Abstract

The Impact of Marital Discord on Adolescents' Psycho-Social Well-Being within the

Orthodox Jewish Community

Marital discord, divorce, parental separation, and being an adolescent of an Agunah can be stigmatizing and lead to social–emotional and behavioral difficulties. The impact of marital discord may be more severe for members of the Orthodox Jewish community, whose culture places significant value and importance on marriage. This study addressed adolescents aged 11–17 whose parents are divorced, separated, or married and their perception of marital discord in the Orthodox Jewish community. The study determined differentiating risk factors between boys and girls and examined the spiritual effect of marital discord on adolescents, particularly given the literature on the pivotal impact of ruptures in attachment and connection on spirituality. The measures used are replicated from extant data from a study on children of Agunot (see glossary). Based on the literature and study completed on children of Agunot, it was anticipated that adolescents of the divorced group would be uniquely vulnerable to a wide range of internalizing and externalizing difficulties. Data were collected from adolescents from divorced, separated, and two-parent homes via surveys to explore the relationship between marital discord and the primary dependent variables. The data indicated that marital discord between parents, although worse for adolescents from divorced homes, greatly impacted adolescents' emotional well-being, conduct, peer interactions, and spirituality. Some of these effects were more pronounced for boys than girls. The study results will hopefully assist Jewish Orthodox families and students who display concerns due to marital discord, divorce, and parental separation.

THE IMPACT OF MARITAL DISCORD ON ADOLESCENTS' PSYCHO-SOCIAL

WELL-BEING WITHIN THE ORTHODOX JEWISH COMMUNITY

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Dedication

In dedication to my staunchest supporters, my husband Menachem and my children Shayna Miriam, Brucha Yitty, Yitzchock, Dovid Yonah, and Yekusiel Yehuda, for your constant love, support, and encouragement. You touch my heart every day! You make my life important and you are my proudest accomplishments. Thank you for inspiring me daily with your compassion, dedication, hopes, and dreams. I am so fortunate to be on my life's journey with you.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Appendices

Chapter I: Introduction

This study aimed to probe the effects of parental discord, divorce, and parental separation on adolescents within the Jewish Orthodox community. Marriage and divorce in this community might be viewed differently from marriage and divorce in the non-Jewish community, with divorce in the Jewish population 10% lower than that of the national median, currently holding at 50% (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Orthodox Jewish individuals observe specific gender roles within marriage; for example, women are expected to serve as wives and mothers. Divorce and marital discord are often stigmatized, leading to social exclusion (Barth & Ben-Ari, 2014) and increased social, emotional, and behavioral challenges, as well as difficulties adjusting to a new lifestyle for the individuals who experience or witness marital discord (Wang & Amato, 2000).

Issues affecting this group have not been addressed adequately (Schnall et al., 2014). Counselors who treat Jewish clients might be unable to find a significant amount of literature that informs culturally competent mental health care that addresses the stressors related to marital discord in the Orthodox Jewish community. Additionally, it is important to note that marital discord impacts the entire family. For example, marital discord, divorce, and parental separation can mitigate or exacerbate risks for adolescents as they are developing. A greater understanding of the factors affecting these adolescents in the Orthodox Jewish community will assist mental health counselors, Rabbis, teachers, and families in developing and promoting coping skills and adjustments (I. Schechter, 2016).

In this introductory chapter, the background of the study, problem statement, and purpose of the study are presented. The theoretical basis of the study, nature of the study, and relevant definitions are also described.

Background

Marital values and the importance of marriage are emphasized within the Orthodox community, as evidenced by culturally appropriate dating practices. In an Israeli study, Shalev et al. (2012) found that when Orthodox people of both genders date, there is often a different emphasis than dating in mainstream culture. In Orthodox Jewish dating relationships, the focus is typically on marriage, establishing a home, and family. Similarly, using a qualitative design, Milevsky et al. (2011) pursued this topic in greater depth, focusing solely on the attitudes of Orthodox women. The researchers interviewed eight ultra-Orthodox Jewish women between the ages of 19–23 from a large metropolitan area in the United States. This qualitative study revealed several key themes, including dating as a precursor to marriage. The participants emphasized that the purpose of dating was to find a spouse and not for recreation.

Marriage within the Orthodox Jewish community is unique, possessing characteristics that other cultural groups might not share. Dr. Lisa Aiken, as cited by Dr. Yisroel Levitz in his book, *A Practical Guide to Rabbinic Counseling*, discusses premarital counseling and shares the Jewish perspective of sex, intimacy, and marriage. Dr. Aiken posits that sex, intimacy, and marriage are sacred and holy in the Jewish religion and create a strong emotional and spiritual connection. It is about building the relationship between spouses and transcends the physical act itself.

Most Orthodox Jews in the United States are satisfied with their marriages. This was demonstrated by Schnall et al. (2013), who investigated the marital satisfaction of 3,002 married Orthodox Jewish individuals residing primarily within the northeastern United States. Results indicated that 73.3% of the men and 74.2% of the women rated their marriages as mostly or highly satisfying. Seventy-seven percent of the sample indicated that their spouses met their marital expectations. Additionally, if given a chance to turn back time and marry the same spouse again, 73.8% of respondents indicated that they would remarry the same spouse again (Schnall et al., 2013).

Interestingly, 73% is also the marriage satisfaction rate noted in a study on secular society by the Office for National Statistics in the United Kingdom. The authors analyzed data from 286,059 individuals between October 2017 and September 2018 and found marital status to be among the top three things people said made them most happy (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

Problem Statement

Despite the elevated levels of marital satisfaction in the Orthodox Jewish community, divorce, parental separation, and marital discord are prevalent (Schnall et al., 2013). Divorce can be a stressful life event for individuals of all religious and cultural backgrounds, with families affected by divorce experiencing significant changes in their lives. These families usually need to adjust to a shift in their finances, the loss of social standing, and relocation, leading to stress and behavioral and emotional concerns (Wang & Amato, 2000).

The role of religion in everyday life speaks to the Jewish Orthodox communities' uniqueness (Franken & Levrau, 2020). The Orthodox Jewish belief system centers on God and His commandments. Orthodox Jews accept the divinity of the Torah and adhere closely

to the laws detailed in the Talmud involving such aspects of life as diet, prayers, holidays, and sexuality (Maybruch et al., 2014).

The Orthodox Jewish community views the family as a central component of society, consequently viewing divorce as a threat. Given their unique nature compared to the general U.S. population, Orthodox Jewish adolescents may experience an arduous recovery and adjustment process to marital discord (Y. Schechter, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

There is a robust amount of literature on the effects of parental discord and divorce on children and adolescents, and more specifically, on child witnesses of domestic violence (Pelcovitz & Kaplan, 1994). The heightened risks for depression and anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), conduct disorders, and academic problems have been well documented for this high-risk population (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to fill the void in the scholarly literature on adolescents' perceptions of parental discord and divorce in the Orthodox Jewish community, with the researcher seeking to contribute knowledge about culturally relevant factors associated with adolescents of divorce. The factors that served as the study's dependent variables included (a) the child's behavioral, emotional, and social functioning; (b) the child's perception, and (c) the child's spiritual development. The sample consisted of data from three surveys. An increased understanding of the factors related to internalizing and externalizing behaviors might lead to more effective approaches in assisting young members of the Orthodox Jewish community in coping with marital discord and divorce.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher used Albert Bandura's (2001) social learning theory to investigate how individuals can regulate their social influences while coordinating their psychological belief system. The theory explains the act of colliding beliefs, behaviors, and thoughts while being exposed to environmental stimuli (Bandura, 2001).

Researchers have used the social learning theory to study the effect of marital discord on young children and adolescents. This theory has also been used as a lens to discuss the long-term effects of divorce (Cui & Finchman, 2010; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Mullet & Stolberg, 2002) as well as applied to study how witnessing their parents deteriorating relationship impacts children (Kapinus, 2005). In addition, Gager et al. (2016) examined prolonged exposure to household conflict through the lens of the social learning theory.

Bandura (2001) explained how societal forces like divorce shape people's thoughts and behaviors. With marital instability and parental conflict, children and adolescents have fewer incidences of positive social learning and display many negative behaviors (Bandura, 2001). Aligning with the social learning theory, extant literature indicates that children who witness their parents' strained relationship subsequently duplicate poor communication and negative interpersonal skills (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Additionally, they suffer from elevated social anxiety, oppositional behavior, apathy, and hostility (Oldehinkel et al., 2008).

Nature of the Study

The researcher instituted Pearson's product–moment correlation coefficient analyses to determine relationships between variables and used *t* tests to screen for independent means and analyses variance (ANOVA) to look at group differences (Gravetter & Frzano, 2012). The researcher analyzed existing survey data on children of Agunot, a large body of

literature, and factors affecting children and adolescents of divorce. The primary variables of interest were (a) adolescents' behavioral, emotional, and social functioning; (b) adolescents' perceptions of marital discord; and (c) adolescents' spiritual development as impacted by exposure to their parents' marital discord. This type of study design possesses the strength of being nonintrusive, facilitating the examination of extant data with the collection of new data, and containing a high degree of external validity (Gravetter & Frzano, 2012).

Definitions

Agunah/Agunot: a Jewish woman stuck in her religious marriage as determined by Jewish law.

Chesed: a Hebrew word that means loving-kindness between people.

Get: Jewish divorce.

Middot: a Hebrew word that means measure or norms; refers to character development.

Mitzvot: the Hebrew word for commandment; refers to a commandment commanded by God to be performed as a religious duty.

Modern Orthodox: a movement within Orthodox Judaism that balances the observances of Jewish law with the secular world.

Orthodox Judaism: the collective term for the traditionalist branches of contemporary Judaism.

Rabbi: a title of respect for a Jewish scholar or teacher qualified to rule on questions of Jewish law.

Talmudic texts: the text that provides the primary source of Jewish religious law and Jewish theology.

Torah: a Hebrew word meaning instruction, teaching, or law; refers to the Five Books of Moses. It can be found in book form or a scroll.

Yeshivot: a Jewish educational institution that focuses on studying the religious text and Jewish language.

Chapter II: Literature Review

According to Mirkin and Okun (2005), Orthodox Judaism differentiates between Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Reform Judaism, but the term itself has various connotations. Orthodox Judaism is the advent of religious Judaism, which adheres to the Torah, the central sacred Jewish text (Written Law), and the interpretation and application of the laws and ethics legislated in the Talmudic texts (Oral Law). Torah instruction is a central concept of Jewish tradition. The Torah consists of the foundational narrative of the Jewish people and their covenant with God, which involves following a certain way of life (Encyclopedia Judaica: Volume 8).

An analysis provided by the Pew Research Center (2015) demonstrated that Orthodox Jews account for 10% of the 5.3 million adult Jews living in the United States. Y. Schechter (2016) and Schnall (2006) described the Orthodox Jewish population as diverse, with many subgroups ranging from ultra-Orthodox to Modern Orthodox. Subgroup members have nuanced similarities and differences regarding religious practices, religious law, spirituality, dress, and worldview.

Orthodox Jewish Culture

The concept of culture has been noted in many articles that emphasize the similarities of beliefs within a group of people. Triandis (1996) defined culture as shared elements that provide the standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating, and acting among those who share a language, a historical period, and a geographic location. Triandis

also conceded that these shared elements are transmitted from generation to generation, with some modifications made along the way.

Mirkin and Okun (2005) relayed that Orthodox Judaism is not simply a religion; it is a culture. Schnall (2006) and Wieselberg (1992) shared that Orthodox Jews generally live in tight-knit communities and define themselves as members of a community (Margolese, 1998). This allows them to be surrounded by organizations, institutions, and other members of their unique social group. M. Friedman et al. (2005) found that American Orthodox Jewish participants identify more strongly with their Jewish identity than being American.

The demographic profile of the Orthodox Jewish American is distinct in several ways. The 2020 Pew Research Survey revealed that fertility among Orthodox Jews is more than twice as high as among non-Orthodox Jews. Orthodox Jewish adults report having an average of 3.3 children, whereas their non-Orthodox counterparts report 1.4 children. Orthodox Jewish women are also 5 years younger when they give birth to their first child. In 2020, the estimated number of children living in Jewish households was 2.4 million compared to only 1.8 million in 2013.

One of the essential duties of a Jewish parent is to provide instruction in Jewish education, transmitting the tenets and principles of Judaism (Boyatis et al., 2006). Jewish parents enroll their children in Yeshivot and day schools to fulfill this mandate. Presently, all established Orthodox communities have numerous Yeshivot and day schools, in which young men and women spend many years learning and studying (Schick, 2000). Many attend college, with 37% of Orthodox Jews reporting having college degrees (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Orthodox Jewish Children and Adolescents

Raising a family is a divine duty to Orthodox Jews and expresses loyalty to Judaism. Judaism recognizes that parents must contribute to their child's religious, educational, emotional, social, and material needs (M. Friedman et al., 2005). Family life is regarded as hallowed and a training ground for the Jewish way of life and where children receive their earliest education (Levitz & Twerski, 2005). Arnow (1994) and Burstein (2007) concluded that the family unit in Orthodox Jewish culture is central to child development, and as with all cultures, some expectations need to be met by the child.

Additionally, adolescence is perceived as a transitional period between childhood and adulthood, from ages 10–19 (Burstein, 2007). Adolescents experience rapid physical, cognitive, and psycho-social growth. Triandis (1996) pointed out that these transitions of changing circumstances are, in essence, preparation for adult roles within a particular society. Subsequently, the Orthodox Jewish adolescent is required to adhere to a set of rules that are different from the general population (M. Friedman et al., 2005). At the age of 12 for a girl and the age of 13 for a boy, they are considered an adult and accept the duties and responsibilities of their adult life (Burstein, 2007). These occasions are usually marked with a celebration (Mirkin & Okun, 2005).

To assist in preparation for these roles, Orthodox children and adolescents are typically provided with both religious instruction and secular studies at their respective schools in an atmosphere that reinforces students' commitment to the values of the Torah (I. Schechter, 2016). Most schools are community-minded and embrace Mitzvot, Chesed, and Middot as pillars of their education (Franken & Levrau, 2020).

Orthodox Jewish Families and Marriage

In 2020, 98% percent of Orthodox Jews reported that their spouse is Jewish, with intermarriage rare. They place much importance on raising their children as Jewish by religion (Pew Research Center, 2021).

In Judaism, refraining from marriage is considered unnatural. The Talmud says that an unmarried man is constantly thinking of sin. To reiterate this concept, the Talmud tells of a story of a Rabbi who was introduced to a young unmarried Rabbi. The older Rabbi told the younger one not to come into his presence again until he was married.

In the Orthodox Jewish community, marriage is taught to be a sacred bond that defines the basis of morality (Barth & Ben-Ari, 2014). The Seventh of the Ten Commandments states, "Thou shall not commit adultery," alluding to marriage as not only a legal contract but divinely moral. The Orthodox Jewish community places a significant emphasis on marriage, and every Friday evening, according to the Orthodox Jewish religion, the husband recites a blessing from the Book of Proverbs to his wife as a "Woman of Valor" (Wessely, 1863). Tamar Frankiel, in her book, *The Voice of Sara: Feminism, Spirituality, and Traditional Judaism*, shares that women ensure the protection, nourishment, and challenge necessary to foster the spiritual health of the family. Children in Orthodox Jewish homes are exposed to this practice every week, which becomes internalized in their perception of marriage.

Marriage for Orthodox Jews is not solely, or even primarily, for the purpose of procreation. Traditional sources recognize that companionship, love, and intimacy are the primary purposes of marriage, noting that women were created because "it is not good for

man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18, as cited in Arachim, n.d.) rather than because she was necessary for procreation.

Schnall et al. (2013) found that although most married couples in the Orthodox Jewish community were satisfied with the quality of their marriage; however, they also found that some families have significant stressors regarding finances, communication, physical intimacy/sexuality, time, pressures, and in-laws. Stressors that can lead to marital discord are further described in the next section.

Divorce in the Jewish Orthodox Community

Although marriage in the Orthodox community is revered for the most part, the divorce rate is on the rise. The Pew Research Study notes that the divorce rate in the Jewish community is only 10% lower than that of the national average, which is currently holding at about 50%. This incorporates Jews of all sectors.

Local Rabbis' and family therapists' anecdotal records show divorce in the Orthodox Jewish community is on the rise, predominantly in the first year of marriage and later in life, once all the children have grown and left home (Levitz & Twerski, 2005). Changes in society's values, the desire for instant gratification, a disconnected world (Scott et al., 2013), problems with intimacy, sexual issues, time together, money, in-laws, children, and household tasks are reasons provided for divorce (Schnall et al., 2013)**.**

Effect on Families

The continuity of the Jewish nation is intertwined with the concept of a Jewish man and a Jewish woman meeting, marrying, having children, and building a Jewish home (Frankiel, 1990). The family provides the educational, financial, and emotional support that

its members need to thrive and develop. Divorce and the disintegration of the family unit weaken this belief and create a societal impact (Anderson, 2014).

Boyatis and fellow researchers (2006) asserted that, in the aftermath of divorce, parents are often preoccupied with emotional devastation and have little energy left for their children. Cummings and Davies (1994) concurred, stating that a parent's emotional difficulties interfere with their ability to nurture a secure attachment with their child. Furthermore, a child's exposure to the violence and abuse that can accompany marital discord has been found to have a strong association with adolescent behavioral difficulties (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001).

Children of divorce usually come from economically disadvantaged homes, and this economic stress can correlate with an adolescent's behavioral difficulties (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Similarly, divorce impacts the family via ongoing stressors, including the single parent working many hours and relocation from the childhood home (Denton, 2012). When financial problems and marital conflicts deplete a parent's emotional resources, they are often not able to place appropriate limits on their child's behavior. Research has consistently shown a strong connection between such parental challenges and subsequent behavioral difficulties in their children (Pelcovitz et al., 1994).

In addition, Pelcovitz (2011) has found that the insular nature of the Orthodox community, as well as the sense of shame that divorce brings, create higher levels of at-risk behaviors among adolescents. These children and teens often feel marginalized and lonely and have, in a sense, lost their spiritual model (Boyatis et al., 2006).

Agunot

An Agunah or Agunot (plural) is a Jewish legal term pertaining to a woman stuck in her religious marriage against her will. As an Agunah, she cannot remarry and does not have complete control over her own life decisions. For Orthodox Jewish women, whose identity is often tied to being a wife and a mother, the inability to remarry and perhaps have children can make her feel like she has lost her identity (Frankiel, 1990).

Agunah is derived from the word *iggun*, meaning the chained state, with the term coming from the Hebrew word for anchor. Sadly, some men refuse to grant their spouses a divorce. The issue of Jewish divorce refusal continues to be a wide-ranging international problem in the Jewish world. It is a tragic form of spiritual and emotional incarceration for the individual and has social, financial, and legal ramifications for the family and the local Jewish community (getora.org, 2021).

There is limited literature associated with the psychological aspects of being an Agunah. Dr. David Pelcovitz (2020) oversaw one exploratory study in conjunction with the Yashar organization. This study added to the research indicating that being an Agunot impacts an individual's posttraumatic responses to interpersonal trauma in the areas of affect regulations, alterations in attention and consciousness, relations to others, self-concept, somatic complaints, and systems of meaning (Pelcovitz, 2020). In this study, Pelcovitz surveyed 126 participants, including spouses, children, and adult children. Pelcovitz's core findings indicated that Agunots presented with high levels of suicidal thoughts or self-harm and reported high rates of physical violence in their marriage, with the women reporting feeling controlled, intimidated, frightened, and sexually coerced (Pelcovitz, 2020).

Children of Agunot

As part of his study, Pelcovitz (2020) surveyed both children and adult children, with the adult children being asked to complete a survey related to the impact on the family when one spouse withholds a Get. The impact of being raised in this volatile environment was evident, with the adult children displaying 47% higher than average norm in social difficulties and 37% higher than average difficulty managing emotional distress. In children, the emotional and social difficulties were much more aligned with 49%, which is higher than average in social difficulties, and 38%, which is higher than average for managing emotional stress. No apparent differences were found between boys and girls.

Last, Pelcovitz (2020) detailed that children of Agunot are exposed to marital conflict relating to the divorce, with the data displaying a distinct relationship between the frequency at which the children were exposed to marital conflict and the amount of physical abuse their mother endured from her ex-husband. Pelcovitz also found that the more controlling the spouse was, the more conflict the children were exposed to.

Marital Discord

Marital conflict and discord are different states from the usual difficulties of marriage. In distressed marriages, people are fundamentally dissatisfied with their relationship. Their disappointment is constant and not fleeting (Meadows & Arber, 2015). Once marriages are in turmoil, a progressive dyadic decline begins that quickly cascades downwards (Balderama-Durbin et al., 2015). Balderama-Durbin et al. (2015) found that couples with elevated levels of marital distress fought frequently, with the conflict remaining unresolved. Behaviors such as contempt, withdrawal, violence, and a complete loss of connection signal the marriage is in trouble (Cwik, 1995).

Conflict in marriage is inevitable. Married couples can experience struggles due to a great deal of shared intimacy and interdependence between partners, resulting in spouses being vulnerable with one another (Hanzal & Segrin, 2009). In addition, having diverse backgrounds, personalities, habits, and expectations, along with the rigors of everyday life, present conflicts in many relationships (Grych & Finchman, 1993).

Grych and Fincham (1993) asserted that marital conflict can be related to finances, children, intimacy, household obligations, or extended family. Dadds and Powell (1991) noted that marital conflict is associated with stressors in parenting practices and can lead to a depressive state for the parent, creating a vicious cycle of fighting and displaying negative emotional behaviors (Salinger et al., 2020).

Marital conflict can be stressful and even harmful for children and adolescents, as it might lead to adjustment problems (Zimet & Jacob, 2001). Witnessing parents resolving conflict can prove to be instrumental in developing children's and adolescents' conflict-resolution skills (Hanzal & Segrin, 2009).

Marital Discord in Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Jews place a high value on marriage and family life, and to a considerable extent, Jewish couples succeed due to their commitment (Mirkin & Okun, 2005). Interestingly, Chinitz and Brown (2001) researched the relationship between a couple's similar religious beliefs and practices and their level of marital conflict and found that within the Jewish faith, there was more disagreement on Jewish issues, indicating higher levels of marital conflict. Marc S. Cwik (1995) contended that the Jewish family needs to recognize the effects that marital discord and conflict universally have on children and adolescents (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). In his work, Cwik explored spousal abuse and marital discord

within the Orthodox Jewish faith and addressed areas particular to Judaism, namely gender role divisions, community expectations, and divorce laws.

Marital Discord and Adolescent Outcome

Children are sensitive and attuned to how their parents are getting along (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Family harmony is essential and leads to emotional security on the part of the child. When the child feels secure, they will experience better mental health and school adjustment (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Conversely, when children and adolescents are exposed to interparental conflict, they are at risk for increased depression, social withdrawal, anxiety, and decreased self-concept (Crawford et al., 2001). Children become deeply worried in these family environments, contributing to the child's emotional insecurity (Anderson, 2014).

Porter and O'Leary (1980) obtained measures of overt marital hostility, general marital adjustment, and children's behavioral problems from 64 children. The authors found that overt marital hostility correlated significantly with behavioral concerns and maladjustment of boys. It was clear that an increasing trajectory of marital conflict was more predictive of negative mental health outcomes than if children started out with high levels that declined (Porter & O'Leary, 1980).

Factors of Marital Discord

To fully comprehend the causal factor that marital conflict affects child maladjustment, it is important to define the determining factors of the marital conflict that may be harmful to the child and adolescent (Balderama-Durbin et al., 2015). Marital distress is common for most married couples (Aiken, 2005); however, for some, these troubles reach the point of profound disappointment and doubts about their marriage (Anderson, 2014). The

cause varies from couple to couple and often presents as difficulties with communication.

Balderrama-Durbin and colleagues (2015) shared data received from a sample of 1,020

couples who completed the Marital Satisfaction Inventory Form. The data suggested that the

communication breakdown evolved into increased arguing, stonewalling, defensiveness, and

contempt. Distressed couples often engage in these negative communication patterns and

cannot move on successfully after an argument. Eventually, this spills over into intimacy and

sex, with the couple getting locked into a negative pattern of stonewalling instead of building

a connection (Meadows & Arber, 2015).

Marital distress has a powerful effect on both the partners and the children (Bumpass

& Lu, 2000). Children raised in high-conflict homes tend to have more emotional difficulties

(Anderson, 2014). In a study conducted in the United Kingdom over several decades, Gordon

and Sellers (2018) observed families at home and conducted long-term follow-ups and

experimental studies. Gordon and Sellers found that children exposed to severe or chronic

interparental conflict from as young as 6 months old may have increased heart rates and

stress hormone responses. Furthermore, the study indicated that infants, children, and

adolescents showed disrupted early brain development, sleep disturbances, anxiety,

depression, and conduct disorders (Gordon & Sellers, 2018). The same effects were seen in

children exposed to ongoing but less intense conflict in comparison to children whose parents

negotiate and resolve conflicts (Crawford et al., 2001).

Zimet and Jacobs (2001) postulated that dimensions of marital discord associated

with child maladjustment include exposure to conflict, higher intensity conflicts, verbal and

physical aggression, lack of conflict resolution, and child-specific disagreement. Zimet and

Jacobs examined children's cognitions and behaviors, contextual factors, and demographic

differences, all variables that moderate or qualify the relationship between child and parent. The results conveyed that marital conflict increases the risk for emotional and adverse behavioral outcomes, resulting in fewer adolescent endeavors.

Studies by both Dadds and Powell (1991) and Reid and Crisafulli (1990) revealed that adolescents exhibit more significant levels of externalizing problems when exposed to interparental conflict. Dadds and Powell examined the types of marital conflict and their effects on aggression, anxiety, and immaturity in both boys and girls in clinical and nonclinical samples. The family's socioeconomic status and the child's age were controlled. Reid and Crisafulli discussed the effect of marital discord on external conduct behaviors in both boys and girls in clinical and nonclinical families. As with Dadds and Powell's study, Reid and Crisafulli's results yielded a strong association between marital discord and boys for clinical more than nonclinical families.

Marital Discord and Adolescents' Self-Concept, Behavioral, Social, Emotional, and Academic Development

Feshbach and Feshbach (1987) noted that family conflict significantly inhibits children's and adolescents' behavioral and social–emotional development. Dadds and Powell (1991) and Reid and Crisafulli (1990) applied externalizing behaviors such as empathy, depression, affectivity, and achievement. The authors measured aggression using teacher ratings and self-reports. Conversely, the authors used audiovisual tapes to assess empathy in their longitudinal study of boys and girls aged 8–9 years old; the authors assessed the same participants again 2 years later when they were 10–11 years old. Significant test–retest correlation was found for affective measures, with achievement tests being stable for both groups over the 2 years. The emphasis on success is significant because unsuccessful

achievements often result in negative outcomes such as depressed mood (Davies & Windle, 2001) and difficulty obtaining employment (Cui & Finchman, 2010).

Social–emotional development represents an individual's status and influences subsequent developmental tasks, such as family relationships, social status, physical health, and mental well-being (Pallas, 2000). Bronstein and his colleagues (1996) reported that adequate parenting practices can foster adolescents' development and facilitate better development and growth. Bronstein et al. based their findings on results from their longitudinal study. In this study, the authors obtained parent report forms to inform parenting characteristics; these report forms contained 15 five-item subscales for each student entering fifth grade. The authors also observed families in their natural settings. The results were coded along with adjustment measures noting peer relations, self-concept, academic performance, and teacher rating of behavioral and psychological problems obtained for the fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-grade students. Like prior scholars (Dadds & Powell, 1991; Zimet & Jacob, 2001), Bronstein and colleagues concluded that positive parenting practices serve adolescents' development and growth.

With their focus primarily on behavioral concerns, Davies and Windle (2001) assessed both parents and students to determine if a child's temperament, behavioral problems, and perception of family emotional support protected adolescents from the effects of marital discord. Parents completed the O'Leary-Porter Scale in addition to the Kansas Satisfaction Scale. Both measures have high reliability and concurrent validity and were summed up to obtain a single composite to measure marital discord. The high school students completed the Revised Dimensions of Temperament Survey, which assesses four types of temperaments. Cronbach's α exceeds the high-reliability rate for each temperament measure

in the Revised Dimensions of Temperament Survey. The Perceived Social Support Survey, where adolescents can detail their perception of family support, shows high–retest reliability, and the validity of this test is well documented. The students and parents were also asked to complete the Retrospective Childhood Problems Survey, which assesses childhood behavioral problems. Because both the child and parent measures have high validity, the study results demonstrated a meaningful relationship between problematic adolescent behaviors and substance abuse. Difficult temperaments and depressive systems (Feshbach & Feshbach, 1987) potentiate the effects of marital discord, whereas perceptions of family support protect adolescents from the adverse effects of marital discord.

Adolescents' Perceptions

Perception allows children to interact and adapt to their environment using their senses (Andresen et al., 2019), and this interaction with the environment influences adolescents' physical, social, and mental health (Feshbach & Feshbach, 1987). Perceptual development is related to physical progress, physiological regulation, cognitive development, spatial relationships, and language maturity (Reese-Weber & Hesson-McInnis, 2008). When children and adolescents are provided with appropriately stimulating environments, healthy engagements, and positive interactions, they can best manage their perceptions and social situations (Haimi & Lerner, 2016).

A child's developing behaviors and abilities play a role in the social–emotional aspects of the child's life and functioning, such as forming relationships and building an understanding of others (Anderson, 2014). When there is a disruption in the child or adolescent's perceptual development, it can compromise their overall physical and psychological health. Perception is then skewed, and the child can exhibit antisocial

behaviors (Crawford et al., 2001). Research on children's perceptions has evolved considerably (Andresen et al., 2019). Many older studies supported Piaget's theory that social sensitivity increases with age (Borke, 1971), but these studies did not prove that children as young as 3 contained an awareness of others' feelings or an understanding of situations that evoke different kinds of affective responses (Andresen et al., 2019).

The Children's World Survey (2013–2014) has undertaken many studies on perception. In one study, scholars assessed whether the environment was conducive to children attaining their potential based solely on the children's evaluations and perceptions (Reis & Main, 2015). The authors of this study found that the child's perception of their sense of well-being mattered most. In a second study, researchers asked 17,000 children aged 8–16 from four continents about their experiences and perspectives. This study gave researchers pause and lent incredible achievement to the topic of perception and that any effort to improve the child's well-being needs to include their voice (Reis & Main, 2015). In a third study, researchers assessed quality of life in specific domains among children aged 4–9 and compared and contrasted these results with the children's parents' quality of life. Quality of family relationships, school climate, and peer involvement were the main predictors of a child's tendency to worry. Last, scholars used data from an international database that contained responses from 8,000 eight-year-old children from eight European countries who were asked what they perceive as determinants of a good life (Reis & Main, 2015). The analysis revealed that being cared for and feeling safe were the leading determinants of a good life from the children's perspective (Andresen et al., 2019).

Adolescents' Perceptions and Appraisal of Marital Conflict

In their book *Marital Conflict and Children*, developmental psychologists Edward M. Cummings and Patrick T. Davies (2011) explained that conflict is a normal part of everyday experiences. They expounded that how a conflict is expressed or resolved is more important than whether parents fight. How marital conflict makes children feel has its own set of consequences. Davies and Windle (2001) and Grych and Finchman (1993) proposed that the effect of marital conflict, which can range from a calm discussion to physical aggression, is based on the child's appraisal of the conflict. In other words, it is based on the child's perception of the event and how the child internalizes it for themselves.

Zimet and Jacob (2001) conducted two studies that examined children's appraisals of marital conflict. The first study consisted of 45 adolescents aged 11–12 years and their married parents who came from White, middle-class homes. The second study consisted of 112 twelve-year-old adolescents, and the adolescents' parents explicitly provided the reason for the marital conflict. Zimet and Jacob found that cognitive, affective, and coping responses to conflicts varied in content and intensity. Furthermore, the authors found that angry and hostile conflicts led to greater self-blame and fear of escalation for the child. Additionally, Zimet and Jacob determined that adolescents responded to conflicts in three ways; they either blamed the parent or themselves or had no explanation for the conflict at all. The adolescents' appraisals of marital conflict were influenced by its content, intensity, and cause (Zimet & Jacob, 2001), with the researchers reporting that the meaning of the conflict to children and adolescents is an essential determinant of its impact.

Grych (1998) explored the factors that influence appraisal in his examination of cognitive and emotional responses to parental conflict with 60 children and adolescents aged

7–12. In this study, the participants listened to audiotapes of conflictual interactions. In this study, Grych used the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Questionnaire, which is an extremely reliable measure because it displays a coefficient alpha. Additionally, each subscale measure combines into three scales, with the test being given twice to the same group at separate times. The validity of the measure is reflected in the concurrence of the parent and child's responses. Moreover, the measures proved reliable because the predictors (the level of hostility expressed in the interaction, the child's prior experience with interparental conflict, age, and how a conflict is expressed) were consistent.

Kerig (1998) took a slightly different approach and researched the mediational and moderational models by studying the relationship between appraisals and adjustments for adolescents. Over two sessions, the parent and child completed measures in the form of questionnaires. Aligned with Davies and Windle's (2001) study, the parents filled out the O'Leary-Porter Scale for the parent and the children completed the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Questionnaire (Grych, 1998). Age was treated as a covariate and *t* tests were conducted to examine gender differences; no significant differences were found. The results garnered that appraisals function as moderators, showing the relationship between the dependent (emotional, cognitive) and independent variable (marital conflict) correlates.

Gender Differences

Considerable evidence suggests that marital conflict has a more significant effect on boys than girls (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Amato and Anthony (2014) are among those who have noted that boys are more likely to exhibit signs of stress and aggression and display poor social relations and work effectiveness. They are also more likely to be caught in the parental conflict, with boys experiencing greater maladjustment resulting from divorce-

related processes. Teenage boys whose parents have separated have a more significant risk of becoming involved in delinquent behavior (Crawford et al., 2001). These effects are even more recognizable when marriages were marked with high conflict before the divorce (Cummings & Davies, 2011).

Exploring Grych and Finchman's (1993) work, Cummings et al.'s (1994) study included 51 children aged 9–12 from intact families. Cummings et al. noted that boys appeared less shielded from marital discord. They also predicted adjustment in boys relating to coping efficacy and destructiveness shown and self-blame linked to internalizing behaviors for girls.

The association between marital discord and gender is demonstrated in studies conducted by Porter and O'Leary (1980), Reid and Crisafulli (1990), Dadds and Powell (1991), Grych and Finchman (1993), and Davis and Windle (2001). These studies' findings indicate that marital hostility correlates with behavioral concerns and maladjustment in boys. Interestingly, Kerig (1998) and Pelcovitz (2020) did not find gender significant.

For many divorced families, mothers have custody of their children. This plays a huge factor in the mother–daughter relationship, which Amato and Sobolewski (2001) found to be resilient to the stresses of divorce. Sadly, young girls who have witnessed their parents go through divorce report changes in their physical development, such as an earlier onset of menstruation and physical maturation (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Last, Anderson (2014) asserted that gender differences in children's adjustment to divorce likely depend on multiple factors, such as the sex of the custodial parent, parenting style, marital status, parent–child relationship, and amount of contact with the noncustodial parent.

Summary and Conclusion

The divorce rate in the United States is climbing. Each year, about 1,000,000 children experience parental divorce (Haimi & Lerner, 2016), with approximately 34% of children under 16 years old experiencing parental divorce in the United States (Bumpass & Lu, 2000).

Parental separation and divorce can damage children and families (Anderson, 2014). The research suggests that adolescents experience difficulties and lower well-being as a result of (a) being exposed to ongoing marital discord they are exposed to along and (b) their appraisal of the conflict between their parents (Grych, 1998). Children of divorce exhibit more conduct problems, present with more significant emotional problems, display more social issues, and struggle with religion and spirituality more than those from intact, two-parent families (Amato & Anthony, 2014), with boys predominately manifesting higher externalizing behaviors. Additionally, adolescents with divorced parents are twice as likely to develop a mental health disorder (Zill et al., 1993) and are more likely to experience psychosomatic health concerns than individuals in intact families (Anderson, 2014). Furthermore, parental conflict predicts the emergence of anxiety and depression in children and impacts adults' and children's psychological well-being (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001).

Judaism views marriage as the ideal human state. Both the Torah and Talmud view a man without a wife, or a woman without a husband, as incomplete (Aiken, 2005). Lisa Aiken relayed that marriage in Orthodox Judaism is seen as a spiritual bonding between two people and as a fulfillment of God's commandment. Many Jewish couples who are having marital problems will stay in the marriage longer because they have a contractual bond with God, and many Jewish couples will resist divorce because they do not want to be viewed as incomplete. This mindset understandably impacts the environment in which children and

adolescents are being raised (Haimi & Lerner, 2016). This current study demonstrates that,

for the Jewish Orthodox adolescent, these predictors are valid due to the nature of the

community and the value placed on marriage (Pelcovitz, 2011).

Chapter III: Research Questions and Hypotheses

Three research questions and hypotheses were explored in this study.

Research Question 1: How do adolescents' perceptions of marital conflict (including the conflict properties, conflict threat, and conflict self-blame, as measured by the Children's Perception of Internal Conflict scale [CPIC]) relate to their emotional, conduct, and social problems (as measured by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire [SDQ])?

Hypothesis 1a: Marital conflict will be positively correlated with emotional problems.

Hypothesis 1b: Marital conflict will be positively correlated with conduct problems.

Hypothesis 1c: Marital conflict will be positively correlated with social problems.

Research Question 2: How do adolescents' perceptions of marital conflict (as measured by the CPIC) relate to their spirituality (as measured by the Teen Spirituality Survey [TSS])?

Hypothesis 2a: Marital conflict will be negatively correlated with spirituality.

Research Question 3: Are boys or girls at greater risk for behavioral and emotional concerns (as measured by the SDQ) due to parental conflict (as measured by the CPIC)?

Hypothesis 3a: The relation between marital conflict and behavioral problems will be
    more pronounced for boys than girls.

Hypothesis 3b: The relation between marital conflict and emotional problems will be
    more pronounced for girls than boys.

Chapter IV: Method

This quantitative, correlational study examined children in the Orthodox Jewish culture, with a specific focus on adolescents' perceptions of marital conflict, spirituality, and behavioral, emotional, and peer problems. An increased understanding of these factors might lead to a more beneficial and effective approach to supporting children who experience marital conflict in Yeshivot, Modern Orthodox day schools, and the Jewish Orthodox community.

The focus of this study was to investigate the relationship between the independent/predictor variables measuring parental conflict and the dependent/criterion variables measuring adolescent difficulties and spirituality. The researcher used a quantitative approach to measure the phenomenon objectively through statistical analysis to address the research questions (see Wrench, 2017).

Participants

The final sample consisted of 191 Orthodox Jewish adolescents aged 9–18 from divorced, married, separated, and widowed homes. The participants were recruited from the Yeshiva day school population and social service organizations across the United States and Israel. Efforts were made to oversample children from community service organizations that serve children living in high-conflict homes. The participant sample was 43% male and 57% female. Ages ranged from 9 to 18 ($M = 14.83$, $SD = 2.19$), and grades ranged from fifth to 12th ($M = 9.48$, $SD = 1.80$). Most participants were 14 or older and were in Grades 9–12 (see Figures 1 and 2). As shown in Figure 3, a majority of participants identified their parents as

married (72.0%), with the next highest category being divorced (17.0%), followed by

separated (4.7%), remarried (4.2%), and then widowed (1.6%).

Figure 1

Age Distribution of Participants
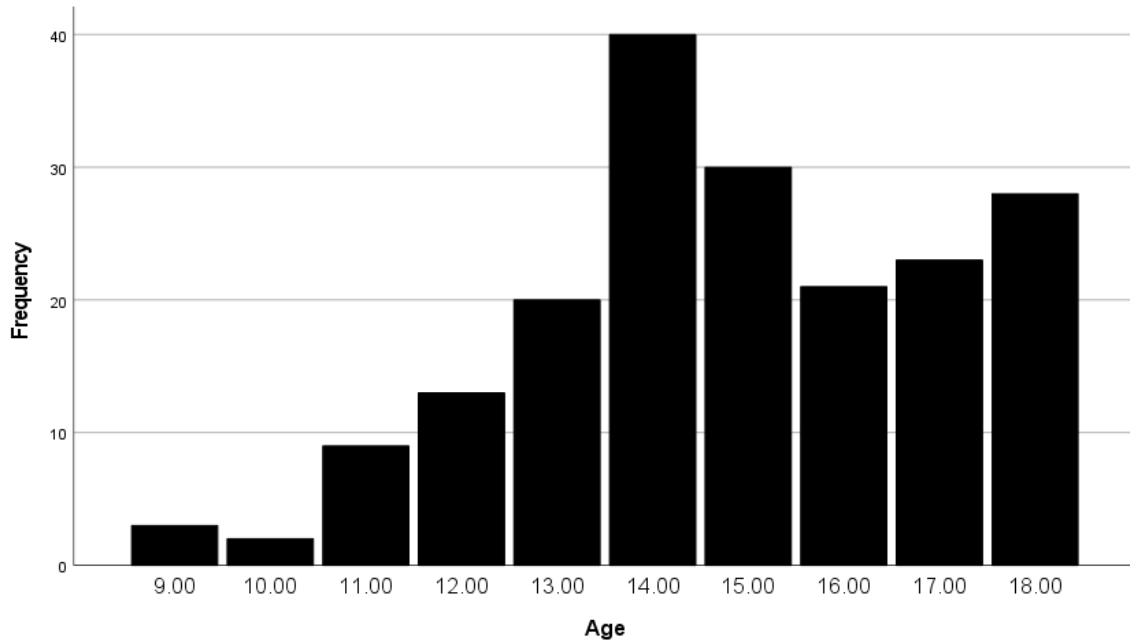
Figure 2

Grade Distribution of Participants
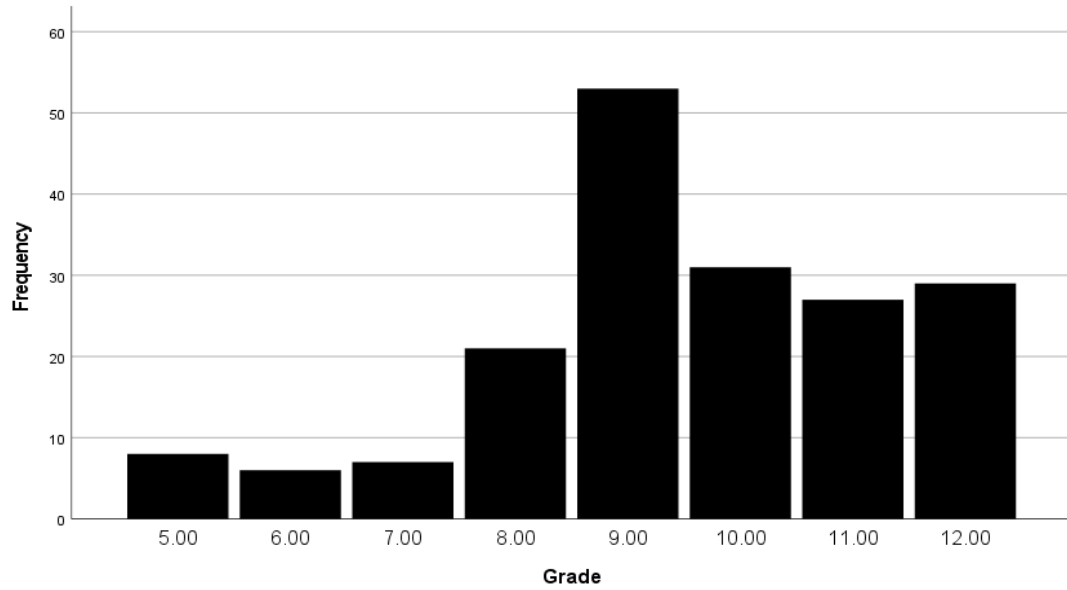
Figure 3

Marital Status of Participants' Parents
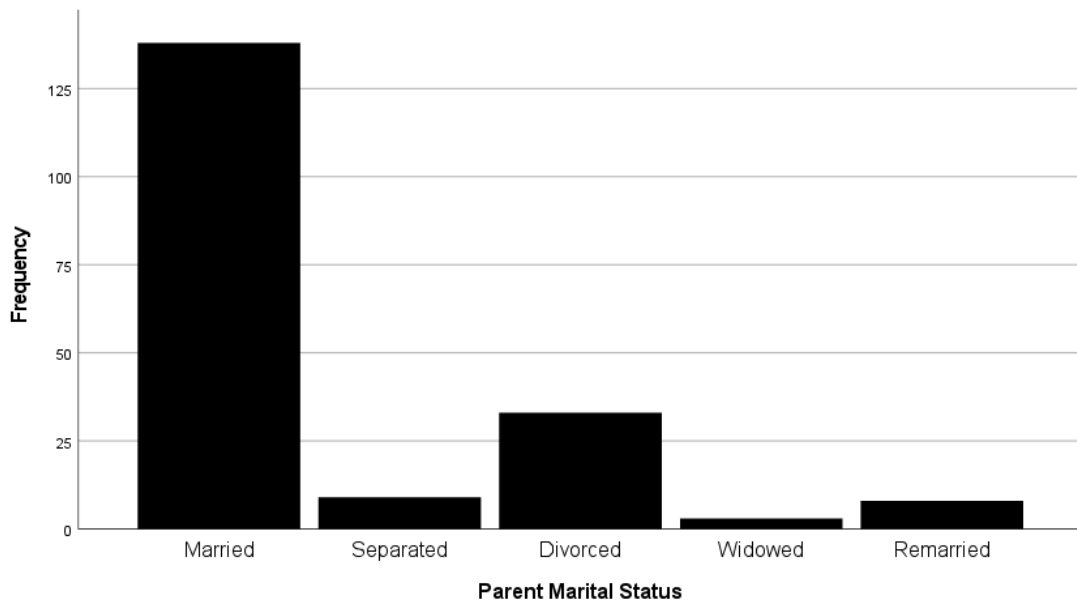
Procedures

The procedure initially included distributing the Qualtrics link to social services agencies working with children of divorce and children whose parents were separated. Relationships were developed; however, when the researcher was ready to share the surveys, the organizations were apprehensive and noncommittal. Thus, the researcher contacted Yeshivas and other social service organizations within her professional network, and the participants were oversampled.

The researcher sent emails that described the study, provided information about confidentiality, and contained the Qualtrics link of the measures. Once the organizations and Yeshivas agreed to participate (see Appendix A and B), they disseminated the Qualtrics link to their population. The first item on the survey was a statement that briefly described the study, confidentiality procedures, and participants' right to withdraw from the study at any time and not answer certain questions (see Appendix C).

To uphold confidentiality and anonymity, no names or other identifying information were collected. The participants identified their gender, age, and grade at school. The surveys were completely anonymous, and the data were entered into a password-protected file. The study was deemed exempt, so no parental consent was required for participation.

Measures

The survey consisted of a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D) and three self-report measures (see Appendices E–G). After the student answered basic demographic questions, they received a revised SDQ, the CPIC, and the Teenage Spirituality Survey. The surveys took no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Participants could complete the survey on their preferred electronic devices and were directed to complete it independently.

The measures selected were based on a data set gleaned from a study on children of Agunot commissioned by the Organization for the Resolution of Agunot and the Yashar Coalition (Pelcovitz, 2020). The measures focus on the constellation of symptoms and perceptions unique to children exposed to marital discord.

Emotional, Conduct, and Peer Difficulties

The researcher used the SDQ (B. Goodman et al., 1998) to assess emotional, behavioral, and social difficulties. The original SDQ utilizes 38 questions that assess five subscales: emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity scale, peer difficulties, and a prosocial scale. Research on the reliability of the SDQ has produced mixed results. Some articles say the SDQ exhibits strong internal consistency (i.e., the degree to which similar items within a scale correlate; Yao et al., 2009). However, others report that the SDQ shows only good internal consistency (R. Goodman, 2001), whereas others note concerns regarding the reliability of the subscales, with most subscales showing low internal consistency. Yao et al. (2009) found that the SDQ showed moderate test–retest reliability, which is the degree to which the same respondents had the same results when the measure was conducted after some time under the same conditions. Additionally, the SDQ shows good concurrent validity with the correlation of the measure with others measuring the same concept (Muris et al., 2003). Last, the SDQ has displayed good discrimination validity without correlation with opposite concepts (Lundh et al., 2008).

In the current study, the researcher only used the emotional, conduct, and peer difficulty scales of the SDQ because the literature suggests these scales may be most directly associated with parental conflict. Each subscale had five items, and the response items were coded on a three-point scale ranging from *not true* to *certainly true*. The researcher then

averaged participants' scores on each of the five items to create a total score on each subscale ranging from 1–3, with higher scores reflecting more problems. The subscale for emotional difficulties had a Cronbach's alpha of .77, the conduct problem subscale had a Cronbach's alpha of .84, and the peer problem subscale had a Cronbach's alpha of .69, suggesting that the subscales were reliable and had adequate internal consistency. See Appendix E for all items.

Marital Conflict

The CPIC (Grych & Finchman, 1993) was first used in a sample of 222 children aged 9–12, and the results were cross-validated in a second sample of 144 similarly aged children. Three analytically derived subscales (conflict properties =.70, threat =.68, and self-blame = .76) demonstrated acceptable internal consistency and test–retest reliability. The validity of the conflict properties scale was supported by significant relations with parent reports of conflict and indices of child adjustment. The threat and self-blame scales correlated with children's responses to specific conflict vignettes.

Several studies have used the CPIC, and in most cases, these studies have shown adequate internal consistency (Kline et al., 2003; Raynor & Fosco, 2004; Reese-Weber & Hesson-McInnis, 2008). This measure is unique because it assesses children's perceptions of interparental conflict and provides a better predictor of the effects of parental conflict on children's development than parent reports of marital conflict. Children's appraisal is likely to be more proximal to their functioning and reflect their cognitive and emotional processing of related processes.

In the current study, the researcher administered the CPIC to understand adolescents' perceptions of parental conflict (Grych & Finchman, 1993). The measure is composed of 48

statements requiring the adolescent to respond with *true* (3), *sort of true* (2), and *false* (1). The researcher averaged the subscale scores, with higher scores reflecting significant problems with parental conflict. In the current study, participants completed the conflict properties, threat, and self-blame scales, as described below.

Conflict Properties. This scale measures the frequency and intensity of the conflict as it relates to the degree of negative affect or hostility expressed and the resolution of the conflict as it relates to the perception that parents are unable to deal with conflict constructively. The conflict properties scale has three subscales: frequency, intensity, and resolution. Some sample items include, "I often see my parents arguing" (frequency), "My parents get really mad when they argue" (intensity), and "Even after my parents stop arguing, they stay mad at each other" (resolution). The Cronbach's alpha for six items was .89 for the frequency subscale, .91 for the seven-item intensity subscale, and .94 for the six-item resolution subscale, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency and reliability.

Threat. This scale measures how threatened children feel by their parents' arguing and their ability to cope effectively when fights occur. The threat scale has two subscales: perceived threat and coping efficacy. Some sample items include, "When my parents argue, I'm afraid that something bad will happen" (perceived threat) and "When my parents argue or disagree, there's nothing I can do to make myself feel better" (coping efficacy). Each subscale had six items, and the Cronbach's alpha for the intensity subscale was .90. The perceived threat subscale had a Cronbach's alpha of .89, and the coping efficacy subscale had a Cronbach's alpha of .71, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency and reliability.

Self-Blame. This scale measures adolescents' perceptions of being blamed or triangulated in the interparental conflict or the subject of arguments. The self-blame scale has three subscales: self-blame, triangulation, and content. Some sample items include, "Even if they don't say it, I know I am to blame when my parents argue" (self-blame), "I feel caught in the middle when my parents argue" (triangulation), and "My parents' arguments are usually about me" (content). Each subscale had eight items. The perceived self-blame subscale had a Cronbach's alpha of .89 and the triangulation subscale had a Cronbach's alpha of .91, suggesting that the items have relatively high internal consistency and reliability. See Appendix F for all items.

Spirituality

The TSS was constructed based on data obtained from youths in Europe, South America, the Asia/Pacific region, and the United States. Three studies were conducted in the United States, with two being longitudinal. The first study took place in two waves; the first was from 2002 to 2003, and the second was in 2005. In 2002–2003, researchers telephone surveyed 3,290 youth aged 13–17. In 2005, 2,530 of these youths were resurveyed. In the second study, which occurred in 2003, 3,680 students were surveyed at 46 diverse colleges and universities across the country. The third survey, conducted in the fall of 2004, surveyed 112,232 first-year students at 236 colleges and universities, with a follow-up survey of 14,527 students in the spring of 2007 when the same students were juniors (Child Trends, n.d.).

The TSS (Child Trends, n.d.) is a reliable measure. Internal consistency, as measured using the Cronbach's α coefficient alpha ratings, ranges from .71 to .85. Students' test–retest reliabilities in which assenting participants were administered the survey 2–3 months after

the initial administration were good, with the scores being correlated to each factor. Scores were calculated using means due to differences in the number of items for each scale. Test–retest reliability was strong for the factors and composites. The factors on this measure are positively associated with the adaptive scales of the Youth Coping Responses Inventory (YCRI; Hernandez et al., 2010) and Behavior Assessment System or Children -Self Report of Personality (BASC; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004). Factors on this measure are negatively associated with the maladaptive scales of the YCRI (i.e., destructive coping) and BASC (i.e., depression).

The TSS consists of 15 statements about adolescents' perceptions of their spirituality. Adolescents answer questions on a scale of 1–5, which includes the responses *not at all*, *a little*, *somewhat*, *a lot*, and *completely.* In this study, scores across items were averaged so that higher scores reflect greater spirituality. See Appendix G for all items.

Beliefs. Eight items ($\alpha = .98$) on the TSS examine connection with oneself, others, and the understanding of the transcendent. Participants were asked to indicate how much they believe in the following and responded to statements such as "There is a god" and "There is sacredness to all life." Scores across items were averaged, with higher scores reflecting greater spirituality.

Effects of Beliefs. Seven items ($\alpha = .98$) on the TSS assessed adolescents' ability to incorporate an awareness of the sacred in their lives. Participants were asked how much their belief that something exists beyond the everyday world can, for example, "Protect you from harm" or "Bring you peace in your life."

Operationalization Constructs

Dependent Variables

The following items functioned as dependent variables in the current study:

- Conduct/behavioral symptom: Behaviors that are persistent or repetitive, disruptive, and inappropriate. The school-age child might display aggression, defiance, inattention, and hostility, to name a few.

- Conflict: Negative affect or hostility expressed on behalf of the parents. The adolescent's intake of how frequent, intense, and how the conflict between his parents is resolved.

- Emotional difficulties: Characteristics and behaviors associated with emotional disturbance. Children experiencing emotional difficulties are often unhappy, emotional, and depressed.

- Peer/social functioning: An individual's interactions with their environment and ability to fulfill their role in that environment. For a school-age child, this often involves sharing, forming relationships, participating in groups, playing with others, and sharing readily, or the reverse, where the child prefers to be alone.

- Perception: The adolescent's perspective and experience (i.e., the way the child understands and interprets their awareness of their environment). This study correlated the child's perception to the parents' marital conflict.

- Self-blame: To hold responsible. The adolescent feels responsible and attributes fault for the marital discord.

- Spiritual growth: The adolescent's system of meaning and connecting to a belief system. This study examined how adolescents identify themselves in correlation with their parent's marital discord.

- Threat: An indication or warning in which the adolescent feels at risk by their parents' arguing and ability to cope effectively when fights occur.

Independent Variable

The independent variable in this study was marital discord, which is defined as marital strife, contention, conflict, antagonism, and lack of harmony. Children witness and are thus exposed to their parents' marital discord.

Power Analysis

A sample size of 190 or more individuals was calculated to provide adequate power (>80%, two-tailed) for small to medium effects for each correlation ($r = .2$). Small to medium effects were used to calculate power and to detect modest but not trivial effects.

Chapter V: Results

Data were screened for any unusual scores, outliers, and nonnormal variables. Although there were no outliers, several variables were very mildly kurtotic, and one was very mildly skewed. Square-root transformations were applied to all nonnormal variables but generally did not improve the shape. The one exception was for the self-blame subscale of the CPIC, in which the researcher did find mild improvements in the skew and kurtosis when transformed. Therefore, all hypotheses were tested with the raw and transformed variables. Given no notable changes in the results, the original raw variable was retained.

Descriptive Statistics

Participants, on average, thought the statements describing parental conflict were *false* to *sort of true*, with most responses being closer to *sort of true*. Participants, on average, thought the statements describing emotional, conduct, and peer difficulties were somewhere between *not true* to *somewhat true*, with all three subscales being closer to *somewhat true*. Participants, on average, endorsed the statements about spiritual beliefs *a lot*. Those statements about the effects of their spiritual beliefs were endorsed somewhere between *somewhat* and *a lot*. See Table 1 below for descriptive statistics for the main study variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Min	Max
			Range	
CPIC conflict properties - Frequency	1.95	.67	1.00	3.00
CPIC conflict properties - Intensity	1.81	.64	1.00	3.00
CPIC conflict properties - Resolution	1.82	.72	1.00	3.00
CPIC threat - Threat	1.95	.66	1.00	3.00
CPIC threat – Coping efficacy	1.87	.44	1.00	3.00
CPIC self-blame - Triangulation	1.72	.62	1.00	3.00
CPIC self-blame – Self-blame	1.45	.50	1.00	3.00
SDQ emotional problems	1.89	.56	1.00	3.00
SDQ conduct problems	1.65	.59	1.00	3.00
SDQ peer problems	1.55	.48	1.00	3.00
TSS beliefs	3.93	1.26	1.00	5.00
TSS effects of beliefs	3.47	1.33	1.00	5.00

Note. CPIC = Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale; SDQ = Strengths and Difficulties Scale; TSS = Teen Spirituality Survey.

Additional Analyses

Grade, Gender, and Marital Status Effects

Aside from testing for the three hypotheses, all the main study variables were examined for grade, gender, and marital status effects. The only grade effects were for the spiritual beliefs subscale, with being in a higher grade associated with greater spiritual beliefs. The only gender effect was for the self-blame subscale, with males scoring significantly higher than females.

Additionally, the researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA on the main study variables to see if parental marital status was associated with parental conflict, problems, and spirituality. For most parental conflict subscales, participants with separated and divorced parents had greater parental conflict than those with married parents. Children with separated

or divorced parents tended to show more emotional and peer difficulties than participants with married parents. Children with separated parents also tended to have more conduct problems than those with married parents. Regarding spirituality, individuals with separated parents were less spiritual than those with married parents. The overall pattern suggests some disadvantages for children of divorced or separated parents compared to children of married parents.

Subscale Correlations

The intercorrelations of the subscales in the CPIC were all significant and positive (rs $\geq.39$, $p <.001$), with most being above a correlation of .5. The subscales within each domain (i.e., conflict properties, threat, and self-blame) were strongly, significantly positively correlated (rs $> .50$, $p < .001$) with one another. The SDQ subscales were also positively correlated (rs $\geq.50$, $p < .001$). Spiritual beliefs and the effects of spiritual beliefs were highly positively correlated ($r =.88$, $p < .001$). Intercorrelations between scales by research question are discussed below.

Research Question 1. Research Question 1 asked the following: How do adolescents' perceptions of marital conflict (including the conflict properties, conflict threat, and conflict self-blame, as measured by the CPIC) relate to their emotional, conduct, and social difficulties (as measured by the SDQ)?

Hypothesis 1a: Marital conflict will be positively correlated with emotional difficulties.

Hypothesis 1b: Marital conflict will be positively correlated with conduct difficulties.

Hypothesis 1c: Marital conflict will be positively correlated with social difficulties.

Table 2 provides the correlations needed to answer Research Questions 1 and 2. All parental conflict subscales significantly correlated with emotional, conduct, and peer difficulties. The magnitude of the effect was moderate to strong ($rs = .30 - .58$, $p < 001$). More parental conflict was associated with more emotional, conduct, and peer difficulties; thus, full support was found for Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c.

Table 2

Significant Intercorrelations of Parental Conflict with Problems and Spirituality

CPIC subscale	SDQ problem subscale			TSS subscale	
	Emotional	Conduct	Peer	Belief	Effects of belief
Conflict properties - Frequency	.48	.56	.48	-.41	-.49
Conflict properties - Intensity	.48	.54	.48	-.35	-.45
Conflict properties - Resolution	.49	.58	.51	-.43	-.49
Threat – Perceived threat	.35	.49	.43	-.44	-.44
Threat – Coping efficacy	.30	.39	.35	-.27	-.29
Self-blame - Triangulation	.45	.55	.48	-.42	-.47
Self-blame – Self-blame	.38	.55	.47	-.49	-.54

Note. CPIC = Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale; SDQ = Strengths and Difficulties Scale; TSS = Teen Spirituality Survey.

Research Question 2. How do adolescents' perceptions of marital conflict (as measured by the CPIC) relate to their spirituality (measured by the TSS)?

Hypothesis 2a: Marital conflict will be negatively correlated with spirituality.

As shown in Table 2, all parental conflict subscales were negatively and significantly correlated with spiritual beliefs and the effects of spiritual beliefs. Once again, the magnitude of the effects was moderate to strong, with the correlation coefficients ranging from -.27 to -.54 ($p. < .001$). Greater parental conflict was associated with fewer spiritual beliefs and less

of an effect of spiritual beliefs on perceptions and worldviews; thus, full support was also found for Hypothesis 2a.

Research Question 3. Are boys or girls at greater risk for behavioral and emotional concerns (as measured by the SDQ) due to parental conflict (as measured by the CPIC)?

Hypothesis 3a: The relation between marital conflict and behavioral difficulties will be more pronounced for boys than girls.

Hypothesis 3b: The relation between marital conflict and emotional problems will be more pronounced for girls than boys.

For Research Question 3, the correlations between marital conflict and behavioral and emotional problems were split by gender; these correlations are presented in Table 3. All correlations continued to be significant for both males and females. Only correlations that had more than a .10 difference between males and females were examined as being potentially different.

Correlations were stronger for males than females for frequency, resolution, and coping efficacy with conduct problems. However, the differences between correlations were quite small and ranged between .1 and .2. This finding provided partial support for Hypothesis 3a. Correlations were stronger for males than females for perceived threat, coping efficacy, and self-blame with emotional problems. Given that parent conflict was hypothesized to be more strongly correlated with emotional difficulty for girls than boys, these results were opposite of what the researcher hypothesized. Thus, Hypothesis 3b was rejected.

Notably, although no direct prediction was hypothesized, the correlation was stronger for males than females only for coping efficacy with peer difficulties. Across the three

difficulty measures of the SDQ, the correlations between conflict and problems were often roughly equal for males and females. When there was a difference, it was males who yielded higher correlations.

Table 3

The Relation between Parental Conflict and Emotional, Conduct, and Peer Difficulties for Males and Females Separately

CPIC subscale	SDQ problem subscale		
	Emotional	Conduct	Peer
Conflict properties - Frequency	.47 (M), .49 (F)	.63 (M), .49* (F)	.48 (M), .49 (F)
Conflict properties - Intensity	.47 (M), .49 (F)	.58 (M). .50 (F)	.49 (M), .46 (F)
Conflict properties - Resolution	.49 (M), .49 (F)	.66 (M), .51* (F)	.51 (M), .52 (F)
Threat – Perceived threat	.43 (M), .29* (F)	.53 (M), .47 (F)	.42 (M), .46 (F)
Threat – Coping efficacy	.36 (M), .21* (F)	.48 (M), .32* (F)	.46 (M), .28* (F)
Self-blame - Triangulation	.47 (M), .43 (F)	.60 (M), .52 (F)	.45 (M), .54 (F)
Self-blame – Self-blame	.48 (M), .30* (F)	.54 (M), .56 (F)	.46 (M), .46 (F)

Note. M = male correlation; F = female correlation. CPIC = Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale; SDQ = Strengths and Difficulties Scale.
$p < .01$ for all correlations .32 and lower; $p < .001$ for all correlations above .32.
* = the correlation for males and females had a difference of more than .10.

Chapter VI: Discussion and Findings

This study aimed to probe the effects of marital conflict on adolescents within the Jewish Orthodox community. Marriage and divorce in this community can be viewed differently from marriage and divorce in the non-Jewish community. The literature on children of divorce indicates that marital discord is one of the single most significant factors affecting adolescents' psychological well-being. This study aimed to fill the void in the scholarly literature on adolescents living in high-conflict homes in the Orthodox Jewish community, with the researcher seeking to contribute knowledge about culturally relevant factors associated with adolescents of divorce and marital conflict.

Children should have the opportunity to grow up healthy with the ability to learn, provide for themselves and their future families, and contribute to society. The families in which children grow up influence these opportunities in a myriad of ways. For instance, families can reduce vulnerability by removing and reducing risk factors and can increase resiliency by adding protective factors.

To begin with, there are usually issues that cause tension between teenagers and parents, such as homework, sibling fights, boundaries, and trust. The adolescent period is often marked by several emotional and behavioral changes. Marital conflict compounds these issues, and adolescents have reported various difficulties in the robust amount of literature on children and adolescents of divorce. Additionally, the adolescents in this study represent the Orthodox Jewish community, where the value and importance of marriage are emphasized.

The literature supported this study by consistently showing that marital discord between parents, while worse for adolescents from divorced homes, presents a significant risk factor for various issues for many adolescents. Three primary research questions guided this dissertation, and quantitative data were used to answer the research questions. The researcher used the CPIC, SDQ, and TSS to determine if the parental conflict was positively and significantly correlated with emotional difficulties, conduct difficulties, peer difficulties, and spirituality among Jewish Orthodox adolescents. The results indicated that marital conflict can affect teenagers' mental health and development, potentially leaving them angry, disillusioned, and emotionally vulnerable.

Emotional, Conduct, and Peer Difficulties

Research Question 1 questioned how adolescents' perceptions of marital conflict (including the conflict properties, conflict threat, and conflict self-blame, as measured by the CPIC) relate to their emotional, conduct, and social problems (as measured by the SDQ). The researcher hypothesized that marital conflict positively correlates with emotional, conduct, and social difficulties. The study results strongly supported the hypothesis that marital conflict was positively correlated with emotional, conduct, and social difficulties.

The study results also aligned with prior research indicating that marital conflict is related to children's social and affective functioning. When adolescents are exposed to conflicts between parents, they are apt to develop behavioral, emotional, and adjustment problems. Adolescents often release their repressed feelings of fear, anger, and sadness in the form of bullying others, being aggressive and stubborn, disobedience, or being fearful and timid.

As Grych and Finchman (1993) explained, children's internal processing of marital conflict involves two steps: (a) children recognize that there is some sort of disruption and respond emotionally to it, and (b) children attribute meaning, understanding, causality, and responsibility for the conflict. Adolescents may be particularly aware of the conflict between their parents, and that sensitivity is problematic for them. Adolescents then mimic the conflict-management approaches they have seen at home rather than being understanding when they are in conflict with someone.

Emotional Difficulties

Internalized outcomes such as depression and suicide are influenced by family risk factors such as family conflict, having a nonresidential parent, low parental monitoring, and poor communication between youth and parents. These are all byproducts of a home with divorced or separated parents and parents who argue. The emotional climate in families with marital discord is less cohesive, less emotionally expressive, more hostile, more critical, less accepting, more conflictual, and more disorganized than in families without marital discord. Although this study indicated a correlation between the risk factor of marital discord and adolescents' emotional outcomes, the study often did not indicate whether the risk factor preceded the outcome; thus, a causal relationship was not verified. Furthermore, the study did not indicate whether the risk factor preceded the outcome.

Seeing an argument is one thing, but witnessing the two people you love most shouting at one another, while also being completely helpless to change the situation, can lead to sadness, worry, and stress. Specifically, conflict in marriage affects adolescents' emotional security. Emotional security theory posits that marital conflict impacts children's development by threatening their goal of security in the family. This is apparent, as

children's first relationships are formed with their parents and families. Emotional security threats usually motivate adolescents' emotional and behavioral responses, with their responses representing their cognitive representation of their family and the marital relationship. Unfortunately, these responses develop into maladaptive behavior patterns at school, at home, and in peer interactions. The results of this study fit in with emotional security theory because the findings support that adolescents in homes saturated with marital conflict experience challenges in adaptive emotionality, exhibiting externalizing and internalizing problems. These problems include but are not limited to increases in feelings of loneliness, anxiety, depression, shyness, and stress. As the conflict escalates and becomes cyclical in nature, adolescents frequently isolate themselves physically and emotionally to escape the negativity within their homes.

Gleaning from emotional security theory, having both parents present in the day-to-day routine is a supportive factor for families and a protective factor for children, as these conditions favor more adaptive behavior and better academic outcomes. When both parents share household responsibilities, care for the children, and communicate effectively with one another, it enables greater functionality among family members. Although this study showed that adolescents from separated or divorced homes often fared worse in both externalizing and internalizing behavior, merely having the presence of both parents in the family environment did not ensure a harmonious coexistence.

In the current study, adolescents reported a range of .30 to .48 in regard to emotional difficulties and how these difficulties relate to their perceptions of their parent's marital conflict. Adolescents also reported a range of -.27 to -.49 in regard to emotional difficulties and how these difficulties relate to their spiritual beliefs. Additionally, adolescents reported a

change of -.29 to-.54 in relation to the effects of belief. These ranges were dependent on the frequency, intensity, and resolution of the marital conflict and the perceived threat, coping efficacy, triangulation, and self-blame perceived by the adolescent.

Conduct Difficulties

Typically, conduct difficulties are a repetitive and persistent pattern of behavior in which an adolescent disregards basic social standards and rules. These difficulties may include the adolescent being irresponsible, violating the rights of others, and physically harming other people. This study examined conduct difficulties in correlation with familial and social dimensions, with the affected child displaying behaviors such as bullying, threatening others, starting physical fights, deception and theft, escaping from school, and staying out of school.

Externalizing behaviors such as juvenile delinquency and conduct disorder are pressing concerns facing U.S. society today. Juvenile criminal arrests for both property and violent crimes peak among children from families experiencing high levels of stress. Parent–child interactions and parents' management practices are perhaps the most significant family risk factors for externalizing behaviors (Salinger et al., 2020). As noted, family instability due to divorce also increases the risk of delinquent behavior.

Teenagers from homes where marital discord is prevalent are at a disadvantage, with the research suggesting what any child can tell you, which is that it is frightening when adults yell at each other. After all, parents are the child's source of security. When parents seem out of control, the world becomes a scary place. The stress response to parental conflict can make children anxious long afterward, making it difficult for them to navigate their interactions. Because children cannot turn to arguing adults for comfort, they may internalize

their fear, and it can manifest as defiance or misbehavior. Maybe worst of all, when adults yell at each other, it gives children the message that when humans have disagreements, yelling is the appropriate way to handle them.

In this study, adolescents reported a range of .39 to .58 in regard to conduct difficulties and how these difficulties relate to their perceptions of their parents' marital conflict. Interestingly, males reported higher scores than females. Additionally, adolescents reported a range of -.27 to -.49 in regard to conduct difficulties and how these difficulties relate to their spiritual beliefs. Last, adolescents reported a change of -.29 to -.54 in relation to the effects of spiritual beliefs. These ranges were dependent on the frequency, intensity, resolution of the marital conflict and the perceived threat, coping efficacy, triangulation, and self-blame perceived by the adolescent.

Peer Difficulties

Adolescence is characterized by an increased engagement in peer interactions as youth begin to create more intimate friendships outside the home (Zimet & Jacob, 2001). Therefore, exposure to negative marital conflict during this developmental stage has negative implications for an adolescent's social interactions. The findings in this study are consistent with prior research that identifies that adolescents exposed to marital conflict have significantly lower conflict resolution skills and higher aggressive responses.

When adolescents witness their parents—two people who are understood to care deeply for one another—arguing over a variety of subjects, they consequently internalize these skills and begin to utilize them in their own lives. The adolescents may develop poor conflict resolution skills such as ineffective communication, an inability to compromise, and difficulty with self-regulation. Furthermore, disagreements in marriages will inevitably arise,

but how the parents respond to the discord can positively or negatively impact the child and how they interact with peers (Anderson, 2014).

Based on the CPIC, marital conflict consists of three factors: perceived conflict, threat, and self-blame. In this study, the researcher asked adolescents to reflect on the conflict, threat, and self-blame captured in the eight subscales of frequency, intensity, resolution, perceived threat, coping efficacy, triangulation, self-blame, and content they perceive concerning their parents' marital discord. Adolescents reported a range of .35 to .51 in regard to peer difficulties and how these difficulties relate to their perceptions of their parent's marital conflict. Interestingly, males and females reported a .1 difference, with males reporting lower peer difficulties than females. The adolescents also reported a range of -.27 to -.49 in regard to peer difficulties and how these difficulties relate to their spiritual beliefs. Additionally, the adolescents reported a change of -.29 to-.54 in relation to the effects of belief. These ranges were dependent on the frequency, intensity, resolution of the marital conflict and the perceived threat, coping efficacy, triangulation, and self-blame perceived by the adolescent.

Subscales of the CPIC

Frequency

Based on the responses to statements on the CPIC related to frequency, such as "They may not think I know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot," "My parents are often mean to each other even when I'm around," and "I often see my parents arguing," it is evident that the frequency in which marital discord occurs between parents may have been detrimental to their adolescent's emotional, conduct, and peer development. Continuous friction in a home can create constant tension, with many parents' unknowingly modeling an unhealthy view of

marriage as being a constant battle. Constant fighting in a home is stressful and takes a toll on everyone involved.

In relation to the adolescents' perceptions of the frequency of their parents' marital discord, this study found that adolescents reported a .48 in regard to emotional difficulties, a .56 in regard to conduct difficulties, and a .48 in regard to peer difficulties. The adolescent also reported a -.41 in regard to their spiritual belief and a -.49 in regard to the effects of spiritual beliefs and how they relate to the frequency of the marital conflict. Both genders reported minimal significance with the exception of conduct and how it relates to the frequency in marital discord in which males reported a difference of more than .10.

Intensity

The responses to statements on the CPIC related to intensity, such as, "My parents get really mad when they argue," "When my parents have an argument they say mean things to each other," "When my parents have an argument they yell at each other," and "My parents have pushed or shoved each other during an argument," indicate that the intensity in which marital discord occurs between parents could be problematic. When children witness their parents arguing intensely, it could potentially lead to the development of low self-esteem and anxiety among kids. Other families may suppress these conflicts, leading them to stay suppressed just below the surface, constantly threatening to erupt. This unrelenting tension makes everyone involved feel as though they are constantly walking on eggshells, which can create a feeling of isolation among all family members and even lead to avoidance behavior. Unfortunately, when parents model this type of behavior, they teach their children to use avoidance as the primary way to deal with conflict, which in turn can set children up for emotional discord and unsatisfying relationships in the future.

In relation to the adolescents' perceptions of the intensity of their parents' marital discord, adolescents in this study reported a .48 in regard to emotional difficulties, a .54 in regard to conduct difficulties, and a .48 in regard to peer difficulties. Adolescents also reported a -.35 in regard to their spiritual beliefs and a -.45 in regard to the effects of spiritual beliefs and how they relate to the intensity of the marital conflict. Both genders reported minimal significance with the exception of conduct and how it relates to intensity in marital discord, in which males reported a difference of .8.

Resolution

Based on the responses to statements on the CPIC related to resolution, such as, "Even after my parents stop arguing they stay mad at each other," "When my parents argue they usually make up right away" (reverse code), and "My parents still act mean after they have had an argument," it is evident that the intensity in which marital discord occurs between parents can also be detrimental to a child's development. Parents make the mistake of beginning an argument in front of the children, but not ending it in front of them, thinking it better to "leave it there" or take it to another room. The reality is that kids would benefit from seeing a resolution (if there is one), especially because many children continue to worry about the issue otherwise.

In relation to the adolescents' perceptions of the resolution of their parents' marital discord, adolescents reported a .49 in regard to emotional difficulties, a .58 in regard to conduct difficulties, and a .51 in regard to peer difficulties. The adolescents also reported a -.43 in regard to their spiritual beliefs and a -.49 in regard to the effects of belief and how it relates to the resolution of the marital conflict. Both genders reported minimal significance

with the exception of conduct and how it relates to resolution in marital discord, in which males reported a difference of more than .10.

Perceived Threat

The responses to statements on the CPIC related to perception, such as, "I get scared when my parents argue," "When my parents argue I worry about what will happen to me," "When my parents argue I worry that one of them will get hurt," and "When my parents argue I'm afraid that they will yell at me too," indicate that the adolescents' perceptions of conflict relate to whether they can adaptively cope with other stressful situations. This suggests that the more adolescents misinterpret the conflict, the higher the stress level they experience and the worse they are at coping with those stressors.

Adolescence is a crucial time for physical and emotional development, and it may be a pivotal stage in the formation of ideas about intimacy and marriage. Teens' expectations of a romantic relationship are undoubtedly influenced by the romantic relationships of their parents or guardians. The family is the first environment in which youth experience adult relationships. Family composition and adult behaviors, such as the presence of one or both parents and the quality and stability of their relationships, can have long-lasting consequences for youth

Adolescents' perspectives are important because perspectives indicate how the adolescent is experiencing their parents' relationship. If teens perceive that their parents are always fighting, they are likely to feel stress and turmoil. In the current study, the researcher was particularly interested in adolescents' perceptions of their parents' relationship. These perceptions shape adolescents' attitudes about marriage and influence their future choices about forming romantic relationships.

In relation to the adolescents' perceptions of how threatened they feel when their parents argue, participants in the current study reported a .35 in regard to emotional difficulties, a .49 in regard to conduct difficulties, and a .43 in regard to peer difficulties. The adolescents also reported a -.44 in regard to their spiritual beliefs and a -.44 in regard to the effects of belief and how it relates to the perceived threat of marital conflict. Both genders reported marginal significance in relation to peer, conduct, and emotional difficulties and how they relate to perceived threat of marital discord, in which females reported a difference of more than .10.

Coping Efficacy

The responses to statements on the CPIC related to coping efficacy, such as, "I don't know what to do when parents have arguments," "When my parents argue there is nothing I can do to stop them," "There's nothing I can do to make myself feel better," and "When my parents argue they don't listen to anything I say," indicate that adolescents have a difficult time coping with the distress of their parents' hostility. Adolescents feel powerless and defenseless during marital discord, leading the adolescent to inefficiently cope with the distress if they do not believe they are capable of making an impact.

Parenting behaviors affect adolescents' belief that they are capable of handling stressful situations. Self-doubt creeps in and self-esteem comes into question when teenagers are unable to cope with the challenges being thrown at them. They are made to feel inadequate and useless and easily develop self-helplessness. They give up because they do not believe they can make a difference in their own lives or the lives of others.

In relation to the adolescents' perceptions of how they cope with their parents' marital discord, adolescents in this study reported a .30 in regard to emotional difficulties,

a .39 in regard to conduct difficulties, and a .35 in regard to peer difficulties. Adolescents also reported a -.27 in regard to their spiritual beliefs and a -.29 in regard to the effects of belief and how it relates to their coping efficacy of the marital conflict. Both genders reported significance on emotional, conduct, and peer difficulties and how they relate to coping efficacy in marital discord, in which females reported a difference of less than .10.

Triangulation

Based on the responses to statements on the CPIC related to triangulation, such as, "When my parents argue I end up getting involved somehow," "I feel caught in the middle when my parents argue," and "I feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement," it is evident that an adolescent can become emotionally involved with the conflict, internalize much of the disagreement, and respond to it as if they were part of it. This immense level of investment makes it hard for adolescents to separate themselves from their parent's marital disputes, which increases their risk of developing symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Fundamentally, adolescents should know that their parents are adults having an adult problem in their relationship; even if the drama is centered on the child, it is not their responsibility to sort it out. This is particularly tricky in most situations, especially when the teenager sees themselves as the only sensible one in the situation.

In relation to the adolescents' perceptions of how triangulated they felt when their parents argued, adolescents' reported a .45 in regard to emotional difficulties, with males scoring significantly higher than females on this subscale. Adolescents reported a .55 in regard to conduct difficulties and a .48 in regard to peer difficulties. The participants also reported a -.42 in regard to their spiritual beliefs and a -.47 in regard to the effects of belief

and how it relates to the triangulation of the marital conflict. Both genders reported minimal significance.

Self-Blame

Based on the responses to statements on the CPIC related to self-blame, such as, "It's usually my fault when my parents argue," "Even if they don't say it, I know I'm to blame when my parents argue," and "My parents blame me when they have arguments," it is evident that adolescents may harbor feelings of responsibility for the conflict and potentially isolate themselves from the negativity surrounding them. The feeling of responsibility overwhelms the adolescent and makes it increasingly complex for them to cope with the conflict and everyday stressors they experience.

When parents argue about issues directly related to the adolescent, the adolescent may experience depression or anxiety and engage in rule-breaking and aggression. Arguing in front of a child is incredibly damaging to their psyche, as it creates a sense of instability and insecurity and may manifest as guilt and a feeling of responsibility.

In relation to the adolescents' perceptions of how they accept the blame for their parents' marital discord, adolescents in this study reported a .38 in regard to emotional difficulties, a .55 in regard to conduct difficulties, and a .47 in regard to peer difficulties. Adolescents also reported a -.49 in regard to their spiritual beliefs and a -.54 in regard to the effects of self-blame and how it relates to the intensity of the marital conflict. Both genders reported minimal significance with the exception of emotional difficulties and how they relate to self-blame in marital discord, in which males reported a difference of more than .10.

Content

The responses to statements on the CPIC related to content, such as, "My parents get into arguments about things I do in school," "My parent's arguments are usually about me," and "My parents often get into arguments when I do something wrong," indicate that adolescents may feel responsible and targeted when they are the subject of their parents' disagreements. The specific content that parents argue about, such as their teenager not thinking ahead, not acting more grown-up, not behaving responsibly, and so on, makes it more difficult for the teenager to feel supported and validated and can create a sense of sadness and anger. This causes a teenager to either engage in negative behavior, feeling like they are the root of the difficulties, or withdraw, feeling like life is stacked against them. Either way, arguments that revolve around the adolescent hurt the child–parent relationship and intensify the issues. In relation to the adolescents' perceptions of the content of their parents' marital discord, data were accumulated with the self-blame scale, in which the adolescents reported a mean of 1.45 out of a range of 1.00 to 3.00.

Spirituality

Research Question 2 asked how adolescents' perceptions of marital conflict (as measured by the CPIC Survey) relate to their spirituality (as measured by the TSS), and the researcher hypothesized that marital conflict would be negatively correlated with spirituality. The study results fully support this hypothesis, as parental conflict subscales were negatively correlated with spiritual beliefs and the effects of spiritual beliefs. Once again, the magnitude of the effects was moderate to strong. The greater the perceived parental conflict, the less the teenager held spiritual beliefs and used those spiritual beliefs to shape their perceptions and

worldviews. Interestingly, being in a higher grade was associated with more significant spiritual beliefs. In other words, the older the child, the stronger their beliefs.

In the scientific community, the terms religiosity and spirituality are overlapping concepts that are defined and measured differently (J. Friedman, 2008). Religiosity is commonly defined as the outward expression of one's relationship with the sacred through a formal and organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols. It is measured by the frequency of attendance at religious services and the practice of prayer and meditation. Spirituality, on the other hand, is defined as an awareness of the existence and experience of inner feelings and beliefs in connection to the sacred, which in turn gives the individual purpose, meaning, and harmonious interpersonal relationships. Spirituality is measured by the well-being, peace, and comfort derived from faith and spiritual connectedness as well as religious coping (Denton, 2012). Unlike spirituality, which is an internal experience that goes beyond the physical limits of time and space, religiosity is an external practice within a social entity or institution that is defined by boundaries and characterized by goals that are nonspiritual in focus, such as cultural, economic, political, and social goals.

This study considered spirituality as an additional dimension in learning and understanding, a channel for making sense of one's experience, with spirituality viewed in two ways. First, spirituality was viewed as an individual's intrapsychic sense of connection with something transcendent, as in the question, "Is there is a higher power?" Second, spirituality was viewed as the subsequent feelings of the effects of this connection (e.g., "How much does your belief that something exists beyond the everyday protect you from harm?").

Adolescence is a challenging stage involving the transition from childhood to adulthood and from dependence to independence. During this stage, spirituality can generally function as a protective resource against several adverse life challenges (Lippman & McIntosh, 2010). Aside from major physical and psychological changes that may cause some adolescents significant distress, spirituality usually comes with an introspective, contemplative side that allows adolescents to connect with themselves and develop emotional awareness, which can manifest both internally and externally. This study viewed spirituality as being associated with feelings of belonging and connectedness, especially through strong relationships with people and surroundings, and not stemming from religious observances and practices. Being Orthodox and formally participating in religious Jewish practices and spirituality appear to relate differently to an individual's overall psychological well-being. Many of the world's religions emphasize the importance of marriage and family, with a family's religious beliefs promoting family bonds, particularly between parents and children.

Orthodox Jews have their own definition of what it means to be Jewish culturally, religiously, and spiritually. Orthodox Jews usually have a strong belief in God and want their children to share that belief. Many follow the traditions of Judaism handed down from their parents and grandparents and hold them sacred. Raising children with strong moral values, celebrating Shabbat and Jewish holidays, providing them with a Jewish education, and supporting them in becoming a bar or bat mitzvah is usually mandatory and not up for negotiation. When paired with emotional closeness, family memories, and a deeper sense of connection, a sustainably significant bond embodies a Jewish life for many Orthodox Jews.

Such bonds are usually developed by presenting values and traditions in a consistent, positive, and meaningful way. Parents will intentionally provide love, guidance, stability, and

a rootedness into their child's identity. They do their best to model a rich Jewish life and pass along Jewish pride, hoping to keep Judaism alive one family at a time.

It is every Jewish Orthodox parent's wish that their child will remain faithful to their birth faith of Judaism while living a socially and spiritually conscious life with joy and meaning. They raise their children to hold their heads up high with grace and dignity, to be happy and healthy, and to make a positive difference in this world with the hope that they embrace something bigger than themselves, are confident, build strong connections, have personal visions, and seek a deeper meaning toward life.

Children who are raised by parents whose behaviors are predictable and consistent feel secure and safe and have total and unbreakable trust in their parents. Conversely, when a child has parents who argue, parents can undermine the child's identity and connection to spirituality. The child gets a clear message that their parents are not someone whose behaviors and reactions can be relied upon. This leads the child to feel—rightly so—that their parent and what the parent represents is not someone or something the child can trust.

Adolescence is a sensitive stage for spiritual development given that it is a period when youth tend to engage in spiritual exploration or make spiritual commitments that endure throughout the life span (Denton, 2012). Adolescents also have the proclivity to think about big questions, such as the purpose of their lives, how they can contribute to the world, and the nature of suffering. When a caring adult engages adolescents in dialogue about these issues, it can help the adolescent connect their abilities with their aspirations. Caring adults can also provide support when circumstances in an adolescent's life make an affirming spiritual stance difficult to see. Conversely, when parents are immersed in their own conflict,

they struggle to be the caring adult their child needs. Furthermore, when parents argue, they provide their children with a false representation of their values.

For many adolescents, experiencing marital conflict can leave them feeling confused, disheartened, and disconnected. The disruption of their family can create a snowball effect that leads the adolescent to disconnect, thus reducing their opportunities of building relationships with people, their environment, and spirituality. Parenting children in a loving, compassionate manner could have a profound impact on their relationship with spirituality or vice versa. Notably, scholars have found a strong relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being irrespective of an individual's religious participation (Lippman & McIntosh, 2010). Additionally, higher levels of spirituality are associated with higher levels of positive affect, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relationships with others, and self-acceptance. This can translate into adolescents' developing a sense of well-being, positive life attitudes, altruism, resiliency, school success, health, and positive identity, thus reducing the likelihood of delinquency, depression, and excessive risk-taking.

In the current study, a negative and significant correlation was found between spirituality and heightened marital conflict, with adolescents who witness more marital conflict reporting a decrease in spirituality. Adolescents reported a range of -.27 to -.49 in regard to spiritual beliefs and .-29 and .-54 in regard to the effects of spiritual beliefs on regard to emotional, conduct, and peer difficulties and how these beliefs relate to the frequency, intensity, resolution, perceived threat, coping efficacy, triangulation and self-blame of the marital conflict. Interestingly, age correlated with spirituality; the older the child, the stronger they were spiritually.

Gender

Research Question 3 inquired if boys or girls are at greater risk for behavioral and emotional concerns (as measured by the SDQ) due to parental conflict (measured by the CPIC). The researcher made two hypotheses. First, she hypothesized that the relationship between marital conflict and behavioral problems would be more pronounced for boys than girls and that the relationship between marital conflict and emotional problems would be more pronounced for girls than boys. When looking at the data, the correlations between marital conflict and behavioral and emotional problems were split by gender. All correlations were quite robust and continued to be significant for both males and females. Interestingly, correlations between frequency, resolution, and coping efficacy with conduct problems were somewhat stronger for males than females. This was also true for the correlations of perceived threat, coping efficacy, and self-blame with emotional problems. Given that parental conflict was hypothesized to be more strongly correlated with emotional problems for girls compared to boys, these results were the opposite of the researcher's hypothesis.

Additionally, although no direct hypothesis was posed, the correlation between coping efficacy with peer problems was slightly more pronounced for males than females. Across the three problem measures, the correlations between conflict and problems were often roughly equal for males and females, but when there was a difference, it was males who yielded higher correlations.

Although there are many ways in which exposure to negative marital conflict impacts adolescent development, this study suggests that these impacts may differ across genders. The researcher's hypotheses were based on these disparities and characteristics that are typically ascribed to each gender because parents treat their daughters and sons differently.

Beginning at birth, children are conditioned to develop particular characteristics based on gender, seen early through gender typing. Girl-typed toys aim to develop girls' communication skills and nurturing abilities, whereas boy-typed toys aim to develop boys' independence and competitiveness (Blakemore & Centers, 2005; Campenni, 1999). These gender differences are also highlighted through parental interactions, as mothers often engage more emotionally with their daughters than sons (Cummings et al., 1994).

In this study, the researcher found that high-marital conflict homes were associated with male adolescents turning outward with their frustrations and annoyances, showing their distress through externalizing symptoms. This is thought to be associated with the fact that boys are stereotypically less likely to show emotion, so they are not taught self-soothe. Additionally, adolescent boys seek autonomy and spend more time with their peers, yet remain unequipped with the necessary skills to resolve conflict situations and are likely to respond with anger.

By contrast, girls in high-conflict homes often present with internalizing symptoms, as girls are more likely to turn inward with their emotions, thus increasing anxiety and distress. Parents stereotypically allow their daughters to be more emotional, which is understood to be a reason why girls respond less frequently with outward anger and more often with inward emotions.

In terms of parental interactions, parents frequently believe boys can manage more emotional stress and thus allow more opportunities for their sons to be involved with the conflict, either directly or indirectly, than they do with their daughters (Cummings et al., 1994). However, interestingly, research shows that the closer the relationship between a mother and daughter, the more involvement the daughter will have in the conflict (Cui &

Finchman, 2010). The close connection between mother and daughter results in the mother feeling more comfortable sharing her marital conflicts with her daughter. This shows that stereotypes, in combination with how parents react to these stereotypes, influence how adolescents are influenced by negative marital conflict. In this study, although both boys and girls expressed more emotional, social, and peer problems when they perceived greater marital discord, this effect sometimes appeared to be more pronounced for boys, suggesting they may be less resilient to parental discord and manifest their distress in emotional, conduct, and peer problems.

Marital Discord

According to the social learning theory, exposure to aggressive marital conflict provides children with a model for aggressive responding that children imitate and generalize to interpersonal conflict situations at home and school (Bandura, 1977; Cummings & Davies, 1994). Repeated exposure to aggressive marital conflict sensitizes children to the cues of impending conflict, such that even harmless disagreements between peers are interpreted as signs of impending conflict. This sensitivity to conflict heightens distress and triggers aggressive reactions.

In addition, the emotional security framework suggests that negative emotional reactivity and negative interparental representations in response to the repeated marital conflict may begin to generalize across time and settings (Davies et al., 2001; Grych & Finchman, 1993). The marital relationship also addresses and correlates to variables such as social skills, parents' child-rearing skills, adolescent behaviors, poor emotional regulation, difficulties properly dealing with conflict, and more frequently presented indicators of anxiety and depression.

Marital discord, much like divorce, affects long-term outcomes for adolescents and young adults. In addition to the individual's psychological health, experiencing marital discord also affects personal beliefs and values about divorce and how one addresses conflict in a relationship. Young adults often replicate the family structures within which they grew up, and based on those experiences, young adults may view marriage less positively and self-report a greater acceptance of divorce.

Marital Status

In addition to surveying students in a standard classroom, this study attempted to oversample adolescents experiencing marital discord by recruiting from programs that assist children when their parents experienced high levels of conflict. To this end, the researcher received responses from adolescents with parents who were married, divorced, separated, remarried, and widowed. The study results indicated that family structure impacts marital discord between parents. For many outcomes, adolescents with separated and/or divorced parents fared worse compared to those from two-parent homes. Although often worse for adolescents from divorced and separated homes, marital discord presents a significant risk factor for various adolescent issues across marital status.

The researcher ran a one-way ANOVA on the main study variables to see if parental marital status was associated with parental conflict, problems, and spirituality. For most parental conflict subscales, participants with separated and divorced parents had greater parental conflict than those with married parents. Children with separated or divorced parents tended to show more emotional and peer difficulties than participants with married parents. Children with separated parents also tended to have more conduct problems than those with married parents. Regarding spirituality, individuals with separated parents were less spiritual

than those with married parents. The overall pattern suggests some disadvantages for children of divorced or separated parents compared to children of married parents.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

The study results support the notion that marital conflict may have a negative impact on adolescents; in particular, adolescents from divorced or separated homes can be even more vulnerable. Adolescents who grow up in families overwhelmed with marital conflict experience challenges in their social, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual development. Some of these effects may be even more pronounced for boys than girls. Adolescence is a time of intense physical, social, and emotional changes, making it imperative for educators, parents, and Rabbis interacting with this population to explore the negative influences that marital conflict can have on youth. This is even more prudent for Orthodox Jews who view marriage as vitally important.

Clinical Limitations

As with all research, this study's limitations are constrained in generalizability and applicability and cannot represent all adolescents. Larger, more diverse samples might allow researchers to assess other personal and familial factors that affect outcomes.

This study relied on the adolescents' perceptions; therefore, the study results are based on how each individual interpreted their reality. Children's perceptions about their lives and well-being are subjective. Two different children can be in the same situation and react differently. Therefore, the study results and data are based on a subjective lens and do not necessarily reflect what others might see or experience or other objective measures.

This study explored the connection to spirituality in a broad sense without a real connection to religious observance, something that is core to identifying as a Modern

Orthodox Jew. The spirituality survey used, though reflective of the individual's beliefs and the effects that those beliefs have, is not reflective of the Orthodox community norms, such as but not limited to kashrut (dietary laws), daily worship, traditional prayers and ceremonies, laws of modesty, and regular and intensive Torah study.

Last, this study presented with a limited number of constructs. In quantitative dissertations, the researcher is able to clearly measure and relate constructs to one another. The constructs examined in this study were limited, and there are likely many more constructs that are relative to adolescents and marriage that should have been included.

Recommendations for Further Research

This research has contributed to the body of literature on adolescents' well-being within the Jewish Orthodox community. The following are the researcher's recommendations for further research.

Recommendation 1

This study primarily examined the spiritual and psycho-social well-being of the adolescent, with evidence indicating that marital conflict is associated with decreased spirituality and increased internalizing, externalizing, and peer difficulties in adolescence. Beyond the spiritual, social, and emotional adversities that adolescents experience, further research can explore if negative marital conflict is associated with adolescents' cognitive performance, namely academic functioning. Educators may gain insight by exploring if students who experience family transitions during adolescence have a decline in grades and/or averages, as well as studying how adolescents' preoccupation with home conflicts challenges their ability to focus on schoolwork and academic achievement.

Recommendation 2

Adolescence is characterized by increased personal independence and responsibility and decreased parental monitoring. However, for adolescents from high-conflict homes, parental monitoring may decrease rapidly and excessively because parents are absorbed in the conflict. Further, unrealistic expectations, such as preparing meals for younger siblings, getting themselves and their siblings to and from school, or mediating conflict between the parents, may be placed upon the adolescents. This may be even more pronounced for children after separation or divorce. Exploring the unattainable responsibilities and expectations of the youth within the home can help support these youths' well-being.

Recommendation 3

Marital conflict can be disruptive and damaging. Further studies can determine the actual content of the conflict and any differences between overt and covert conflicts. Overt conflict is where there is little left to the imagination, whereas covert conflict is done in secret or with subtlety. Further research can look at the child's reaction when conflicts are not discussed or actively hidden from the child to address how the conflict is handled and determine its effect on the child's perception and psycho-well-being.

Recommendation 4

This study over-sampled the demographics to attempt to include more children from divorced, single-parent homes. A more comprehensive study that is limited to adolescents from divorced homes or a much larger sample to include many more children with divorced or separated parents may allow for a more fine-tuned exploration of these populations and better address their unique needs and challenges.

Recommendation 5

This study was quantitative in nature and focused solely on the adolescents'

viewpoints. Adding a qualitative lens using interviews and behavioral assessment could

provide a more nuanced understanding. Behavioral observations can focus on how the

individual adolescent interacts with their environment. Because of its direct nature,

behavioral observation is particularly well suited for this research and can provide a

systematic record of behavior that can be used in preliminary evaluations and intervention

planning and design. In addition, the use of different forms of assessment (e.g., interviews

and rating scales) and sources (e.g., teachers, parents, and children) could further elucidate

how a child responds to parental conflict.

Recommendation 6

It would be ideal to observe how adolescents in high-conflict homes change over

time. Longitudinal data allow researchers to explore dynamic rather than static concepts and

are important for understanding how people move from one situation and or stage to another.

Further research could help determine the link between earlier life circumstances and later

outcomes, as well as find trends and relationships within the data collected.

Recommendation 7

Finally, a direct assessment of religious practice may allow researchers to determine

how parental conflict relates to both spiritual beliefs and the daily practices that define

Modern Orthodox Jews. When raising religious Jewish children, there is a particular focus on

instilling these practices for them to maintain for the rest of their lives and to eventually

instill in their own children.

Implications for Jewish Educators

Build Relationships

There is perhaps no relationship that holds greater responsibility or reward than the relationships educators develop with children. Building relationships with each child over time can help the educator get to know their student better and learn about each individual's unique family structure and needs. Additionally, children who have a positive relationship with an educator have an increased sense of belonging and feel encouraged to express themselves freely. The feeling of belonging and acceptance for many children can create an environment of trust and mutual respect; this is necessary for all children, especially those who have challenging home lives.

Promoting Spirituality

It is crucial to consider that considering spirituality may help educators understand and engage in teaching in more meaningful and complex ways and contribute to a more inclusive pedagogy. Children's close relationships with their educators may further promote their identity development, which is found to be connected to confidence, honor, and acceptance of who they are. Identity development is also connected to the development of self-respect, self-love, a sense of authenticity, and a sense of belonging and connectedness, something these students are missing and may initiate the nurturing of spirituality.

Social-Emotional Skills

Relationships play a key part in every child or young person's well-being, as healthy relationships help a child feel secure and supported. It is imperative for educators to engage in conversations with adolescents by asking them questions and valuing their opinions. Adolescents can form healthy relationships when educators (a) teach relationship-building

and communication skills, (b) serve as role models, and (c) show students how to identify

and maintain healthy relationships.

Recognizing Signs

It is common for youths to be grumpy, hostile, easily frustrated, or prone to angry

outbursts; however, adults should be aware of behaviors that are outside of the scope of

normal behavior. Although it may not warrant a specific diagnosis, displaying one or a

combination of these signs should be closely monitored for any patterns because they may be

indications that intervention is needed. Educators must look out for the students who are

noticeably depressed and anxious, acting out, or experiencing social problems and inquire

about their well-being as well as provide support and a safe place for students.

Assist Families

Educators can assist parents in recognizing the negative effects their fighting can have

on their children and guide them to and through counseling. Additionally, educators should

build rapport with social-service agencies that can provide families with comprehensive leads

and support. If parents were made aware that their conflict might contribute to emotional,

conduct, and peer problems as well as a decreased sense of spirituality, they may become

more motivated to find solutions.

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Appendix A: Organization/School Consent

This research is being conducted by Ms. Estee Scher, a student at Yeshiva University Azrieli Graduate Program, under Dr. David Pelcovitz as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

I am studying the effect of marital discord on children of divorce. This study looks at how, what, and if adolescents identify themselves in correlation with their parent's marital conflict. The survey contains 3 measures and will take approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. The survey, as well as responses, are completely anonymous. The survey will not ask for names or any other identifying information. Please note that participation is completely voluntary; participants may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Specifically, one survey will be questioning the teenagers' difficulties and strength, a second survey will measure the adolescent's perception of their parents' marital quality, and a third regards the adolescent's spiritual views. This study seeks to identify factors that will improve the social, emotional, and behavioral processes of adolescents whose parents have divorced.

If successful, this study may contribute to better our understanding of children/adolescents of divorce in our Jewish Orthodox schools and community at large.

I am hereby seeking your consent to distribute the surveys to participants of your organization. I will provide copies of the measures, and consent and assent forms to be used in the research process.

I am available to answer any questions regarding the procedures of this study. Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide your organization with a copy of the full research report. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at esteescher@gmail.com.

Concerns of any aspect of this study may be referred to Professor David Pelcovitz, the thesis advisor at dpelcovitz@gmail.com.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Estee Scher

Appendix B: Parent Assent

My name is Ms. Estee Scher, a student at Yeshiva University Azrieli Graduate Program, and I am working under Dr. David Pelcovitz as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. Thank you for your participation in this research study that examines how adolescents respond to parental disagreements. Your middle school/high school student will be asked to complete three anonymous surveys. One survey will have them report on their strengths and difficulties, a second survey focuses on the parental relationship and conflicts, and a third regarding their spiritual views. Adolescents usually find answering these sorts of questions interesting and are happy to share their opinions.

Their participation will require approximately 20-30 minutes. If successful, this study may contribute to better our understanding of how adolescents manage parental discord and support their social and emotional development in our Jewish Orthodox schools and community at large.

The data collected in this research project will be kept confidential. The child's name will not be on any of the materials and will not be stored with the data, and this consent form will be stored separately from your adolescent data. Reports of this study will not include individual data in a form your child could be identified. The researcher will store data from this study with the information placed on a secure server using a protected software system.

Adolescent participation in this study is entirely voluntary. The adolescent may refuse to answer individual questions or engage in individual activities. The adolescent may also

discontinue all participation in this study at any time. Confidentiality is of utmost importance, and the teachers, schools, and any outside organizations will not be provided with information regarding a specific child's performance on any of the study tasks. I am happy to share the final results of the study but that would involve describing aggregate data only to ensure no child can be identified.

I am happy to answer any questions regarding this study and can be contacted at esteescher@gmail.com. Concerns regarding any aspect of this study may be referred to Professor David Pelcovitz, the thesis advisor, at dpelcovitz@gmail.com.

Appendix C: Adolescent Assent

This research is being conducted by Ms. Estee Scher, a student at Yeshiva University Azrieli Graduate Program, under Dr. David Pelcovitz as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

This study seeks to identify how parental disagreements affect the social, emotional, behavioral and spiritual processes of adolescents. The survey contains 3 measures and will take approximately 20-30 minutes for you to complete. The survey, as well as your responses, are completely anonymous. The survey will not ask for your name or any other identifying information. Please note that your participation is completely voluntary; you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. You may also decline to answer any single question or group of questions asked in the questionnaire. If you cannot complete the study in one sitting, you can return to it later as long as you are on the same electronic device. To return to the survey, just click on the original link.

We take steps to protect your anonymity. However, some employers use software that tracks web pages visited and keystrokes. Therefore, you may wish to complete the survey on your personal electronic device.

I am happy to answer any questions regarding this study and can be contacted at esteescher@gmail.com. Concerns regarding any aspect of this study may be referred to Professor David Pelcovitz, the thesis advisor, at dpelcovitz@gmail.com.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Estee Scher

_____

    Date

Appendix D: Demographics Questionnaire

Participants were asked to click on appropriate circle.

Age: 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18

Gender: Male, Female, Other

Grade: 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th

Siblings: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5+

Marital Status of Parent: Married, Separated, Divorced, Widowed, Remarried

Appendix E: Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

The 25 items in the SDQ comprise 5 scales of 5 items each. For the purpose of this study, we will be examining 3 out of the 5 scales.

Scoring is as follows: 0=Not True, 1=Somewhat True, 2=Certainly True

Emotional Problems Scale:

2. I get a lot of headaches.

7. I worry a lot.

11. I am often unhappy.

13. I am nervous in new situations.

20. I have many fears.

Conduct Problems Scale:

4. I get very angry.

6*. I usually do as I am told.

10. I fight a lot.

15. I am often accused of lying or cheating.

18. I take things that are not mine.

Peer Problems Scale:

5. I am usually on my own.

9. I have one good friend or more.

12. Other people my age generally like me.

16. Other children or young people pick on me.

19. I get on better with adults than with people my age.

Appendix F: Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale

This instrument was developed to assess how children view interparental conflict. There are

multiple subscales and three superordinate scales: Conflict properties (Frequency, Intensity,

Resolution), Threat (Threat, Coping Efficacy) and Self-Blame (Triangulation, Self-Blame,

Content).

Items without an asterisk are scored as follows: 0=False, 1=Sort of true 2=True.

Items with an asterisk are reversed key and scored as follows: 2=True, 1, Sort of true,

0=False.

<u>Conflict properties</u>

Frequency:

1.* I never see my parents arguing or disagreeing.

10. They may not think I know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot.

15. My parents are often mean to each other even when I'm around.

19. I often see my parents arguing.

27*. My parents hardly ever argue.

35. My parents often nag and complain about each other around the house.

Intensity:

5. My parents get really mad when they argue.

13*. When my parents have a disagreement they discuss it quietly.

22. When my parents have an argument they say mean things to each other.

31. When my parents have an argument they yell at each other.

36*. My parents hardly ever yell when they have a disagreement.

38. My parents have broken or thrown things during an argument.

43. My parents have pushed or shoved each other during an argument.

Resolution:

2*. When my parents have an argument they usually work it out.

11. Even after my parents stop arguing they stay mad at each other.

20*. When my parents disagree about something, they usually come up with a solution.

28*. When my parents argue they usually make up right away.

39*. After my parents stop arguing, they are friendly towards each other.

46. My parents still act mean after they have had an argument.

<p style="text-align:center;">Threat</p>

Perceived threat:

7. I get scared when my parents argue.

16. When my parents argue I worry about what will happen to me.

24. When my parents argue I'm afraid that something bad will happen.

33. When my parents argue I worry that one of them will get hurt.

40. When my parents argue I'm afraid that they will yell at me too.

45. When my parents argue I worry that they might get divorced.

Coping efficacy:

6*. When my parents argue I can do something to make myself feel better.

14. I don't know what to do when my parents have arguments.

23*. When my parents argue or disagree I can usually help make things better.

32. When my parents argue there's nothing I can do to stop them.

44. When my parents argue or disagree there's nothing I can do to make myself feel better.

48. When my parents argue they don't listen to anything I say.

<u>Self-blame</u>

Triangulation:

4. When my parents argue I end up getting involved somehow.

8. I feel caught in the middle when my parents argue.

12. When my parents argue I try to do something to stop them.

17*. I don't feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement.

25. My mom wants me to be on her side when she and my dad argue.

30*. I don't get involved when my parents argue.

34. I feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement.

42. My dad wants me to be on his side when he and my mom argue.

Self-blame:

9*. I'm not to blame when my parents have arguments.

18. It's usually my fault when my parents argue.

26. Even if they don't say it, I know I'm to blame when my parents argue.

41. My parents blame me when they have arguments.

47*. Usually, it's not my fault when my parents have arguments.

Content:

3. My parents often get into arguments about things I do at school.

21. My parents' arguments are usually about me.

29. My parents usually argue or disagree because of things that I do.

37. My parents often get into arguments when I do something wrong.

Appendix G: The Teen Spirituality Survey

The survey is measuring teenagers' awareness or awakening to universal unity—Being or becoming aware of the sacredness of oneself, others, and the universe Cultivating identity, relationships, meaning, and purpose that flow from this awareness.

- Spiritual awareness is experienced with great diversity, and may include the following experiences and perspectives.

- Seeking to connect in relationship to oneself, others, and to one's understanding of the transcendent (often including an understanding of God).

- Seeking to live a life that incorporates an awareness of the sacred.

The Adolescent Scale is scored on a five-point scale as follows, Not at all, A little, Somewhat, A lot, Completely.

Please indicate how much you believe the following.

- There is a God.

- There is a higher power.

- There are angels.

- There is a sacredness to all life.

- That all life is connected.

- That I am connected to a higher power.

- That I have a soul.

- There is a single source of all life.

How much does your belief that something exists beyond the everyday world…

- Give you the strength to make it through the hard times.

- Protect you from harm.

- Affect how you treat others.

- Provide you joy in your life.

- Bring you peace in your life.

- Guide how you think and act in everyday life.

- An important part of who you are.