

interview process (see Weger, Meyer, & Wagemann, 2016). I identified themes while comparing lived experiences that attributed to how people cope after high conflict divorces. A description of the experiences formed into terms of conditions, situations, and context offering structure to the collection of data.

Research Questions

The following research questions were used in this qualitative study to explore coping behaviors among adult children after receiving treatment for parental alienation.

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of adult survivors of childhood high conflict divorce?

Research Question 2: According to adult survivors of childhood high conflict divorce, how have these childhood experiences affected adult relationships?

Nature of Study

The phenomena of interest involved the lived experiences of adult survivors of childhood high conflict divorce. Collecting data in a phenomenological approach requires interviews with participants that focused on how the individual coped after the divorce and any recognition to alienation from their parent. A recommendation on the sample size is dependent upon saturation of individuals who experience the phenomenon without new themes emerging during the interview process (Creswell, 2013). The participants came from the population of adult children experiencing PA during and after the parent's divorce. I excluded individuals with severe issues of PA that might cause more trauma and lessen the person's coping behaviors. The study adds to the field of psychology that surrounds an adult's experience of childhood parental divorce. I conducted

semistructured, face-to-face interviews to collect data about different approaches to treatment and develop an understanding of the coping behaviors of adult survivors from high conflict divorces.

Sources of Data

The researcher collected data from the person who have experienced the phenomenon and develop a composite description of those experiences for all of the individuals participating. The description consists of "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Prior researchers use various sources of data, such as longitudinal analysis, social behaviors, and levels of abuse. The use of social media, such as Facebook, might prove as resourceful in locating participants. For this study, the collection of data came from primary sources through social media. As the researcher, the use of surveys is found online with a particular link, but in the event a person cannot reach a computer, an in-person survey is available via video or at a local library. The surveys did not include personal information or any information that could distinguish who the person was during the interview. For example, the individual's name or doctor's names are eliminated from the study, as a procedure to protect confidentiality of the participants (APA, 2016). After reviewing the surveys, a follow-up interview with participants aligning specific correlations to the study occurred. The coding process categorized areas of interest, such as treatment outcomes, style, changes in behaviors, and so forth.

Possible Analytic Strategies

The analytical approach for the study involves the use of narrative analysis. Part of the study connects a person's experience that shapes his or her behavior toward the alienating parent. A narrative analysis characterizes the life experiences into the meaning of the coping behaviors of adult survivors and communicates how treatment builds an individual's resiliency (Thorne, 2002). The representation of the strategy creates a constructive category of experiences the participants share about treatment approaches. The analysis of the data through narration offers insight and a sense of life experiences for the participants.

Template analysis acts as another technique of an analytical strategy for the study. The process of collecting information from participants involves questionnaires and interviews; the template analysis categorizes the data into coding the researcher deems important (King, 2004). The use of interviews elaborates the responses of participants for qualitative surveys. Then the process of analyzing the data begins with priority coding to identify themes. The information explains the relevance of the research questions. The application of the template corresponds to the whole data set and modifies each transcript (King, 2004). Then the data is open to the interpretation of the data sets and writing the final findings.

Ethical Considerations

The study revolves around adult children instead of young children because youth are a vulnerable population (Creswell, 2013). The experiment of the research uses the perception of parental alienation as a child from the adult perception. Adult survivors have the ability to give permission and make an appropriate decision during the process

of the research. For example, participants with severe symptoms of PA can involve some form of trauma, but most importantly as a researcher, a decision is made to discontinue the interview of the participants as a means of protecting the individual from further harm. The object of the study is not to harm the individual in any manner that associates psychologically, physically, and so forth. Especially if he or she is currently receiving treatment because the process could negatively affect the person's rehabilitation or coping abilities (APA, 2016). The informed consent breaks down the purpose of the study and the protection of the participant's confidentiality and privacy follow ethical guidelines with the APA (2016). As a researcher, a plausible way to eliminate vulnerable or emotionally fragile participants begins during the questionnaire process to include responses with no history or current suicidal thoughts. The participant is currently emotionally stable and free of mental health symptoms.

No ethical issues arose during the conduct of this research. Had an ethical violation occurred, the researcher would have contacted the appropriate organizations, such as the IRB or colleagues to eliminate further violations and the steps to correct the situation. The proper steps for adjusting the action of an ethical issue or dilemma by determining possible factors that could harm the participant. The steps involve no longer taking responses from the participant and dismiss any information given during the interviewing process. At any time during the study where the occurrence of stress levels increase, a number scale was be given to the participants with 1 being little to no stress levels and 10 being the highest level of stress. Had a participant experienced stressors during the interview reached a level of 5 or higher an immediate halt would occurred .

Because safeguarding the individual's welfare was crucial any information collected from the participant would have no longer be used in the study.

Summary and Transition

Chapter one discussed the fundamentals for the study. Now that a platform for the beginning of the study is set to continue forward. Chapter two will discuss how the information in the study will align with previous articles in research. Once the comparisons are made from an abundant of research articles, I have determined the missing gap in the study by showing a need for change among adult children from high conflict divorces, lacking healthy coping skills.

Chapter 2: Review of Academic and Professional Literature

Introduction

The literature review provides a context for the research questions. The literature review starts with an overview of high conflict divorce on children with a connection to factors affecting the adult child's approaches to coping behaviors. Any treatment approaches given to the child during or after the divorce are recognized and listed in the literature review. At the conclusion of this chapter, I provide an overall summary of the problematic issues of adult survivors from high conflict divorce or PA.

The process of compiling a literature review included finding peer-reviewed and other scholarly journal articles, books, and published dissertations as supporting evidence for the study. In locating articles for the literature review, I used Walden University's Library, such as ProQuest and Google scholar search engines.

High Conflict Divorce

More than 40 to 50% of married couples in the United States end in divorce, and more than half of divorces involve children under the age of 18 (APA, 2016). Of those divorces, 40% of children experience parental divorce before adulthood (Shafer, Jensen, & Holmes, 2017). While married, parents see and interact with each other on a daily basis in rearing their children, but after a divorce, coparenting becomes difficult (Amundson & Lux, 2016; Joyce, 2016; Visser et al., 2016). Children become a pawn during the divorce when both parents battle for custody of the children (Warshak, 2015). Whoever gains custody of the children in high conflict divorces is decided by the court, but often the mother has physical or sole custody of the child (Kruk, 2016).

In a divorce the child may side with the parent whom he or she attaches to. Because attachment is imperative to the psychological wellbeing, adjustment, and social abilities of the child, the mother is seen as the main caregiver for the child's welfare (Robertson, 2016). Parents could use this to gain or manipulate the child through alienation of the other parent (Amundson & Lux, 2016; Bernet, 2015). In a majority of cases of PA, the father becomes the target of alienation from the child, causing a rift in his dynamics as a parental role (Robertson, 2016). The role of father is just as important in the development and mental health of the child (Warshak, 2015). Without the father's role in the child's life, the child's behavior becomes defiant, unruly, or fearful, and the child may refuse to visit the alienating parent (Robertson, 2016).

The focus of high conflict divorces should require positive coparenting as essential to the mental health and wellbeing of the child (Sokol, Stevenson, & Braver, 2017). Better quality parenting occurs when parents invest more time in maintaining and strengthening the relationship with the child during the struggles of divorce (Beebe & Sailor, 2017; Nielson, 2017). Some circumstances could mean treatment and counseling for all parties involved (Beebe & Sailor, 2017). The styles of treatment are dependent on the factors affecting the child's wellbeing, such as depression, deviant behavior, aggression, or drug abuse.

The lack of positive coparenting affects the child's future into adulthood, and it may impact mental health (Beebe & Sailor, 2017; Warshak, 2015). Mahrer et al. (2016) and Elam, Sandler, Wolchik, and Tein (2016) described how high conflict divorce increases high levels of internalization. The child's internalization for the hatred of the target parent will be reflected in hatred and rejection about him or herself (Beebe &

Sailor, 2017; Jaffe, Thakkar, & Piron, 2017). Attachment issues plagues a child's ability to have a healthy adjustment to change and relying on a parent's attention to the child during a divorce (Amundson & Lux, 2016; Thakkar & Piron, 2017). After their parent's divorce, some children display low conflict and lower externalizing problems (Elam et al., 2016; Mahrer et al., 2016). However, there were still negative impacts on young adults (Elam et al., 2016; Mahrer et al., 2016).

A family breakup like a divorce is stressful. Saini, Drozd, and Olesen (2017) described a similar behavior among parents through the use of gatekeeping. Gatekeeping occurs when beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors pertaining to the child's relationship are negatively affected by limiting the amount of time spent or overall quality involving the other parent (Sani et al., 2017) One parent may feel that his or her approach to raising the child is better and will ensure limited contact to maintain balance for the child. If the occurrence of negative gatekeeping continues, this will interfere with the child's ability to develop positively (Amundson & Lux, 2016; Drozd & Olesen, 2017).

Stressful outcomes of divorce on youth heighten physiological stress or cortisol reactivity (Lucas & Thompson, Lunkenheimer, & Granger, 2017). Adolescents' exposure to social-evaluative stress, such as martial conflict, predicts dampened HPA and ANS function with SNS stress responses for poor quality of parenting (Lucas & Thompson et al., 2017). In emerging adulthood, children begin to self-blame for parental conflicts and display higher levels of cortisol throughout the day (Abetz & Wang, 2017; Lucas & Thompson et al., 2017). Self-blame is associated with acute stress levels because the child is taking on responsibility for the parent's arguments (Abetz & Wang, 2017; Lucas & Thompson et al., 2017). The more long-term exposure to traumatic stress the

person experiences, the more the individual is left feeling a loss of security in the home, but experiences increased defensiveness and destruction of future romantic relationship (Fozard & Gubi, 2017; Scott & Weems, 2017).

The style of attachment depends on the child's bond with the parent through the definition of Bowlby's (2005) theory of attachment. The process of shaping the child's adjustment to life is dependent the roles of child-parent characteristics and temperament of the child (Bowlby, 2005). A healthy child feels secure are social, explorative, and adjusts well within his or her environment (Bowlby, 2005). A child's emotional regulation (ER) is dependent on maternal and peer attachment (Morris et al., 2007). A mother who gives emotional availability and the child's ability to comply mediate ER (Morris et al., 2007). An ambivalent child will display high levels of aggression, anxiety, and hostility (Bowlby, 2005). An ambivalent adult refrains from bonding with romantic partners and other forms of relationships (Bowlby, 2005). Romantic relationships of adults with secure attachment experience balance and long-term relationships (Bowlby, 2005).

During marital dissolution lacking nurturing and socialization for the child, the child may display emotional and behavioral problems (EBP) as a process of adjustment to the change (Amundson & Lux, 2016; Madigan, Plamondon, & Jenkins, 2017; Murphy et al., 2017; Theunissen et al., 2017). Children of divorce suffering from EBP are found in one in 10 youngsters (Murph et al., 2017; Theunissen et al., 2017). Examples of behavioral problems include conduct, anxieties, or substance abuse. An interruption in the individual's ability to develop properly depends on the child's stage of development and parents' support (Shafer et al., 2017; Thabrew et al., 2017).

Theunissen et al. (2017) stated that about 25% of children suffer from depressive disorders in association with EBP. Depression is recognized when an individual experiences a minimum of five symptoms over a period of 2 weeks that includes sadness, anger, hopelessness, loss of interest, and isolation (APA, 2016). Depression is more prevalent in divorced families; young adults, around the age of 18 to 30, from a divorced family may have a lack of intimate relationships and have low self-esteem (Madigan et al., 2017; Shafer et al., 2017). A child or adolescent with intimate and bonding relationships with parents reduces the risks of early low self-esteem from depressive episodes (Murphy et al., 2017; Shafer et al., 2017).

Scholars have depicted the negative outcomes of adult children from divorce, including lower parental regard, lower satisfactions, and relationship distress (Roper, 2016). Gager, Yabiku, and Linver (2016) studied the implications of divorce or the conflict between parents that cause an adult child's probability for divorce. Children's future relationships or marriage mimics their parent's ability to handle disagreements and roles as parents (Schmidt, Green, & Prouty, 2016). Some adult children from divorced parents may lack the ability to connect positively with a significant other (Gager et al., 2016).

Parental Alienation

After many cases of high conflict divorce and reports of abuse in the early 1980s, Gardner introduces PA (Lorandos & Bone, 2016). Gardner reported how a mother alienates the father through with derogatory names, removing or destroying in essence of the father's existence, exaggerating the father's psychological problems, and interfering with visitations with the father (as cited in Lorandos & Bone, 2016; as cited in

Whitcombe, 2017). PA occurs when a removal of a capable and loving father occurs from the maternal denigration, which results in emotional rejection towards the father (Kruk, 2016; Whitcombe, 2017). Children of divorce with an absentee father suffer abandonment issues and wish for a closer relationship (Kruk, 2016). PA is more noticeable because fathers are affected by the alienation from their children (Kruk, 2016). Fathers with primary custody of the child will partake in PA by protecting the child on the grounds of imagined dangers or abuse by mother's live-in boyfriend (Lorandos & Bone, 2016).

A parent with mental health issues, conscious or unconscious, are seen as narcissistic and lacking empathy (Bernet, Baker, & Verrocchio, 2015; Mandarino, Kline Pruett, & Fieldstone, 2016). The parent's mental health goes unnoticed until the behaviors are noticeable within the child when a divorce custody evaluation is given. Clinicians can detect brainwashing of children when signs in restrictions to love or being loved, inappropriate information, comparative martyr role, assault on character, contradictory and indirect use of statements, good parent versus bad, one-sided alliance, scripted views, and anxiety arousal (Lorandos & Bone, 2016). The mental health issues are another cause for PA, and children will learn to externalize behavior indirectly by modeling parental behaviors (Morris et al., 2007).

A parent who cannot separate from conflicts with the spouse creates an unhealthy attachment with the child, and the child may be unable to please the parent (Beebe & Sailor, 2017; Jaffe et al., 2017). The parent-child relationship is damaged by the alienating parent, and the child develops negative coping skills (Bernet, 2016; Jaffe et al., 2017; Whitcombe, 2017). PA in children can lead to a higher risk for depression, low

self-sufficiency, and unhealthy attachment patterns into adulthood (Baker, 2007; Jaffe et al., 2017). Abnormal coping skills create problems in handling life events positively.

Coping Behaviors

Children

Every child varies with internal working models (IWM) between coping, efficacy, and strategies (Camisasca, Miragoli, Di Blasio, & Grych, 2017). The strategies for coping while in distress involves the person's ability to self-motivate and access cognitive resources (Brummert, Lennings, & Bussey, 2017) A secure child with distress uses positive cognition to restructure strategies and support for what he or she is feeling (Camisasca et al., 2017). A child of avoidance displays distress, using higher levels of distraction with avoidance strategies (Camisasca et al., 2017). Anxious-ambivalent children under distress will use every available coping strategy, but have no correlation with coping efficacy (Camisasca et al., 2017). When parental conflict is high, the coping self-efficacy of children will avoid maladaptive cognitions with higher levels of internalizing (Brummert et al., 2017).

High conflict divorce and PA causes various negative long-term health and social consequences for adverse childhood experiences (ACE). A child with ACE is unable to flourish in comparison to the children who have abilities to flourish (Kwong & Hayes, 2017). A flourishing child will seek options that are positive and build resilience for dealing with stressful circumstances; this child will not react with behavioral problems causing the child to become a delinquent (Kwong & Hayes, 2017; Opondo, Redshaw, &

Quigley, 2017). Children with negative effects from ACE are unable to cope, and the adverse effects are traumatic.

A common characteristic of the trauma from divorce or PA involves posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Severe or mild symptoms of PTSD cause the youth to use maladaptive or dysfunctional emotional regulatory processes to reduce the distress the child is experiencing (Scott & Weems, 2017). The child forms an automatic response to distress that maintains or increases heightened emotional arousal (Scott & Weems, 2017). The cycle of dysfunctional regulation causes short- or long-term internalization of traumatic events (Scott & Weems, 2017). Without the proper teaching of healthy coping skills from the parent or a clinician, the child's state of emotional regulation is worsened.

Adult

There are lasting effects of divorce that become a lifetime of issues (Gardner as cited in Woodall & Woodall, 2017). Few scholars have defined an adult's coping skills related to parental high conflict divorce. There are comparisons to a child's ability to use coping skills with avoidance and maladaptive outcomes (Reed, Lucier-Greer, & Parker, 2016). Coping skills of adults are emotionally driven. In the development stage, the individual is seeking self-identity away from the control of the parents role or guidance (Reed et al., 2016). The rates of depression are higher in emerging adults from 18 to 24 years of age (Reed et al., 2016). Adults have the cognition to depend on themselves and no longer rely on parents' opinions, but struggle with independence in early adulthood (Reed et al., 2016).

Positive coping behaviors of adult children occur through peer support or some type of social support (Reed et al., 2016). When an adult child seeks support from others,

he or she is more likely to experience fewer depressive symptoms, better emotional regulation, and improved personal adjustments (Reed et al., 2016). The immediate family is not the most positive support for the adult child after a high conflict parental divorce. The individual can seek support from external family members through companionship, emotional interaction, or any counseling with direct experiences or knowledge (Reed et al., 2016).

Risk Management

High conflict divorce and PA contribute to development or mental health issues. A role in risk prevention is recognizing potential outcomes after a high conflict divorce affecting the child or adult children's livelihood, such as behaviors and academics (Wamboldt, 2016). The outcome in extreme cases of depression ends with suicide (Shafer et al., 2017). Relatives and parents ignore signs of suicide because the child wants attention (Shafer et al., 2017). Identifying families involved in high conflict divorce can minimize risks affecting the child's future (Amundson & Lux, 2016; Wamboldt, 2016). Children or adults display an agitated state to explain a pervasive interpersonal conflict (Amundson & Lux, 2016). The child begins to focus on the case presentation unaware of the facts or allegations the alienating parent presents about the target parent. Children will mimic the alienating parent and not interact with the target parent (Amundson & Lux, 2016).

High conflict divorce is termed as longstanding and intense disputes involving disruptive court cases between parents who cannot agree on terms of divorce (Shaw, 2017). The frequency of negative interactions correlates with the lack of trust (i.e., raising a child) and aggressive behaviors of the parents during divorce (Shaw, 2017). High

conflict divorces become a safety concern for the child or children. In recent studies of high conflict divorces, the occurrence of abuse reports increases within child custody cases (Shaw, 2017). The courts should take notice of high conflict divorces and require parents to take parenting classes before a divorce is final (Shaw, 2017). The classes will allow parents to understand divorce from the point of the child and how to properly coparent.

A parent's marriage is a source of information for children to learn how to handle communications, disagreements, and expression of love (Zemp, 2016). Other internalizing and externalizing behaviors for children affect the individual's future emotional socialization (Jewell, Schmittl, McCobin, Hupp, & Pomerantz, 2017). Braithwaite, Doxey, Dowdle, and Fincham (2016) showed less commitment and relationship satisfaction that interferes with stability in emerging adult children. The adult child becomes at risk for divorce or an inability to have a working romantic relationship (Braithwaite et al., 2016; Zemp, 2016).

The romantic attachment behaviors supersede the individual's security because the buffering of negative processes becomes more manageable, but a lack of security in romantic relationships could evolve into depression (Bradford, Burningham, Sandberg, & Johnson, 2017; Leustek & Theiss, 2017). Emerging adults' depressive symptoms negatively associate with their ability to display resilience during the turbulence of divorcing parents (Leustek & Theiss, 2017). The adult child may feel caught in the middle of a war and having to choose sides (Leustek & Theiss, 2017). When professionals do not take notice of early signs, the parent may project instability in the

child's mental welfare and damage the child's psyche (Jewell et al., 2017; Leustek & Theiss, 2017).

Assessment

Assessing the impact of divorce amongst adult children depends on the amount of interaction with the parent during a high conflict divorce. Professionals who do not see the role of fathers become an obstacle to treating the family as a whole (Barnell & Stone, 2016; Warshak, 2015). Clinicians may use the Bowen's family systems model (FSM) and Kohut's theory of self-psychology to assess the process for treating or intervention techniques (Barnell & Stone, 2016). Not many clinicians know about PA and lack training or treat the child by using the symptomatic issues the child is experiencing (Bernet et al., 2015; Warshak, 2015). I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 3.

The symptoms of PA become muddled when other co-occurring behaviors exist during and after the parent's divorce (Bernet et al., 2015). Gardner's listing of symptoms involves 8 criteria's that a child will exhibit (1) campaign of denigration, (2) Weak, absurd, or frivolous rationalizations for the deprecation, (3) Lack of ambivalence, (4) "independent-thinker" phenomenon, (5) reflexive support of the alienating parent in the parental conflict, (6) absence of guilt over cruelty to and/or exploitation of the alienated parent, (7) presence of borrowed scenarios, and (8) spread of the animosity to the friends and/or extended family of the alienated parent (Bernet et al., 2015; Warshak, 2015; Woodall & Woodall, 2017). Children have little awareness, depending on the child's age, about recognizing alienation and those who are aware envision that one parent is

attempting to go against the other parent (Bernet et al., 2015). The analysis should require a deeper review that includes discussions with the parents to determine the probability of PA.

Intervention

Parental alienation is seen as a form of abuse (Reay, 2015; Meier & Dickson, 2017). Meier and Dickson (2017) perform a study that indicates family court's perception of parental alienation and why intervention does not exist in cases of visible abuse from parental alienation. Exposure of Interparental Violence (IPV) develops when the child displays signs causing an impact on emotional issues, coping skills, stress, and parent-child interactions (Overbeek et al, 2015). The ultimate cause of parental alienation is posttraumatic stress (PTS) (Overbeek et al, 2015). Overbeek et al (2015) studied the need for intervention with a focus on trauma-specific factors. The symptoms of PTSD decrease when the link between exposure and nonspecific treatment during intervention focuses on parental health that increases coping skills and positive parent-child interactions (Overbeek et al, 2015). There is not a clear indication of the benefits trauma specific intervention has that effect the child (Overbeek et al, 2015).

The Contact Refusal Scale (CFS) can assist clinicians in defining complex relationships and actions following a parent's divorce (Huff et al, 2017). There are early signs to indicate whether parental alienation or high conflict divorce is a factor in a child's purpose to refuse visitations with the target parent. The CFS can measure the early signs of PA and determine the severity among children's reason to not interact with the other parent. Some of the signs involve the child's excitement or happiness when

seeing the other parent and a decrease desire to visit the other parent (Woodall & Woodall, 2017).

New Beginnings

A developmental program, New Beginnings (NBP), is a preventive intervention program to assist in lessening the factors of divorce and involvement on future struggles for children into adulthood (Christopher et al, 2017). NBP offers tools for parents that builds stronger relationships with the child and decrease behavioral outbursts through maintaining teamwork (Christopher et al, 2017). The results of the study indicate a decrease in maternal blame, accepting divorce, and adjustment outcomes in the NBP are beneficial to preventing long-term effects of divorce (Christopher et al, 2017). Again the intervention involves both parents involvement for successful results.

Family Transitions Guide

An experimental program known as Family Transitions Guide (FTG) includes motivational interviews and problem solving for parents through practice exercises that creates positive communications with the child (Braver et al, 2016). The object of FTG was to decrease conflicts between parents using a different approach to handling interparental conflict (Braver et al, 2016). Braver's et al (2016) comparison between FTG and Parent Conflict Resolution (PCR) determines some significance for improvement with children feeling less "caught in the middle". FTG is beneficial if the courts mandate the program as a requirement before divorce, but not in the event where damage is occurring.

Children First

Jewell et al (2017) studied the use of the program, Children First (CFP), that educates parents during divorce or separation. From the three measures of adaptive co-parenting on knowledge, attitudes, and likelihood, the 3rd edition displays superiority (Jewell et al, 2017). The increase of success contributes to the focus of training behaviors for adaptive co-parenting (Jewell et al, 2017). Any style of meditation that intervenes or supports families in divorce to create stronger co-parenting skills, has positive and effective change (Patel, Fairchild, & Prinz et al, 2017). Many times intervention will not occur unless someone speaks up or requests the courts to intervene (Reay, 2015). A parent with signs of mental health issues could receive an evaluation to determine the credibility of the accusations for parental alienation or ensure the courts mandate the parents to take co-parenting classes or training (Reay, 2015; Braver et al, 2016; Christopher et al, 2017; Jewell et al, 2017).

Characteristics of Parents

Changes in a child's well-being is a factor for parent's communication failures in the marriage (Knopp et al, 2017). An effective intervention requires isolating family effects important to understanding marital and child functions to identify potential targets (Knopp et al, 2017). Balmer, Matthewson, & Haines (2017) determined in a study that the father is the cause for alienating parent than the mother. Other characteristics that could be an association for parental alienation intervention includes a parent's personality disorders, such as narcissism, anti-social personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, or charismatic authority (Bernet, 2016). A parent can request an evaluation from the courts with regards to personality disorders as a probable factor for parental

alienation. The involvement of the courts can determine from the psychologist's results whether to intervene in custody agreements or require treatment (Bernet, 2016).

Treatments

There are several styles of treating children from high conflict divorce and PA experiences. PA has three types of severity levels that include mild, moderate, and severe (Barnell & Stone, 2016; Brummert et al., 2017). Mild symptoms result in some programming of the child, but not effecting visitations and requires teaching awareness of the factors that could evolve if the parents do not take action (Barnell & Stone, 2016; Brummert et al., 2017). Moderate symptoms involve both programming and difficulties with visitations where the child feels a need to protect and fight for the alienating parent (Barnell & Stone, 2016; Brummert et al., 2017). The final stage is severe and the child can develop severe psychiatric disorders, along with total disregard for the target parent causing a need for treatment with a psychologist (Barnell & Stone, 2016; Brummert et al., 2017). The ASC can assess and identify deficiencies of self-concept and any impairment of the family system with focus on treating high conflict divorces (Barnell & Stone, 2016). A pre and post exam will determine results of effectiveness for the families.

Before a clinician treats the client there are steps to adhere to, such as keeping eyes open, remain engaged as an advocate for reducing conflict, work with parents and children about the issues, promoting resilience, model calmness, be thorough by not adopting urgency, and envision what is in the best interest of the child by raising concerns of anything harmful (Amundson & Lux, 2016, Barnell & Stone, 2016). The object of treatment involves positive coping skills and maximize resilience for children at risk for maladjustment (Luthar Eisenberg, 2017). Early interventions focus on treatment

for parents and children by promoting positive co-parenting and strengthening emotional self-regulation (Barnell & Stone, 2016; Luthar Eisenber, 2017). The style of treatment is dependent on what experiences a clinician has on high conflict divorce or PA.

Family Reflections Reunification Program

Reay (2015) indicates that PA is a form of psychological abuse for children and traditional therapy approaches are not effective. In 2012, Reay (2015) develops Family Reflections Reunification Program (FRRP) to treat severely alienated children and family dynamics. The process Reay (2015) states separating the child from the alienating parent and given custody to the targeted parent or changes to the parent's access with increasing visitations for the targeted parent. The changes in custody agreements will enhance the ability to treat the child and eliminate further interference from the alienating parent (Reay, 2016). The program demonstrates a 95 percent success rate for re-establishing relationships between the targeted parent and child (Reay, 2015).

The Use Bowen's and Kohut's Treatment Theories

Similar to Reay's (2015) research, Barnell and Stone (2016) agree there are flaws in the judicial system to intervene, but lack addressing a broad range of issues from divorce for family systems and individual dynamics. Barnell and Stone (2016) integrate Bowen's family systems theory and Kohut's theory of self-psychology as an intervention model to reduce levels of stress and develop a coherent of the self. The object of the intervention model addresses using group sessions with other parents from high conflict divorce cases that involves eight weekly sessions for ninety minutes (Barnell & Stone, 2016). The process of the approach creates empathy for the other parent found in Kohut's

self-psychology. Parents learn using the teachings of the sessions to practice in daily routines and allow for time to process the change for cohesion (Barnell & Stone, 2016).

Mentalization-Based Therapy for Parental Conflict – Parenting Together

Parents in high conflict divorce do not seek treatment, but rather use the courts to resolve the issues (Hertzman et al, 2017). The use of Mentalization-Based Therapy for Parental Conflict (MBT-PC) addresses unique challenges parents and professionals working with them (Hertzman et al, 2017). The process of MBT-PC assists in reducing anger and hostility between the parents and mitigate damaging effects that the conflict has on the child (Hertzman et al, 2017). MBT-PC teaches parents to learn communication skills and awareness of the effects the conflict has or having on the child (Hertzman et al, 2017). The intervention only works if parents want to cooperate and learn positive co-parenting.

Other Family Treatment Approaches

Templer et al (2017) studied different systematic family treatment approaches that include the Multi Model Family Intervention (MMFI), Family Reflections Reunification Program (FRRP), Overcoming Barriers Family Camp (OBFC), Parallel Group Therapy for PA and the Family Bridges workshop. The main purpose for each of the different treatment programs were to not create further harm to the targeted child with the cause for alienation and restoring family dynamics (Templer et al, 2017). The use of Reay's (2015) theory of treatment in the process of changing custody will involve therapeutic treatment because the process of transitioning for family members and child become difficult (Templer et al, 2017). The use of traditional family therapy is ineffective and

need tailoring that deepens the focus of treatment, such as systematic family therapy, which includes treatment for parental alienation (Templer et al, 2017). Clinician's should be aware a child with parental alienation is experiencing distress and improve psychological well-being (Templer et al, 2017). Major factor a clinician deals with are difficulties working against the family culture and the system, often seen as treatment makes the issues worse than to do anything (Woodall & Woodall, 2017).

Giving Children Hope

Treatment plans focus on family reunification drawn to create parents acting as better role models for the child, but the "interest of the child" is left for the court's to decide (Dallam & Silberg, 2016). The reunification process forces the child to have a relationship with the parents against the will of the child (Dallam & Silberg, 2016). Children with prior trauma who are not given appropriate treatment could reinforce trauma and harm the child (Dallam & Silberg, 2016). A possible treatment known as Giving Children Hope (GCH) can assist with the impact that parental conflict as on the child (Rauh, Irwin, & Vath, 2016). A second part of the program offers group and individual therapy that works with parents to decrease conflict and improve parenting (Rauh, Irwin, & Vath, 2016). Children learn coping skills to identify true and false information, keeping self and parents safe, responsibility of conflict, and relate to either a good or bad parent (Rauh, Irwin, & Vath, 2016). To drive parents away from conflicting issues with each other and reflect on the needs of the child. For an effective treatment, children need to gain trust with the parents (Rauh, Irwin & Vath, 2016).

Functional Family Therapy

Functional Family Therapy (FFT) works with adolescents experiencing behavioral problems, substance misuse, or conduct behaviors using a model-driven approach (Hartnett et al, 2017). There are three phases of treatment involves 1) motivation and engagement, 2) behavioral change, and 3) generalization (Hartnett et al, 2017). Phase one drives to develop views of a family presenting a problem by reducing negativity and blame with a sense of hope (Hartnett et al, 2017). Phase two motivates a change in behavior through problem solving and learn to manage conflict (Hartnett et al, 2017). Phase three teaches how to work with family by developing a plan for future challenges the family might experience (Hartnett et al, 2017). The results of the treatment taught parents in getting to know the adolescent and understanding reasonings for their behavior with positive reinforcement (Hartnett et al, 2017).

Summary and Transition

The review of the literature regarding coping behaviors of adult children from high conflict divorces. Researchers indicate the impact of parental high conflict divorce and define a variety of treatment approaches to assist children of the effects. Case study problems and purpose statement support the exploration of coping abilities of adult children with or without treatment. An analytical framework enables integration of examinations on how various factors of the lifetime effects from high conflict parental divorce has on the child well into adulthood. Chapter 3 will include a description of study, structuring and the conduct of collecting data.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore surviving adult children from parental high conflict divorces. A comprehensive understanding of the individual's coping behaviors may affect high conflict divorce and the prognosis of PA. High conflict divorce negatively affects children, leading to a lifetime of emotional and mental health issues. There is a need for examining coping behaviors of surviving adult children. The conceptual framework for the study was based on the theory of Bowen's family systems and phenomenological reasoning for the effects of PA and high conflict divorce. Chapter 3 includes the research method and design, role of the researcher, and selection of participants. Other information includes the study population, sampling, and data collection methods, and descriptions of the strategies to ensure the study has reliability and validity.

Research Approach

Method

The platform for this qualitative study involved semistructured interviews with adult survivors of PA and high conflict divorces. The primary research question addressed in the study included the lived experiences of adult survivors of childhood high conflict divorces. The use of a qualitative approach was useful in exploring how adult survivors are coping from parental high conflict divorce in the field of forensic psychology. A qualitative study was used to understand the individual's dealing with

issues from the high conflict divorce as children. Other researchers performed studies on PA and factors associated with the cause of PA.

Bernet et al. (2015) performed quantitative research on child psychological maltreatment, exposing a child to alienating behaviors in the context of a high degree of conflict between the parents. Bernet et al. identified the alienating behaviors that occurred in an Italian sample of children and the reported associated psychosocial symptoms. Mahrer et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study of divorced families with children between 9 and 12 years of age in three categories of moderate, low, and high impact of interparental conflict. After 9 years, another evaluation was taken of the same children during young adulthood, and Mahrer et al. described that the high impact of interparental conflict was largely impacted into adulthood. Christopher et al. (2017) performed a quantitative study using a parenting preventive intervention NBP to reduce postdivorce mental health and emotional issues from a prior analysis made 15 years earlier in the young adult's childhood. The best approach for this study was using a qualitative analysis.

Research Design

A phenomenological researcher collects information through interviews involving a questionnaire. Phenomenology involves examining unique experiences of individual's lived situations, taken individually from his or her reality (Creswell, 2013; Weger et al., 2016). This offers a richer and deeper understanding of those experiences from the person's perspective. The interview questions focused on the willingness of the person to answer questions that revolve around his or her parent's divorce and ways of coping with

the aftermath as a child into adulthood (see Creswell, 2013). Each person told his or her stories about high conflict divorce and the impact this has or had on his or her livelihood.

Role of Researcher

My role as a researcher was to eliminate bias and personal beliefs from the study. I collected participants' unbiased interviews with a narration of individuals' answers to ensure the integrity of the collection and analysis of the data. The interview questions were neutral, and I listened to participants attentively in each interview. Interviewees had the opportunity to respond with their perspective and insight to each of the interview questions on coping behaviors of high conflict divorce as an adult survivor. Each response was recorded via a recorder, and I performed a written dialog for additional validity and reliability of the study. Another responsibility of a qualitative researcher is to enhance social science by providing enriching descriptions of the study context through study samples.

MethodologyParticipants

The finding of participants involved searching adult survivors of high conflict parental divorce (ACOD) via social media, such as Facebook. Several groups of ACOD can be reached. The purpose of a sampling is to provide an understanding of the problems addressed in the research questions (Creswell, 2013). Adult participants were varying ages and included both genders of male and female. I chose individuals who experienced negative connotations of high conflict divorce from mild to severe issues affecting their person's livelihood.

It is important for a researcher to establish a good researcher-participant rapport that is positive and trusting (Creswell, 2013). Participants who are comfortable and trust the researcher become more open during the interview process. The limitations of distance created an issue because individuals were from different states; the interview occurred via the Internet through a conference call or by phone. I provided an informed consent before a discussion of interview questions so that the participants were aware of the purpose of the study.

Population and Sampling

The samples included different cultures and states in the United States. The sampling was purposeful so that I could focus on effects after a parent's divorce. The size of the sample is dependent on the saturation of people who are available to participate. Maximum variation sampling allows common patterns of identification for collection of data (Creswell, 2013). Another process of sampling, called snowballing, assists in recruiting any additional participants in elite populations, such as ACOD (Creswell, 2013). To apply snowball sampling for additional participants, I expanded the population size for suitable sampling.

Qualitative studies use a smaller group of individuals to participate in a study. To achieve thoroughness of the study, a large number of participants is not a necessity (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The use of different locations and diverse culture added depth and achieved different perspectives across the populations. Social media like Facebook proved handy in communicating with a diverse population on the same topic for adult survivors of high conflict divorces.

Data Collection

Instruments

Interviews were conducted with adult survivors from parental high conflict divorces. Qualitative interviews require structure (i.e., semistructure), open-ended questions, and context; at times, more questions can be added to produce information or clarify the response from the participants (Creswell, 2013). Informed consents were given to each participant to know what to expect in the interviewing process and the collection of data. The location of the documents for the raw study came from the transcription of interviews.

Collection Process

The collection of study data came from the interview narrations. Once the narration was complete, a copy was given to each participant for review. I used a semistructured interview to explore responses from participants regarding the experiences of high conflict divorce and coping behaviors. The use of semistructured interviews allows for researchers to focus on the topic in relation to the research question (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Locations of the interviews were dependent on the participants' comfort that allowed for effective interviewing with each person. Each person may be found in different states in the United States. I used the telephone as it was more convenient for the participants and I to communicate. I also noted visual observation of the person's physical and emotional responses to each question. The downside of using phone interviews was a lack of detailed responses or limitations on rapport from the

participants. Phone interviews were recorded for the authenticity of the answers to the questions given. I stopped reviewing here.

Data Organization

To organize participants without using personal information involves giving each participant a number. When storing data, the use of a password protected computer with corresponding files into individual document files with the number that associates with the participant. Notes from the interview are taken during each interview that includes observations and comments into identifiable codes or themes. The labeling of codes allowed for a picture to develop identifying what a person's coping behaviors were from a parent's high conflict divorce. After the study is complete, all collections of data remain stored for up to five years and discard after all documentation after five years.

Data Analysis

Interview questions, explore the research question to guide the conduct of the study: What are the lived experiences of adult survivors of childhood high conflict divorce? Open-ended interview questions allow for the participants to give more than just yes or no answers of the individual's experiences and ability to share in-depth information on coping behaviors after parental divorce in childhood. Below are the interview questions the participants of the study respond to are:

1. What age did your parents' divorce?
2. How old are you now?
3. Which parent did the court order you to live with?
4. Which parent was given visitations?

5. Do you recall if your parents had to take a counseling session or a program on co-parenting prior to finalizing the divorce?
6. When your parents had conflicts how did it make you feel?
7. Did you feel that one parent isolated you from the other parent with negative comments or excuses for not allowing visitations?
8. At any point where conversations overheard or spoken directly to you about either parent and what were some things said?
9. How do you feel about your parents co-parenting abilities after the divorce?
10. How did your parent's high conflict divorce affect you socially, academically, and emotionally?
11. How were your emotional needs met?
12. How did you cope with the disputes between your parents?
13. How many relationships with a significant other did you have in your life?
14. Are you married or divorced?
15. How has your parents effected your relationships with a significant other?
16. If you have children, how has your parents' divorce affected your parental role?
17. What age did you start seeing a therapist?
18. How is your relationship with your mother now?
19. How is your relationship with your father now?

Participants of the study share perspectives, giving insight to various factors affecting the individual's coping behaviors after a parent's high conflict divorce. A review of literature supports the effects of high conflict divorce on children and clinicians different approaches to treatment. The collection of data and analysis of the study aligns

with the theoretical framework using Murray Bowen's theory of the Family Systems. The Family Systems Theory (FST) of human behavior with the role of views of family on emotional unity and thinking to describe the complex interactions (Titleman, 2014). FST guides the conceptual framework to conduct a review of interviews as collected data to categorize the coping behaviors of surviving adult children. The primary data analysis technique used for the qualitative study is a coding process. The coding process provides a theme in a qualitative research by categorizing and describing the collection of data from the participants that aligns with the conceptual framework for this study. Appendix F provides a list of codes used to analyze the collection of data. Once the study is complete the results are sent by mail.

Issues of Trustworthiness

The process of gaining a rapport with the participants is important to build trust. The purpose of analyzing data is not to define misconceptions, but to relate different experiences effecting the surviving adult children of high conflict divorce. The reports in the collection of data are made available by offering security and make participants feel a part of the study. Although the information is sensitive full disclosure is available for each participant, with the hope that the participants assist in creating a voice for other adult children experiencing similar issues of high conflict divorce. Dependability demonstrates trustworthiness for qualitative researchers beyond the reliability of the study (Creswell, 2013).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

During the study phase, qualitative researchers ensure dependability supports the integrity in the collection data and the finding (Bryman, 2008). As a researcher, the development of dependability of the findings occurs by conducting interviews with participants, maintaining audio files and transcripts, a table of codes used to compare each participant responses, and the written narration of each interview is used in the analysis of collecting data to summarize the study findings (Bryman, 2008). A program known as MAXQDA, is a software program that performs coding and transcribing audio or video documentation during the interview with participants that adds to the reliability of collected data. The MAXQDA allows for preventing researcher error or bias information in the study process.

Validity

To ensure integrity of the qualitative research requires implementation of study credibility and transferability (Bryman, 2008). The method of study credibility for this project was taken from interviews, audio recordings, and direct observations, where permitted by the participants. The semi-structured interviews used to gather data from each source of coding to create a triangulation of the findings and provide overall quality of the study (Bryman, 2008). The gathering of data from different states and diverse groups supports a comprehensive examination of coping behaviors for surviving adult children of high conflict divorce. The performance of credibility occurs when the researcher identifies and rules out other explanations for the findings.

The conceptual framework of Bowen's FST supports the collection and analysis of study data. Bowen's theory, FST is most suitable in the findings of the study as a theoretical research because FST explains human behavior in a family unit. The direct use of Bowen's theory mentions how families have an effect on members under similar emotional skin (Titleman, 2014). Emotional skin means a degree of change on thoughts, feelings, and so forth of family functioning among other family members. The choice of using FST was the best choice for the study. The interpretation of the findings centers of Bowen's theory of FST, providing credibility during the data analysis and conclusions.

To continue the validity of the study are to recognize researcher's personal values, researcher's theory, or any preconceived notions about the reasons on how an adult copes with high conflict divorces. Researchers who do not pay attention and manage their biases could influence the response taken from the participants during the study and create a corruption of data and analysis process (Hammersley, 2000). To overcome bias requires an internal review of conscious and unconscious feelings, behaviors, and decisions associated with the how and why of the study. By confronting any bias using an open mind and remain tolerant. Most importantly, by putting myself in "their shoes".

An alternate process for keeping unbiased information would include study participants with a copy of the study findings and conclusion. Then the participants can review and offer any suggestions or comments the person wants to add. The feedback enhances credibility and accuracy in the collection and analysis of data. Once final approval is made, participants receive a summary of the final review for the study with their recommendations, findings, and the conclusion.

Ethical Procedures

The collection of data from participants may cause minor risks of discomfort (i.e. stress, emotional upset) when discussing sensitive topics of life experiences that may arise during the interviewing process. Minimal discomfort while conducting the interview with participants at all times. At the beginning of each interview a disclosure statement is given that discusses letting the participants know to tell the researcher to stop at any time. Participants do not have to respond to each question of the interview if they feel uncomfortable or wish to withdraw from the study. If an individual is under severe distress, for example, anxiety attack or interruption to breathing, the interview is stopped and the interview is not included in the study.

Before conducting each interview, participants receive information about the objective and intent of the study. An informed consent is given for review and signing. Appendix B shows what the participants receive as an informed consent. None of the participants receive incentives as an exchange for participation. Participants have a choice in determining if they wish to participate in the study as noted in the consent form. All participants of the study are given numbers to identify them during the process of data analysis. Interview questions do not identify the participants other than gender, age, and ethnicity.

Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guides the structuring and conducting of the study data collection process. An identification number was given by the IRB, 413180572547, with the approval to collect data from participants. The storage of data collected and analysis are kept in a locked password coded safe for up to 5 years. This process protected the rights of the participants. This included hard copies of

transcripts or data collected for the study. Only I had the key code for the safe to promote the security of the research.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 3 is a plan of action for the process of collecting data and the analysis for the problem stated in Chapter 1. Each section explains the intent, research design, population sampling, and analytical methods used in the study process for coping behaviors of surviving adult children after parents' high conflict divorce. The qualitative research approach produced a better understanding of the findings that explained the answers to the research questions and the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 combines the scholarly literature and data analysis phase by reporting the findings during the collection of data. Chapter 4 will determine the findings from the data collection taken during the interview process with participants. Then will describe the comparisons of the participants responses to each other and answer the research questions aligned with the theory proposed.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine how high conflict divorces affect adult children's ability to cope effectively socially, emotionally, or academically. Bowen's theory of the family systems (as cited in Titleman, 2014) and the phenomenological approach were used as the research framework. The interviewing process included questions relevant to the coping behavior of the participants from their parent's high conflict divorce as children. The data from this study identified the experiences and coping behaviors of adult children during and after their parent's divorce.

Restatement of Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study addresses the gap that exists in current literature as seen below:

Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of adult survivors of childhood high conflict divorce?

Research Question 2: According to adult survivors of childhood high conflict divorce, how have these childhood experiences affected adult relationships?

Participant Demographics

The demographics of the participants were adult children who experienced their parents' divorce as children. Participant A was a 36-year-old female who experienced her parent's divorce at the age of 5. Participant B was a 25-year-old female who experienced her parent's divorce at the age of 13. Participant C was a 36-year-old female who experienced her parent's divorce at the age of 3 ½. Participant D was a 25-year-old

female who experienced her parent's divorce at the age of 14. Participant E was a 56-year-old male who experienced his parent's divorce at the age of 13. The participants came from different ethnicities and locations across the United States. The participants who experienced their parent's high conflict divorce were either school age or adolescents.

Children have different coping abilities in situations that are stressful based on the person's innate abilities, such as temperaments and mental developments (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012). The child is either easygoing going in nature or thrown off balance by change. A clear understanding for how the child handles tougher situations depends on the support of family and friends (Academy of Pediatrics, 2014). The success of positive coping skills occurs on the basis of prior circumstances that were successful in change (Academy of Pediatrics, 2014). How the child responds to stressful situation depends on the child's development and include temperament.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

As stated in Chapter 3, I used an audio recording device to enhance the credibility of the study. This eliminated time, asking the participants to repeat a response that takes the focus away from asking questions or the need to give follow up questions. The locating of participants came from an open call on Facebook. I did not select who the individuals were, only that the person had to have experienced their parent's divorce as children and were not currently seeing or seeking counseling.

Transferability

Once all the interviews were completed, I transcribed all of the responses to written material. The use of an audio recording allows for focus on the participants' answers to the questions, eliminating asking to repeat the responses or long pauses while collecting the answers. The transcription of information took time to ensure that every word taken with the audio recording was a word-for-word response. No outside programs or organizations were used in the transcribing process.

Dependability

I used phone interviews and voice recordings that were dependable. The MAXQDA software program transcribes information into codes on the basis of identical responses among participants. Follow-up questions were given when more of an enriching answer or some clarity to the previous questions was needed. For example, participants gave the response "I felt like a pawn." As the researcher, I inferred what he or she was saying, but I asked the participant for a clearer understanding or to give examples to how he or she "felt like a pawn." This process prevents biased responses from the researcher. The repetitive responses, with the use of coding to produce common or like responses, indicated how the individual dealt with the divorce.

Confirmability

The establishment of confirmability ensures credibility in qualitative research. The purpose of using qualitative research offers an understanding of the phenomena, thereby enhancing credibility (Bryman, 2008). Only the participants can judge what the results become. The researcher brings a unique perspective to the study that corroborates

or aligns with the research topic. After the study, the researcher conducts a review or examination of the collection of data by making a judgment for potential bias or distortion (Bryman, 2008).

Setting

The setting for collecting data from participants was as follows: my residence in an isolated room of the house and phone conversation while participants remained at their residence. This type of setting allowed for the participants to remain comfortable talking about possible sensitive information that the individual may reveal. The interviewers chose times where the individual could speak in private. At the time of the interviews, each participant had no contributing factors, such as currently seeking therapy from a counselor or psychologist. There were no current issues in the individual's life, such as trauma, finances, or relationship issues with a significant other.

Review of Data Analysis Process

In the beginning, there was a list of 25 willing participants from different adult ages and gender. Once a review was made during the informed consent process, some participants were unable to participate due to current issues not resolved. These participants were eliminated from the pool of participants, leaving only five individuals to participate in the study. The data were gathered from interview questions. During the interviewing process, an audio recording device and telephone communication were used to accurately quote the participants' responses. After the interview, I transcribed the audio recordings (Appendix D). The duration of the phone interview ranged from 20 to

45 minutes depending on whether the need for follow-up questions to gain insight about the responses given from the participants.

MAXQDA is a software program that performs coding and transcribes audio documentation from the collection of responses taken during the interview. The use of vivo coding was useful for the process of the breaking down raw material on the basis of actual words spoken to create a theme or pattern. I chose vivo coding to highlight the voice of participants by giving meaning to the data. MAXQDA emphasized key words to describe the participants' emotions and behaviors they experienced through spoken language, displaying a common theme. After separating the data and recognizing a common theme, social norms and age were a factor.

Participant Responses

From the research questions, a theme or pattern occurs among the participant's responses. Responses to interview questions address more than one theme. The interview data describes saturation to the study indicating there were differences of coping behaviors, but appear to fit logically in the study. A qualitative approach allows me the opportunity to engage with the participants as I investigate the phenomenon surrounding the experiences and understand why the individual's use of coping behaviors. Those lived experiences explain continuity among a larger population of adult children's experiences during their parent's high conflict divorce. The descriptions below assist the reader to feel an essence of the participant's voices told during the interview.

Participant A is a 36-year-old female who experienced her parent's divorce at the age of 5. The courts ordered her to live with her mother as her primary caretaker. Her father was given visitations ordered in the decree of the divorce to every other weekend

and holiday by supervisions. During the divorce proceedings, the court ordered her father to seek counseling because he was an alcoholic. Neither parents had to take parenting courses/ classes before the finalizing of the divorce. Not much was remembered from the divorce stated by participant A, but she explains feeling like a pawn between her parents. She said, "My father would randomly cancel health insurance because he stated, "Well the children do not live with me why should I have to pay". Although her mother encouraged visits with her father, her father was the opposite by "demonizing" her mother, stating "Your mother took me away from him and not allow visitations." Most visits were not taken by her father because he said, "That the chaperones were his mother's fault for having supervisions during the visits. A lack of co-parenting did not occur because her father spent only a handful of times visiting her. She was an introverted child with trusting her emotions with others for 16 years. A very close relationship was with her sister and her mother was very attentive to her needs. After a couple of years, her mother remarried and considers her stepfather as "dad". When the disputes between her parents became too much, she would isolate herself. She states, "I had 3 significant relationships before her marriage to current husband and only married once." Since having her mother support her in every aspect of her life, she was able to see from her mother's current marriage "What a great relationship looks like". At the age of 6 or 7 participant A started seeking counseling and again at the age of 20. She no longer has a relationship with her father and he has never met her husband or children. She states why she does not have a relationship with her father because "I got tired of being the adult. He has my contact information, but chooses not to have a relationship".

Participant B is a 25-year-old child who experienced her parent's divorce at the age of 13. Her mother was the primary caregiver. The courts did not order co-parenting classes or seek counseling before the finalizing of the divorce. She felt anxious when her parents had conflicts. Participant B states she was isolated from her father geographically because he lived in Southern America. Most of the arguments her parents had were about finances, lack of communication and both parents talked poorly about each other to her when there were conversations. After the divorce co-parenting between her parents were no existent and zero communication. The lack of emotional support affects her socially because she had issues with anxiety which led to an eating disorder. In unpredictable environments, she would become anxious and seclude herself. Academically she did well-seeking validation and cause for perfection in the things she accomplished. At the age of 21, she sought counseling with a therapist where she learned healthier coping behaviors through breathing techniques. She has had one serious relationship that led to marriage and no children yet. Currently her relationship with her mother, as she says, "We have shared the experience with the divorce and enabled us to bond better". Her relationship with her father is "surface level" and "No deep meaning in their conversations involving our emotions, almost feels like an acquaintance".

Participant C is a 36-year-old female who experienced her parent's divorce at the age of 3 ½. The courts ordered her mother as the primary caregiver and her father was allowed scheduled visitations. No court orders for parental counseling, but she states, "Doubt they would have willing". She felt torn when her parents had conflicts because her mother was an instigator. Both parents despised each other with anger. Her mother had no issues expressing her anger with lots of bickering between the two. Because her

father had issues with alcoholism, her mother would put him down in front of her. Often overheard conversations of her mother talking down about her father to anyone her mother was in contact with, including her mother's friends. She states her mother would say, "He was a loser and could not take care of kids". As an adult, she sees things differently in the fact that the information spoken about her father was not true. That her mother was controlling and not allow anyone to have custody of her and her brother. Co-parenting was non-existent with the only communication involving yelling and screaming between her parents. She recalls her father would attempt to stay calm when her mother would cause drama. Her father was never told about upcoming birthday parties and if she asked her mother gave a pity party that her father did not love them. Her mother would state, "He does not need to be here, you have me". Socially, participant C became needy and seeking affection and attention, especially when her mother was working 2 or 3 jobs at a time. Since her mother was not around that often she became to the caretaker of the household. When in the presence of her father, she felt like a different person because the amount of attention she was getting from him. The school was not successful in school and mostly struggled by figuring out her assignments alone. Emotionally she was goofy by making others laugh to hide how she was really feeling. Her coping behaviors or outlet came from singing. She was involved in a choir where she excelled and received validation from other asking advice about singing. This was her outlet as she buried her emotions. Then her father committed suicide and she remained catatonic for 2 and half months by not speaking to anyone about anything. Crying was not a permitted emotion in the household. When her parents had conflicts, she would ignore the fights and was not really sure what was happening at that age; but remembers asking for her father.

Participant C had 3 serious relationships in high school. She states, "I was trying to fill a void when having bad relationships with my first child's father at the age of 19". When she went to college, she had one relationship with a significant other and they soon married, going on 12 years. The marriage had ups and downs, but they were able to work through the issues. She has struggled with her mother who disapproves of her husband. Her mother made comments that she was not worth much and not able to make it on her own. Participant C indicated that her mother's opinion of men as manipulative. She has not had communication with her mother for 8 to 9 years because of her mother's behavior was not changing for positive. Her father remarried before his death and participants C claims her mother was jealous of that relationship and attempt to turn her away from them. At this time she still has a close relationship with her stepmother and sees her as her mother. She states, "Their relationship together displayed what a good marriage looks like and why she and her husband have a strong marriage".

Participant D is a 25-year-old female who experienced her parent's divorce at the age of 14. Visitations were set by the court as 50/50, meaning parents shared the custody. Parenting classes were a requirement of the divorce before the finalizing the divorce. There are still issues to this day with her parent's divorce over custody changes and child support. She feels horrible when her parents have conflicts. Both parents attempted to isolate her with negative comments about each other to her. Things that were stated or overheard were how her father and stepmother were alcoholic but were not. Her mother said mean things about her stepmom in an attempt to tear the family apart. Participant D states there was no fluid co-parenting that was positive. The effects of the divorce caused depression and anxieties. She isolated herself from others by staying home and not going.

Often times self-harming by cutting when listening to the arguing between her parents.

She was left caring for her brother often. Her emotional needs were never met.

Participant D said she did not know how to cope, but she was able to speak with friends and found ways to avoid being home, by either taking a job or staying with friends. She has had 3 serious relationships with significant others. At the time of this interview she was married to her husband, going on 7 years. The effects of the divorce cause severe trust issues with men or others. She consistently worries about what she should and should not believe. Her children are given the same needs that she did not have as a child. She states, "My parents showed me what not to do with my children". Since her parents still have ongoing divorce custody issues, her mother asked the court to put in the decree that the two cannot be in the same room as her father and stepmom. She began therapy at the age of 16, which only lasted with three visits. Although there are still issues with her mother, the relationship is okay. She sees no issues in the relationship with her father and he visits her often.

Participant E is a 56-year-old male who experienced his parent's divorce at the age of 13. Divorce was not common during his childhood. The court gave his mother primary custody and his father visitation rights. No requirements were made for his parents to take counseling or classes. Both of his parents were alcoholics and he would lock himself in his room when the two would argue in the hopes of not hearing them argue. His parents gave rewards if he would go with them for visits. Often told there was more freedom living with one as opposed to living with the other. His mother talked poorly about his father because he says she hated him. Since his parents lived 40 miles away, he saw that the co-parenting as "okay". His father never missed a visit. Participant

E felt as though the divorce was his fault and was not successful in his school work. He came from a small town and found his emotional support with his sister. Friends were hard to have because no one was able to relate to his experience of divorce. He often just withdrew due to lack of friendships with his peers and relationships with his parents. The effects of the divorce caused him to stay in a 23-year marriage even though the two should be divorced. He felt the need to stay because he did not want his kids to experience what he went through and not have the everyday experience with his children. But she stated, "I knew I stayed longer than I should have and waited until his children were adults before divorcing their mother." He eventually divorced and is currently in a new marriage with a significant other for about 8 years. The role of a parent made him guide his children with strict discipline by not allowing his children to talk back and their mother agreed. No counseling or therapy sought. He was able to reconcile with his mother before she became deceased. With his father, he was able to talk to him without a "screaming match".

Identified Themes

As indicated from literature review during Chapter 3, divorce is not uncommon in today's social norm (Filder and Bala, 2010). Participant E indicated that he lacked support with his peers because divorce was not socially acceptable. Participant E responded that he was divorced, unlike the other 4 participants, who were married. He is the only male participant for the study. During the process of acquiring participants for the study, many male interviewees did not want to participate. Male participants stated, "Bringing up "old wounds" would hinder them moving forward in life and did not see a reason to rehash or discuss the past." The rest of the participants were females.

Participant A and C experienced divorce under 10 years of age and participant B, D, and E occurred as adolescents.

Common behaviors of the participant's parents during and after divorce involved alcoholism, lack of emotional support for the participants, fighting, and retaliation. Alcoholism was prevalent in participant A and C's father and participant E included both parents. Participant D was the only participant where a court order mandated the parents to take co-parenting classes. Participant A's mother supported visitation with her father and offer emotional support when her mother could. The relationship for Participant C's mother became estranged by the time she was an adult. A 100 percent of the participants acknowledged their parents would fight over custody arrangements, finances, and retaliation occurred during the divorce. Participant A's father would cancel insurance when he was angry at her mother. Participant B's parent's talked poorly to each other and to her as a child, making her "stuck in the middle". Participant C's mother instigated issues with her father by talking poorly about her stepmother, stating she was an alcoholic, when she was not. Although participant C is an adult now, the custody arrangements are still volatile because her brother is 13 years of age and both parents continue to argue on the topic. Participant E's parents were alcoholics and often argued over random things, to include custody arrangements. To get participant E to side with the mother or father, both parents would barter with him by buying him items.

Common emotions among participants included the "feeling like a pawn", isolation, anxieties, commitment, and eating disorder. A 100 percent of the participants "felt like a pawn" with one or both parents and dealt with anxiety issues that affected who they are now. About 75 percent of the participants claim they are introverted. Participant

C used alternate behaviors by using singing as an outlet and attempt to make others smile or laugh. Participant B and D self-harm by restricting diet that caused an eating disorder and cutting the body as a means of control. Participant A feared affection from others and participant C sought affection for validation.

Theme Analysis

While identifying a common theme an analysis of the data was made. A 100 percent of the participants agreed that their parents lacked co-parenting skills during the divorce. The parents lacked communication with each other, either by not divulging information about the child's activities, such as not telling another parent about conferences or school activities. As for participant E, his father lived 40 miles away and ensured that he did not miss a single visitation with him. Due to him living further away the parents did not have to speak to each other as with the other participant's parents who lived closer.

During the analysis the needs of the participants were not always met by the parents. Participant A and E's support was sister/sibling, and the other participants did not have support or found friends to lean on. The theoretical framework indicated how important family structure and support molded children into adults. By mimicking parent's behavior, the participants either found opposite ways to manage a marriage and children because as adult children decided that what the individual felt they needed as children. Participants A, B, C, and D took on multiple relationships before marrying without a divorce. The participants felt that open communication was most important to building a successful marriage, along with trusting their partners. Surprisingly during the

analysis only 2 participants sought therapy for other reasons. Only participant C discovered through therapy that she had unresolved issues with her mother.

With further analysis on coping behaviors 3 of the 5 participants were introverted and withdrew from everyone. Participant B was not allowed to display emotions of sadness because this was seen as a weakness taught by her mother. Participant D decided to find other options that kept her away from the home by staying with friends or taking on a job. The reasons that the participants selected friends or withdrew as a means to coping became dependent on whom the individual could trust to support their needs. The individuals did not have support at home and lacked communication; the participants began to deal with the issues in a way that best fit the circumstances going on at home. As children the participants saw the increase of hostility and would take upon themselves to keep the peace because as children, the participants saw themselves as the issues between the parent's arguments.

Majority of the participants had several relationships with significant others before marrying. The participant to divorce or remarry was participant E. Participant C mentions that her relationships with a significant other became a need to seek a father figure that was missing in her life. The other participants took different negative factors their parents had during high conflict as to what not to do, especially for their children. The learned behaviors involve communication when disagreements and issues arise within the marriage. However, participant E made the sacrifice for his children to stay in an unhappy marriage. Table 1 correlates the theme between the participants experiences in coping behaviors of their parents high conflict divorce.

Table 1

Comparisons of Participants

Participants	Coping behaviors	Feeling like a pawn	Marriage	Emotional support	Therapy
A female	Introverted	Yes	First	Feared affection/sibling	No
B female	Restricted diet	Yes	First	No one	No
C female	Singing & stay away from home	Yes	First	Sought affection	Yes
D female	Self-harm through cutting	Yes	First	No one	Yes
E male	Isolation	Yes	Divorced	Sibling	No

Summary and Transition

The findings in Chapter 4 describe the lived experiences of adult children after their parent's high conflict divorce. The designing of the research was purposefully aligning with the strategies to investigate those experiences from the interview process. A narrative of the participant's responses displays a frequency among the demographics and inclusionary representations. The conclusion of Chapter 4 merges the study results with my research questions to align with the focus of my findings that provide an explanation of how children experience and an understanding to the coping behaviors during their parent's divorce. The divorce impacted how relationships with significant others formed and ways of dealing with the lack of emotional support given by their parents.

Chapter 5 correlates the findings that align with the qualitative approach founded from the research questions. The pool of participants outlines his or her experience as children who went through their parent's high conflict divorce. The details explain the limitations of the study with details and recommendations for future research. The findings from the study are shared so that legal system and psychologists/counselors have a greater understanding to the importance on how high conflict divorce as children effects adult children.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In this phenomenological study, I explored how the adult child experiences their parent's divorce as children to understand the effects divorce has on a person's ability to cope and the factors of that divorce. The experiences of five adult children were from different locations within the United States and a variety of ages. The interviews were taken via phone conversations and the use of an audio recorder. I found a high probability for unhealthy coping skills during a parent's divorce. All of the participants were not given the support a child needs, such as a lack of healthy communication, displays of negative coping behaviors with anger and resentment towards the opposite parent, and a lack of affection or listening to the child's wants. Participants struggled in relationships with significant others, but 80% of the participants reflected on how negative or traumatic the divorce was as children to prevent future divorce in their marriage. For Participant E, he closed himself off to repairing the marriage by waiting until the children were adults and no longer in the home. Because he has remarried, he has learned better communication and the steps necessary to keep a strong relationship with his significant other.

The results of the study will create a change to provide intervention techniques and give counselors a different perception when treating young and adult children of divorce. The legal system should also take the welfare of the child into consideration that relates to relationships with the mother and father as a whole, even if that means getting the parents to take coparenting classes or seeking assistance with a counselor. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of coping causes of the divorce as a case for more future research.

Interpretation of Findings

Previous researchers did not directly indicate how adult children experience the divorce of their parents. Often the information was told in the nurturing aspect, but there was a lack of information about how the cause of divorce impacts a person. Most of the research aligns with the effects of divorce on children, but the clinical world does not see PA or high conflict divorce as a single mental health diagnosis on the basis of divorce. The underlying mental health issues are taken into consideration instead of the impact divorce has, such as depression or anxieties mentioned by the participants. The findings from the individuals indicated implications for unhealthy coping skills from their parent's divorce.

Research Question 1

The participants revealed a common theme on how adult children of high conflict divorce experience the divorce and the ways they cope with those issues. Bernet (2016) suggested that how parents with innate personalities and indications of known mental health issues, such as narcissism, which many of the participants indicate more of the mother's role during and after divorce a stronger force in the adult child's life that took part in how the individual dealt with day to day issues. Few of the participants' mothers displayed support for the children that was positive, and the father took on an opposite role displaying negative effects with the child. The approach mothers were using aligned with the diagnosis of parental alienation by Gardner (as cited in Lorandos & Bone, 2016; as cited in Whitcombe, 2017). Participants stated how the mother or father would bribe them as children or cause isolation from the other parent. Participants heard comments from the mother or father that degraded the other parent, making the child see the

parent's perception of the alienated parent. Children are easily manipulated by their parents because parents are the resource on how a child behaves and interacts with society (Titleman, 2014).

Courts and psychologists must focus on the best interest of the child.

Interventions are most valuable when making both parents take a role in coparenting classes to alleviate the struggle of which parent is of a stronger value to the child by making both parents responsible for a team effort with the child/ children (Knopp et al., 2017). As the parents look beyond self-hurt, they must guide the child through such hardships the child is dealing with. After speaking with the participants, I found that the structure of the family is valuable to a child's emotional support. Like Bowen's theory of family systems suggested, the changes of a parents' high conflict divorce reciprocate negative coping skills for children who are not aware of how to manage the divorce (Titleman, 2014). When the parents ignore the needs of the child in place of the mother and father's, it creates conflict, stress, anxiety, and reclusion from others in their children (Titleman, 2014).

Each of the participants had a different approach to coping with the issues of their parent's divorce. Coping behaviors of the adult child as a child were ways of overcoming the circumstances at home. The immediate effects for negative coping behaviors by participants were to mask an underlying issue, creating an increase in dysfunctions to strengthen and maintain the abilities to cope. Certain negative or unhealthy coping behaviors from participants included avoiding problems because they feared more arguments or losing the chance to visit the other parent. Participant B mentioned that she had an eating disorder, and Participants C stated that she had extreme anxiety with a lack

of showing any type of emotions to include crying. After speaking with the participants, I determined that children need healthy alternatives that parents should or could teach their children.

Research Question 2

Participants discussed information regarding how they interact with their significant other through hardships, marriage issues, and the original focus of the relationships. For example, Participant C stated that she was trying to fill a void for an absent father figure when she was 19 and the father of her first child. She stated that she did not marry him because of the reason to have a man fill the fatherly role, but is married now and found peace. Participants were aware of the type of changes needed to occur for a successful marriage and give healthy support to their children. This derived from a desire that the participant indicated the needs they were searching for as children, when raising their children.

Participant E struggled with his first marriage because he did not have a support system while he was a child. He had difficulty relating to other peers or individuals because divorce was not common at his age. Participant E stated how he began to blame himself for his parents' divorce. Participant E could not go into depth as to why he felt this way or blamed himself. His parents' arguing, divorce, and alcoholism were traumatic. From Participant E's response, the reason his first marriage was unsuccessful was due to his inability to communicate without the fear of divorce and become isolated from his children. "He needed the relationship with his children" Participant E stated. Participant E stated how he is openly communicative in his new marriage.

Participants, A, B, and D focused on the steps they had to take to encourage a successful marriage. If issues arise, each individual believed an open dialogue is important to build trust and understanding. Participants focused on the negative outcomes during childhood relating to their parent's divorce to create change in their marriage and raising children. This is a major factor that influenced the participants through fear, lack of trust, and internal desires. The individuals do not want to subject their marriage or children to the same trauma that the participants went through as a child. I stopped reviewing here.

Limitations

Limitations of the study include specific factors for phenomenological investigations. The focus on lived experiences for a specific population and other forms of interactivity were not explored. For instance discussions with the parents and the participants, by not including the parents perspective proves as a limitation for the study. Most of the participants had occasional interaction with their parents once becoming adults. This limits the findings of how to apply to the general population of adult children. The purpose of the study contributes to learning how adult children experience and understand their coping behaviors and how to apply that to future relationships with significant other or raising children of their own. The findings are best understood in the contact of the 4 adult children with whom I interviewed for my research. Transferability can determine the consideration of detailed descriptions given by the participants of adult children. The use of adult children as participants in the study have the time to identify who they are separate from their parent and visualize true feelings one has as a child.

Another limitation of the study is the need for more male participants. In the study I found that the male participants refused to participate because they did not want to revisit the past experiences and felt they had moved forward. Men could create a better understanding for male children who suffer with the same issues of their parent's divorce. The information given by men, explores more about how clinicians can actively support the child in therapy and intervention techniques. The next researcher could focus only on male participants in a study to create a new insight about the experiences of parent's divorce.

Delimitations

The current study was limited to male and female adult children from parental high conflict divorce. Delimitations are used to narrow the scope of this study to identify what is not included for the study. The selection of participants came from a media post on Facebook that required individual adults who experienced their parents' divorce as children. In the process of conducting the study, there were no indications of untruthfulness, and all participants were vocal and excited to participate in the study. The participants expressed a need for focusing on children who experienced high conflict divorce with a need for creating positive change.

Recommendations for Future Research

The phenomenological approach to the study offers a preliminary view surrounding the coping behaviors of adult children in a way they were able to form a barrier to protect themselves from their home environment. Previous research did not explore the effects of divorce after a child becomes an adult and the impact made on their

decisions with their children and significant other. The study offers a foundation from which to build future investigation that will continue to explore the impact divorce has on a person. A suggestion for future research to consider can include intervention programs, courts adhere to making parents taking counseling/ classes before the finalizing of a divorce. I asked the question to participants, "What is your opinion would something need to change in order for children not to have such a negative impact on their lives?" The participants suggest encourage the family to take classes that teach parents how to handle disputes amongst themselves, support groups for children to discuss and openly feel as though they are not the only one (that there are others), and the courts to consider health outcomes for the children besides who the child should have as a primary caregiver. In some states such as Delaware, give parents 50/50 custody (Delaware Courts, n.d.). This allows the child to have equal parental involvement and a better relationship.

A recommendation for future studies involves following up with courts and include new intervention techniques to guide parents in healthier relationships with children (Wamboldt, 2016). Divorce is not just involved parents, but the children who experience the divorce. The interviews indicate an impact on mental wellness, the scope of the chosen coping behaviors, and the lack of support not given to children of divorce. Since children are a sensitive population to use as a target for future studies, maybe working with adult children of divorce offering classes or discussion groups that offer opinions of what needs to change to reduce the negative impact that divorce has on a child.

Implications

My study presents a picture of adult children from high conflict divorces in different locations within the United States found through media of Facebook. Their stories implicate a knowledge surrounding how adults experienced and understood their approach to coping with their parent's divorce. Eventually took on the parents' divorce as a means of finding alternative approaches to building relationships with an opposite effect for what was seen as children. The enriching descriptions from the participant's stories are the base of my recommendations to create alternative means to ensure divorces are thought about the child, even to include more classes or intervention techniques that build healthy coping behaviors of the parents with their children.

Early in my research, I proposed this study has relative implications for researchers, court systems, and psychologists. The participant's voice expresses the lived experiences were present as I explored and defined the phenomenon. The dialog of the research initiates communication with adult children from high conflict divorces. While exploring how adult children of high conflict divorce and understand the choices of the participants coping behaviors, my study's findings create a further investigation into the coping behaviors after or during the divorce when parents lack connectivity between the cause of divorce of a child's psyche. More focus and expansion of samples are considerations for researchers who seek to continue the investigation with adult children from high conflict divorce by seeking to define gaps in scholarly literature. This research is just the beginning to encourage future exploration on the topic of children and divorce.

Adult children of my study's findings experience negative impacts from their parent's divorce which continues into the individual's adulthood. A parent could benefit

from my findings that create a great discourse in the lives of their children from selfish behaviors. If parents recognize the importance of co-parenting and display a stronger family unit, children could learn to explore healthy options for coping with their parent's divorce. With the assistance of the courts and psychologists review on the impact of divorce, more notice could be taken to create alternatives of the divorce on the basis of the parent's behavior during divorce.

The adult children in my study were very open with their comments regarding personal effects from their parent's divorce. Most of the participants appeared to need a voice and someone to speak to about those experiences. The other participants who did not participate in the study, proven deeper mental and emotional issues they were not able to deal with or chose to move forward by leaving things in the past that happened as a child. The participants discovered from their parent's high conflict divorce an appreciation on working on better communication skills with their significant other. The approach for parenting derives from the participant's needs during childhood while their parents were divorcing. The change creates a more positive and healthy atmosphere for their children.

Conclusion

Previous studies did not investigate the coping skills of children into the individual's adulthood. As a researcher and completing my higher education, the importance of children's livelihood during their parent's divorce drove me to study a deeper understanding of those effects and created an interest in my topic. The void of scholarly literature in my study addresses adult children's experience as children from parental high conflict divorce. The investigation process utilizes phenomenological

methodology to create a pattern to compare like stories of participants. I interviewed 5 adult children who experienced their parent's divorce as children. The selection process for participants came from volunteers on Facebook social media. The in-depth interview with participants was completed through a phone call and audio recording device to provide enriching data.

My findings reveal a common pattern for alcoholism", "feeling like a pawn", "lack of emotional support", "isolation", "anxieties", "fighting", "retaliation", and "commitment". The participant's experience creates an image of what children cope during their parent's high conflict divorce. Participant's memories form a need for a different outcome in their adulthood with a significant other and co-parenting one's children. The benefit of the study provides a platform for psychologists, legal organizations, and future researchers a greater need with a focus on children during divorces.

This study process provides a deeper insight into the lives of children during divorce and understands different approaches to giving children a chance for healthier coping strategies for the parents and children. A purposeful design of the study focuses on the voice of the participants. Participants involved in the study that I interview share valuable perspectives into the like phenomenon. Evidence indicates the value of co-parenting from parents with their children during a high conflict divorce. My research is the first step to understanding the connectivity between coping behaviors and parental divorce. A recommendation for further research includes: (1) investigating types of intervention techniques during divorce, (2) expanding the target population to include more adult children from high conflict divorce, (3) studies involving more successful

treatments that focus on the child and the effects of divorce with the parents, and (4) exploring how parents experience and understand their children's coping behaviors during divorce.

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Appendix A: Emails to Participants

To:

From: Anissa Michaud

Date:

Research study for doctorate

This is an invitation for you to participate in a research study with the approval of Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the governing board. The purpose of the study is to learn your experiences of coping behaviors after your parent's high conflict divorce as a child into adulthood. I, Anissa Michaud, will conduct the study and my sponsor, doctoral chair Dr. Ed Naggair. If you chose to participate in the study, your participation is voluntary and will not include any compensation. The interview process will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. You do not have to answer any question and can withdraw from the study at any point without personal penalty or risk. I, Anissa Michaud will securely store your answers on a password locked computer and safe. If you have any questions pertaining to the study, you can contact me, Anissa Michaud, at 912 980 4447. Other questions about your rights as a participant, you can contact Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 800-925-3368, extension 1210. As a means to protect your privacy your personal information, such as your name are not included in the study and a simple yes will suffice as your choice to participate in the study. Please RSVP in a separate email to Anissa Michaud at anissa.michaud@waldenu.edu. Thank you.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Introduction:

The interview questions are designed to building an understanding of coping behaviors after a parent's high conflict divorce. Your participation in the research is voluntary and can chose to not participate at any time without personal penalty or risk. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability. At anytime you feel severe distress, please tell me to stop and all your responses are dismissed from the research.

Research question: What are the lived experiences of adult survivors of childhood high conflict divorce?

1. What age did your parents' divorce?
2. How old are you now?
3. Which parent did the court order you to live with?
4. Which parent was given visitations?
5. Do you recall if your parents had to take a counseling session or a program on co-parenting prior to finalizing the divorce?
6. When your parents had conflicts how did it make you feel?
7. Did you feel that one parent isolated you from the other parent with negative comments or excuses for not allowing visitations?
8. At any point were conversations overheard or spoken directly to you about either parent and what were some things said?
9. How do you feel about your parents co-parenting abilities after the divorce?
10. How did your parent's high conflict divorce effect you socially, academically, and emotionally?

11. How was your emotional needs being meet?
12. How did you cope with the disputes between your parents?
13. How many relationships with a significant other did you have in your life?
14. Are you married or divorced?
15. How has your parents effected your relationships with a significant other?
16. If you have children, how has your parents' divorce effected your parental role?
17. What age did you start seeing a therapist?
18. How is your relationship with your mother now?
19. How is your relationship with your father now?

Appendix C: Participant's Responses

Participant A: Female

1. What age did your parents' divorce? 5
2. How old are you now? 36
3. Which parent did the court order you to live with? mother
4. Which parent was given visitations? father
5. Do you recall if your parents had to take a counseling session or a program on co-parenting prior to finalizing the divorce? father had to seek counsel for his alcoholism, but neither parent was order parenting courses.
6. When your parents had conflicts how did it make you feel? I do not remember much about the divorce, but I felt like a pawn.
7. Did you feel that one parent isolated you from the other parent with negative comments or excuses for not allowing visitations? My father would randomly cancel health insurance because he stated, "Well the children do not live with me would should I have to pay". My mother encourage visitations with my father, but my father would demonize my mother to me. He stated that, "My mother took me away from him and not allow visitation. My father did not like having supervision with someone else there and would say it was mother's fault for having a chaperone there. He would not use visitation to visit us because of those reasons.
8. At any point were conversations overheard or spoken directly to you about either parent and what were some things said? No, just spoken to us poorly about our mother.
9. How do you feel about your parents co-parenting abilities after the divorce? From the ages of 5 to 18, my father spent all 3 times to spending time with us. There was zero co parenting involved.

10. How did your parent's high conflict divorce effect you socially, academically, and emotionally? emotionally it is difficulty with opening up to people, affectionately, very closed off emotionally and has for 16 years. introverted person who did not want to go out or put myself out there.
11. How was your emotional needs being meet? My sister and I are very close. my mother was very attentive and she remarried a couple years after the divorce. I love my stepfather, he is my dad. My mother grew a new family and added to that. We were always the priority. I never felt neglected emotionally.
12. How did you cope with the disputes between your parents? I shut down most of the time and while they were married I isolated myself.
13. How many relationships with a significant other did you have in your life? 3
14. Are you married or divorced? First marriage
15. How has your parents effected your relationships with a significant other? My father has never met my husband and probably never will. My mother is always supportive. Not really because I was able to see what a great relationship was by my mother and stepfather.
16. If you have children, how has your parents' divorce effected your parental role? It has not
17. What age did you start seeing a therapist? 6 or 7, again in my 20 for issues with her military husband deployed often.
18. How is your relationship with your mother now? Good
19. How is your relationship with your father now? I do not have one. I got tired of being the adult in the relationship. He has my number, email address, where I live, but his choice not to have one.

Participant B: Female

1. What age did your parents' divorce? 13
2. How old are you now? 25
3. Which parent did the court order you to live with? mother
4. Which parent was given visitations? Father
5. Do you recall if your parents had to take a counseling session or a program on co-parenting prior to finalizing the divorce? no
6. When your parents had conflicts how did it make you feel? anxious
7. Did you feel that one parent isolated you from the other parent with negative comments or excuses for not allowing visitations? My father was living in South America and were isolated because of geography.
8. At any point were conversations overheard or spoken directly to you about either parent and what were some things said? Both were arguing about finances, communication and would bad talk each other directed it at me in conversations with me.
9. How do you feel about your parents co-parenting abilities after the divorce? non existent, no communication
10. How did your parent's high conflict divorce effect you socially, academically, and emotionally? socially, difficulty interacting with other people. alot of issues with anxiety that led to an eating disorder. unpredictable environments make me anxious. academically, pushed me to be a perfection so that I could get validation.
11. How was your emotional needs being meet? bottle them up until I got to college and saw a psychologist. I learned healthier coping skills. As a child emotions were not okay.

12. How did you cope with the disputes between your parents? unhealthy coping skills by restricting my eating and putting focus on school work. I learned eventually healthier coping skills by using breathing methods. All until I was 22.
13. How many relationships with a significant other did you have in your life? 1 serious one.
First marriage never divorced.
14. Are you married or divorced? yes
15. How has your parents effected your relationships with a significant other? More grateful.
Husband and I have a strong marriage because we know how to treat each other.
16. If you have children, how has your parents' divorce effected your parental role? No children.
17. What age did you start seeing a therapist? Never
18. How is your relationship with your mother now? good. used similar experiences that we had through the divorce that enabled us to bond with each other.
19. How is your relationship with your father now? poor surface level. never have deep meaning conversations or talk about our emotions. it is like having a conversation with an acquaintance.

Participant C Female

1. What age did your parents' divorce? 3 ½ no, doubt they would have willing
2. How old are you now? 36
3. Which parent did the court order you to live with? mother
4. Which parent was given visitations? father
5. Do you recall if your parents had to take a counseling session or a program on co-parenting prior to finalizing the divorce? They did not.
6. When your parents had conflicts how did it make you feel? torn. hard to go back and forth between the two because my mother was an instigator. dad just wanted to see us. my father was angry and her, my mother was angry at him. my mother was very controlling. lots of bickering back and forth and me feel like being in the middle.
7. Did you feel that one parent isolated you from the other parent with negative comments or excuses for not allowing visitations? yes
8. At any point were conversations overheard or spoken directly to you about either parent and what were some things said? yes. mother put him down because my father had issues with alcoholism. now that I am older I know why. really bad situation of everyone. my mother would put him down. putting him in negatively to me or my brother. friends she would talk to in the other with comments, such as he is a loser. could not take care of kids. now that i am older I can see the picture that was not true. just her being controlling and not letting anyone have us.
9. How do you feel about your parents co-parenting abilities after the divorce? rarely spoke to each other and when there was it was yelling and screaming. my dad tried to stay calm and my mother would cause drama. when there was birthday parties my dad was not invited or

not involved. school function my dad was never told. if i asked for him to come it was a big deal. pity party that he did not love us enough. he does not need to be here you have me.

10. How did your parent's high conflict divorce effect you socially, academically, and emotionally? socially. a needy person wanting constant affection and attention because my mother she worked 2 or 3 jobs at times. was not around and I was left to take care of the home and chores. when I could work, I did. my father would have given me the attention willing. I was a different person when I was around my father. academically it was hard because i had one parent who was not there. I struggled in school and did not do well. figure it out on my own. emotionally sad a lot, I hide it by being goofy, try to make others laugh so that i could laugh. emotionally it was hard. struggled a lot gone to counseling as an adult. a lot of resistant towards my mother. no relationship with my mother or father. my father was 44 he took his own life.
11. How was your emotional needs being meet? sang alot, involved in choir. excelled at and was validated as a person. people came to me about advice about singing and felt validated as a person. it was outlet and just buried it down. i came from a family. if you want to cry we were taught to push it down. dad passed during senior year. all suppressed emotionally then all my emotions came out. i was catatonic for 2 and half months by not speaking one word to anyone, nothing
12. How did you cope with the disputes between your parents? ignore it. i did not know what was going. at that I did not know what was happening. at that age i remember asking for daddy. as I got older it was hard
13. How many relationships with a significant other did you have in your life? dated a lot. 3 serious boyfriend in high school. as an adult in college there was 1. met my husband. when I

was 19 my first father and trying fill a void by being a bad relationship with my first child father. 2 more relationships before meeting my husband.

14. Are you married or divorced? 12 years. no divorce. up and downs but able to work through issues. i know marriage is a commitment and if going to be married to stay married.
15. How has your parents effected your relationships with a significant other? mother controlling. she disapproved of my husband. but we were going to move away and that I was not worth much and could not make it on my own. men were horrible by hurting me. manipulative. told her i was getting married she blew a gasket and went crazy. she attempted to manipulate her grandson. saying her new husband was a bad person because she did not want me to get married. she affected many things in our newly married. my husband and i decided if she could not turn a leaf be a positive person then she could not be around us. none for the last 8 or 9 years
16. If you have children, how has your parents' divorce effected your parental role? seeing two different types of parents and my dad wanting to be there and devoted father, that he did care. mother tried to do good things but her personality pushed me in the direction I did not want to be like her by being more attentive parent by kissing and hugging my children letting them know how pride I was them and how important they were with being who that aspire them to be with support since I did not get that as a child. my dad was sweet and supportive by saying how talented she was and very pretty. I emulate that with my kids.
17. What age did you start seeing a therapist? during my postpartum depression. harbored feelings with my mother. i went through that. after my 2nd son another therapist with sleep deprivation and postpartum again. impatient and easily irritated which is not like my because I dint have a short fuse. easily getting upset. old feelings came up during the second

counselor that determined I had not resolved my feelings about my mother which am still working on

18. How is your relationship with your mother now? estranged. seen her 4 times in 10 years, brief. last summer for another chance but she manipulated and guilt trip. shut the door again
19. How is your relationship with your father now? step mother stepped up after father's death she is the positive in my life and still have a relationship.

Participant D: Female

1. What age did your parents' divorce? 14
2. How old are you now? 25
3. Which parent did the court order you to live with? mother
4. Which parent was given visitations? then 50 50
5. Do you recall if your parents had to take a counseling session or a program on co-parenting prior to finalizing the divorce? parenting class by court
6. When your parents had conflicts how did it make you feel? horrible and still going on because brother is 13 with another court hearing new custody agreement and child support
7. Did you feel that one parent isolated you from the other parent with negative comments or excuses for not allowing visitations? yes
8. At any point were conversations overheard or spoken directly to you about either parent and what were some things said? mother over exacerbate things, remarried dad and stepmom drink socially. mother saying they were alcoholic and not. turned court against dad. saying mean things about step mom that she is mean, tore family apart. were not together then.
9. How do you feel about your parents co-parenting abilities after the divorce? no co-parenting.
10. How did your parent's high conflict divorce effect you socially, academically, and emotionally? after divorce diagnosed with depression and anxiety. did not go out, self-harming, listening to arguing, while she was caring for her 2 brothers.
11. How was your emotional needs being meet? not met not aware of how to cope, but spoke to friends and avoid being home.
12. How did you cope with the disputes between your parents? friends
13. How many relationships with a significant other did you have in your life? 3 serious

14. Are you married or divorced? husband 7 years
15. How has your parents effected your relationships with a significant other? trust issues, worrying
16. If you have children, how has your parents' divorce effected your parental role? made me how I should parent by giving my children what I wanted as a kid. effects having my daughter birthday because mother put in court that she cannot be in the same room as her stepmom and father.
17. What age did you start seeing a therapist? 16 3 appointments did not last
18. How is your relationship with your mother now? okay, close sometimes
19. How is your relationship with your father now? good, no issues visiting her dad soon for 3 months

Participant E: Male

1. What age did your parents' divorce? 13
2. How old are you now? 56
3. Which parent did the court order you to live with? mother
4. Which parent was given visitations? father
5. Do you recall if your parents had to take a counseling session or a program on co-parenting prior to finalizing the divorce? no
6. When your parents had conflicts how did it make you feel? both parents alcoholics, would lock self in bedroom to not hear arguing
7. Did you feel that one parent isolated you from the other parent with negative comments or excuses for not allowing visitations? placed him in the middle by offering rewards if he came with them. you will have more freedom if you live with me
8. At any point were conversations overheard or spoken directly to you about either parent and what were some things said? mother hated his father with a passion.
9. How do you feel about your parents co-parenting abilities after the divorce? Okay, because of court order with a 40 mile drive and father never missed his visits
10. How did your parent's high conflict divorce effect you socially, academically, and emotionally? school work because he felt the divorce was his fault. few divorces in his time. kids picked on him. small town everyone knew.
11. How was your emotional needs being meet? sister support
12. How did you cope with the disputes between your parents? withdrew from situations and not be a part of it
13. How many relationships with a significant other did you have in your life? 4

14. Are you married or divorced? divorced after 23 years and new marriage of 8 years
15. How has your parents effected your relationships with a significant other? try to work things out. not put kids through it, but knew he stayed longer than he should have. not wanting them to choose and waited until kids moved out to divorce
16. If you have children, how has your parents' divorce effected your parental role? strict with my kids not allowing kids to talk back and agreement with wife about parenting
17. What age did you start seeing a therapist? never
18. How is your relationship with your mother now? she is deceased better reconciled
19. How is your relationship with your father now? he is deceased able to get to a point with no screaming match