

Beyond Parental Divorce: The Dynamics of Identity Development in Young Adults Who Experienced Parental Divorce in Childhood

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Abstract. Parental divorce represents a critical family transition that can influence meaning-making, parent-child relationship, and identity development into young adulthood. This study aims to understand the dynamics of identity development among individuals who experienced parental divorce in childhood. Employing a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, five participants who experienced parental divorce between the ages of 0 and 10 were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that identity development is not merely shaped by the divorce event itself, but rather by how individuals make sense of the experience throughout their developmental trajectory. The results further reveal that limitations in recalling childhood memories, post-divorce parent-child relationship quality, and emotional support from primary caregivers play pivotal roles in identity development, while limitations in recalling childhood memories, reported by one participant, may also be relevant. Alongside psychological vulnerabilities, participants demonstrated adaptive functioning through the development of core life principles, commitment to healthier relationships, and aspirations to build a family distinct from their childhood experiences. This study underscores the critical role of relational contexts and subjective experiences in understanding identity development among individuals exposed to parental divorce in childhood.

Keywords: Identity development; parental divorce; meaning-making; parent-child relationship; young adulthood.

1 Introduction

Parental divorce is widely recognized as one of the most disruptive family transitions in childhood, often altering caregiving structures, attachment relationships, and children's emotional security. For young children in particular, parental divorce occurs during a critical developmental period characterized by a heavy reliance on emotional stability and secure attachment to primary caregivers. Children's ability to understand family conflict and digest emotional experiences is still developing at this age, making it more difficult for them to completely understand and integrate structural changes within the family system (Santrock, 2019). Consequently, altered caregiving dynamics and family relationships following a divorce may fundamentally shape how children construct perceptions of themselves, others, and their ongoing life experiences (Ramadhani & Krisnani, 2019; Suryani et al., 2024).

From a developmental psychology perspective, Erikson (1968) positions identity development as a crucial developmental task, particularly during adolescence and young adulthood. An individual's identity is created by integrating their personal ideals, past experiences, and social expectations. Consequently, early family experiences including parental divorce during childhood serve as critical contexts worth examining, as they can influence how individuals incorporate past life events into their identity development in subsequent stages. Building a cohesive sense of self and guiding identity trajectories depend heavily on childhood experiences, particularly parental interactions and important family events. Additionally, although the method of adjustment differs among individuals, Erikson (1982) highlights that early experiences that are not adaptively integrated may impede the identity development process in later developmental periods.

People from divorced families often struggle psychologically with self-concept and self-esteem, according to an increasing amount of research. For example, Kristina and Wrastari (2021) showed that the dynamics of adolescent self-concept are significantly influenced by the age of the kid at the time of divorce. Adolescents and emerging adults from divorced homes typically have weaker resilience and self-esteem than those from intact families, according to other empirical research (Iskandar et al., 2023; Mayfani et al., 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2024; Valencia & Soetikno, 2022). Furthermore, post-divorce parent-child attachment quality significantly influences self-esteem development and self-perception (Meisyah & Cahyanti, 2022). Taken together, these findings suggest that parental divorce is linked not only to psychological well-being but also to various core components underlying identity development, including self-concept, self-esteem, and parental relationship quality.

Conversely, experiencing parental divorce does not invariably lead to adverse psychological outcomes. When supported by meaningful interpersonal interactions and social support, certain people show the ability to develop higher levels of self-acceptance, motivation, and subjective well-being (Samya et al., 2020; Tonari & Aminah, 2023). This variation highlights the individual responses to parental divorce are far from uniform, mediated substantially by the quality of available social support and relational bonds. Consequently, identity development among individuals from divorced backgrounds is inherently dynamic, shaped extensively by relational contexts and unique subjective experiences.

Beyond emotional and relational dimensions, exposure to family distress can also impair how individuals recall and make sense of their past. In some cases, individuals exhibit restricted access to specific memories of emotionally charged childhood experiences, particularly when such events are tied to family conflict or painful encounters (Schimmenti & Caretti, 2016). Indeed, existing literature indicates that intense emotional experiences during childhood can significantly alter memory processing and the narrative construction of past events (Schimmenti & Caretti, 2016). Such memory constraints may subsequently

hamper an individual's ability to construct a coherent self-narrative and integrate past experiences into their present identity.

The dynamics of parent child relationships after separation are also significantly impacted by parental divorce. Children usually live with one parent, but their continued relationship with the non-custodial parent varies greatly, from long-lasting emotional ties to contacts limited to financial support or even total disengagement. Previous studies show that emotional support and relationship quality from parents especially the primary caregiver are crucial in helping kids develop motivation, emotional control, and a more adaptive self-perception and future (Ramadhani & Krisnani, 2019; Meisyah & Cahyanti, 2022). Consequently, these variations in post-divorce parental relationship quality constitute a critical context for understanding how individuals construct self-meaning and develop identity in subsequent developmental stages.

Nevertheless, many prior studies have employed quantitative approaches focusing on relationships between psychological variables, such as parental attachment and psychosocial among adolescents from divorced families. Such approaches fall short of fully capturing how individuals subjectively interpret and assign meaning to their parent's divorce as an integral part of their identity development journey. Meanwhile, qualitative research by Kristina and Wrastari (2021) explored the dynamics of self-concept among adolescents of divorced parents according to their age at the time of divorced. However, that study centered on self-concept rather than identity development, and its participants were limited to adolescents. Consequently, qualitative inquiries are needed to deeply explore the dynamic experiences of individuals who underwent parental divorce at an early age, including how these experiences are integrated into their self-concept, social relationships, and worldview during adolescence and young adulthood. Gaining insight into how individuals integrate early parental divorce into their identity development is vital, as it offers a more comprehensive understanding of psychological adaptation processes that cannot be fully explained merely through inter-variable associations.

Building upon these considerations, this study aims to expand current understanding of how early childhood parental divorce experiences are integrated into identity trajectories during young adulthood. Furthermore, this research is expected to offer theoretical contributions to the study of identity development within non-intact family contexts, while providing a more comprehensive grasp of the psychological experiences of individuals raised in divorced families.

2 Methods

This study adopted a qualitative methodology, combining a phenomenological design with thematic analysis, to explore individuals' subjective experiences of identity development in the aftermath of early parental divorce. A phenomenological approach was deemed appropriate given its capacity to elucidate the meaning of lived experience as interpreted by participants themselves (Creswell, 2013). Thematic analysis was additionally employed to systematically identify patterns of meaning within participants' accounts, while preserving the study's underlying phenomenological orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This methodological pairing corresponds directly to the study's central aim: to examine how such experiences become integrated into the process of identity formation, as understood through Erikson's (1968) framework of psychosocial development.

Identity development constitutes the central construct of the present study. Following Erikson's (1968, 1982) theoretical framework, identity is understood as a developmental process that emerges through the synthesis of lived experience, exploration of personal values, and the gradual consolidation of self-commitment across the lifespan. Guided by this conceptualization, the study adopts identity development as its principal analytic lens,

examining how participants' experiences of parental divorce in childhood become incorporated into the broader narrative of their psychological development.

The sample consisted of five participants (four female, one male) within the young adulthood range (18–22 years), selected on the basis that each had experienced parental divorce during childhood (0–10 years of age). Following parental divorce, all participants were raised primarily by their mothers; however, the nature of their relationships with their fathers differed considerably, spanning continued emotional closeness, contact restricted to financial provision, and, in some cases, complete paternal absence. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that participant characteristics corresponded closely with the aims of the study. The sample size of five participants was considered adequate on the basis of information power (Malterud et al., 2016). The study addressed a narrow aim and drew on a highly specific sample, and each participant provided rich, in-depth accounts of their experiences. Although these experiences were individually complex, shared themes were obvious across participants, while variety in father-child interactions and the inclusion of both female and male participants provided diversity of perspectives. Accordingly, five participants were deemed sufficient to address the research aims. This study did not aim to claim thematic saturation, and its findings are not intended to be generalized beyond the participants' experiences.

Data were gathered via face-to-face, in-depth interviews with all participants, each lasting approximately 45–60 minutes. A semi-structured interview guide was employed, operationalized around the core dimensions of Erikson's (1968) theory of identity development namely, self-continuity and integration, psychosocial relationships, and commitment to personal values and future orientations. All sessions were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent, ensuring accurate transcription and subsequent analysis. Consistent with the epistemological assumptions of qualitative research, the researchers themselves functioned as the primary research instrument, with the interview guide serving a supplementary role in data collection. Parenthetical codes accompanying participant quotations denote interview transcript identifiers, included to support the study's data audit trail.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis as frameworked by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analytical process involved thoroughly reading and understanding the data, generating initial codes for relevant segments, collating codes into themes and subthemes, and interpreting these themes with reference to Erikson's framework of identity development (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Erikson, 1968). Prior to the interviews, all participants were briefed regarding the study's objectives and voluntarily provided informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning pseudonyms throughout the analysis and reporting phases. To ensure data trustworthiness, the researchers cross-examined information across participants to identify consistent patterns and emerging themes. Furthermore, member checking was conducted by seeking participant confirmation on the interpretative findings, alongside peer debriefing sessions to minimize researcher bias.

3 Results

Thematic analysis of the interview data across the five participants yielded eight major themes: (1) processes of making sense of the divorce, (2) post-divorce impacts on the child, (3) patterns of communication with the non-resident parent, (4) perspectives on childhood, (5) emotional post-divorce experiences, (6) emotional support and family validation, (7) future aspirations, and (8) life principles emerging in the aftermath of divorce.

3.1 Processes of making sense of the divorce

Participants' comprehension of their parents' divorce did not emerge instantaneously but rather developed over time, shaped by lived experience and their own attempts to interpret accompanying changes within the family unit. A number of participants indicated that they had not been given adequate explanations at the time of the divorce, frequently because adults deemed them too young to receive such information; others recalled being offered explanations that they were nonetheless unable to grasp fully, given that their cognitive and emotional development had not yet reached a stage capable of processing the significance and enduring implications of parental separation. In the absence of sufficient clarity, participants were left to construct their own understanding of the transformations occurring within family life for instance, the discontinuation of seeing both parents together or a diminished frequency of contact with one parent. This pattern is reflected in the account of Ema, who, despite having been given an explanation, was not yet equipped to process it owing to her age at the time: "...my grandmother told me that my father and mother were divorced, but as a young child, I didn't understand what divorce meant, what it looked like, or how it worked..." (*w1n1p5, page 2*). Her account demonstrates that although information regarding the divorce had been communicated, the participant's developmental stage at the time constrained her capacity to fully assimilate its meaning.

3.2 Post-divorce impacts on the child

All participants recounted a range of psychological consequences stemming from their parents' early divorce, effects that continue to shape their lives at present. A minority of participants, however, also identified certain positive outcomes; Ema, for example, described the experience as having ultimately fostered personal growth. Even so, negative consequences were far more prevalent than positive ones across the sample. These difficulties spanned multiple psychological domains, encompassing fear responses, reduced self-confidence, and challenges in interpersonal functioning. Ema recounted: "...at first, my sibling and I were even afraid of meeting people, because in my mindset, I thought people would be angry with us or something, just because I saw how my mother was treated." (*w1n1p6, page 3*). This account suggests that exposure to parental conflict generated not only childhood fear but also a lasting perception of the social world as potentially hostile.

Una, by contrast, articulated reservations about marriage as she looks toward the future: "...and looking ahead, I sometimes think maybe it's better not to get married at all, rather than ending up divorced later." (*w1n4p6, page 30*). Whereas Ema's account centered largely on emotional consequences experienced in childhood, Una's reflections point to a further dimension of impact: early exposure to parental divorce may also shape attitudes toward romantic partnership and marriage as individuals enter young adulthood.

3.3 Patterns of communication with the non-resident parent

Findings from the interviews indicated substantial variation in how participants sustained contact with their non-resident parent, particularly their fathers, following parental divorce. Although all participants lived with their mothers post-divorce, the trajectories of their paternal relationships diverged markedly. For a subset of participants, emotionally warm ties with the father were preserved, sustained through both face-to-face and remote contact. Rosa illustrated this pattern: "Yes, we still do. Usually, we go out, or he calls and asks, 'Where are you?' Also, my father's workplace is close to my mother's house, so we often bump into each other like, 'Oh, there's my father,' and then I'd go over and kiss his hand [*salaman*]." (*w1n3p12, page 29–30*). Her account suggests that, notwithstanding the dissolution of the parental marriage, an affectively meaningful bond with the father could be maintained through sustained interaction and periodic face-to-face contact.

By contrast, other participants described paternal contact that was confined almost exclusively to instrumental, financially oriented exchanges, with little accompanying emotional engagement. Ema, for instance, characterized the relationship in minimal terms: "Umm, only for... umm, financial needs." (*w1n1p16, page 5*). Probed further on the nature of their communication, she elaborated: "There is, but it's not that intense. It's only when I need to remind him about tuition fees, living expenses, or if there's any event like a student orientation [makrab] and other things supporting my career and education, we still communicate." (*w1n1p17, page 5*). In contrast to Rosa's experience, Ema's contact with her father was organized principally around the discharge of financial obligations, leaving little room for affective exchange. A further participant, Una, reported a complete absence of contact with her father since the point of separation: "Ever since then, we haven't been in contact at all up until now, ever since I was two years old." (*w1n4p1, page 32*). Taken together, this heterogeneity in post-divorce communication patterns suggests that parental divorce reconfigures not only family structure but also the qualitative character of the parent–child relationship a shift that, in turn, appears to inform how individuals subsequently interpret and construct meaning around their parental figures.

3.4 Perspectives on childhood

During reflection on childhood experiences, emotional reactions including tearfulness were observed among several participants, particularly when they were asked to compare their sense of self before and after their parents' divorce. Thia, for instance, remarked: "...I just want to hug my past self, because my past was kind of dark." (*w1n2p16, page 17*). This statement illustrates that childhood is retrospectively construed as a period marked by lasting emotional wounds; accordingly, participants' reflections were characterized predominantly by an impulse toward self-compassion and a desire to comfort their younger selves.

Notably, one participant reported difficulty recalling specific details from her childhood, especially in relation to the period immediately following her parents' divorce. This suggests that memories associated with that particular phase may be less accessible during retrospective reflection, possibly reflecting a form of protective forgetting or the diminished salience of encoded experiences from that time.

3.5 Emotional post-divorce experiences

Participants' emotional reactions to parental divorce were heterogeneous, spanning envy of peers from intact families, diminished self-esteem, grief, a sense of loss, and fear, alongside feelings of relief.

For a number of participants, relief emerged specifically from the cessation of ongoing conflict between their parents. This relief was especially salient among those who had observed a parent enduring distressing treatment throughout the marriage. Divorce, therefore, was not consistently construed as an unequivocally negative event; rather, it constituted an experience marked by the coexistence of loss and relief. Ema described this duality as follows: "...if you ask if I was happy, I wasn't happy, but there was a happy side because my mother no longer had to endure the harshness and pain of her relationship with my father. Also, I'm glad because that experience shaped who I am today." (*w1n1p25, page 8*). This account illustrates that divorce is not invariably experienced as wholly damaging; for some participants, the end of interparental conflict engendered a sense of security and functioned as a catalyst for a more affirming sense of self.

Responses across participants nonetheless diverged considerably: whereas some derived motivation from their experience, others reported feelings of inadequacy when confronted with what they perceived as "ideal" or intact family structures. Una's account illustrates this

pattern: "...for instance, when a guy approaches me and his family is really intact [keluarga cemara], I'm like 'wow, his family is so intact,' and ultimately, I feel inferior." (*wln4p16, page 31*). Unlike Ema, Una's narrative centered predominantly on feelings of inferiority arising from comparisons with peers from non-divorced families. Taken together, these contrasting cases suggest that parental divorce experienced early in life can exert a lasting influence on individuals' self-perception within social and romantic domains well into young adulthood.

3.6 Emotional support and family validation

Emotional support, validation, and relational closeness with parents especially the mother, who typically served as the resident parent along with extended family members, emerged as a central factor shaping identity development among individuals who had experienced parental divorce. The perceived quality of this support appeared to shape participants' self-concept and future orientation. Among some participants, such support functioned as a source of motivation and personal growth, while among others, its relative absence was associated with feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and other forms of psychological distress. This pattern is illustrated in the words of encouragement Ema received from her grandmother: "Given my broken home background, my grandmother often instilled in me that my parents wouldn't be able to accompany me forever. So she'd say, 'How are you going to grow? You should feel hurt by this situation, but use it as drive to succeed. Don't let this condition become an excuse for you to feel like "I can't do this, I can't do that."' So this situation kind of made me want to continuously grow..." (*wln1p5, page 3*). Taken together, this account suggests that although Ema's relationship with her father was confined largely to financial provision, the sustained support and validation she received from her mother and grandmother operated as protective factors enabling her to reinterpret her experience of parental divorce as a source of motivation for ongoing personal growth.

3.7 Future aspirations

Across the sample, participants uniformly articulated a desire to construct a life markedly different from the one they had experienced in their family of origin during childhood. Such aspirations included the formation of a more harmonious family unit, the deliberate selection of a partner who would not reproduce their parents' relational patterns, and the adoption of a warmer, more emotionally supportive approach to parenting. Among female participants, particular emphasis was placed on achieving self-reliance and financial independence from a future spouse. The male participant, Samsul, meanwhile, articulated a resolute determination to avoid replicating the negative behaviors he had witnessed within his family of origin, a determination rooted in his own firsthand experience of the associated pain: "...when I have my own family, there's one thing I've always ingrained in myself: I will never repeat this to my future children. What I felt was painful, and I don't want the same thing to happen to my children." (*wln5p11, page 39*). This account illustrates that adverse childhood experiences are not solely construed as sources of suffering; rather, they may also function as a foundation upon which individuals build an explicit, forward-looking commitment to enact different parenting practices.

3.8 Life principles emerging in the aftermath of divorce

Early parental divorce also appeared to inform a set of enduring life principles that participants continued to draw upon into adulthood, including beliefs in the solvability of problems, the value of independence, and a wariness toward interpersonal trust. Ema, for

instance, articulated a conviction that hardship is inherently temporary: "...whatever problems exist right now won't last forever; it won't be constant trouble every single day. There will always be a way out and a day to think about how I move forward..." (*w1n1p27, page 9*). This account suggests that confronting earlier adversity led the participant to develop a belief in her own capacity to overcome difficulty, which subsequently functioned as a resource for approaching future challenges. Such principles appear to constitute a core component of participants' self-meaning and lived experience, informing decision-making and relational patterns during young adulthood.

Thia, by contrast, framed her experience as motivation to cultivate a distinctive personal identity, driven by a desire not to be underestimated on account of her family circumstances: "...unique, I have to be a unique person, I have to stand out, because that's the only way I'll get noticed..." (*w1n2p36, page 21*).

Meanwhile, Una arrived at a different guiding principle, emphasizing self-protection in relationships: "Don't rely too much on other people, and don't trust people easily." (*w1n4p32, page 35*). Taken together, these divergent life principles indicate that each participant constructed a distinct mechanism for integrating the experience of parental divorce into her broader process of identity development.

4 Discussion

The results of the present study indicate that parental divorce experienced in early childhood is associated with heterogeneous and multifaceted patterns of identity development, rather than a single, uniform trajectory. Notably, identity outcomes appear to be shaped less by the divorce event per se and more by the individual's subjective interpretation of that experience that is, the ways in which it is cognitively appraised, emotionally processed, and subsequently incorporated into the developing self-narrative. This interpretation is consistent with Erikson's (1968) theoretical framework, which posits that identity formation arises through a reflective engagement with significant life experiences, particularly those situated within the relational context of the family.

A notable outcome of this study concerns the difficulty one participants exhibited in recalling childhood experiences, particularly those surrounding the early period of her parents' separation. This pattern suggests that emotionally intense experiences occurring in childhood are not necessarily encoded or retained in a form that remains fully accessible to conscious recollection. Such an interpretation is consistent with the work of Schimmenti and Caretti (2016), who proposed that highly distressing childhood experiences can influence the extent to which individuals are later able to retrieve and reinterpret those events. Viewed through the lens of psychological development, this restricted access to early memories may function as an adaptive mechanism through which individuals manage experiences that were subjectively overwhelming at the time they occurred. Correspondingly, the finding points to possible challenges in incorporating certain past experiences into a coherent self-narrative, a process Erikson (1982) identified as central to identity formation. Rather than reflecting clinical pathology, these memory constraints appear to represent one of several strategies individuals employ to regulate difficult emotional material. Taken together, this finding contributes to a deeper understanding of identity development among individuals from divorced families, particularly those who experienced parental separation at an early developmental stage.

Moreover, the present findings suggest that the quality of the parent-child bond especially with mothers, who typically served as the primary caregiver following divorce substantially shaped participants' emotional functioning and identity formation. Those who sustained close emotional ties with their mothers exhibited greater motivation, a stronger sense of emotional

security, and more favorable self-perceptions. Sustained maternal emotional support appeared to facilitate participants' reframing of the divorce as a manageable and surmountable life transition. These results suggest that emotional support and parental attachment shape not only self-esteem among individuals from divorced families, as documented by Meisyah and Cahyanti (2022), but also the manner in which such individuals incorporate the divorce experience into their broader sense of identity. This pattern corroborates earlier research indicating that social support networks serve a critical function in buffering adverse psychological effects and promoting resilience among individuals with divorced parents (Iskandar et al., 2023; Rahmawati et al., 2024). The present study thus builds on this body of work by moving beyond self-esteem to examine the more comprehensive process of identity development.

In contrast, participants who reported emotionally distant relationships with their mothers demonstrated a more ambivalent affective profile. Within this subgroup, a recurring pattern emerged in which anger directed at the mother was frequently misattributed, subsequently giving way to feelings of guilt and remorse. This pattern is suggestive of attachment-related ambivalence, characterized by a coexisting desire for relational closeness and the presence of unprocessed, repressed affect that has not been adaptively integrated. Rather than representing outright rejection of the maternal figure, the expressed anger appears to function as an indirect expression of unmet emotional needs. These dynamics may have downstream implications for emotional regulation and identity formation, particularly as they manifest in adult interpersonal relationships.

Post-divorce variations in the father-child relationship also appear to carry meaningful consequences for participants' identity development. In cases where contact with the father was limited to financial provision or where the emotional bond was severed entirely some participants grew up without a substantive relational figure during a critical developmental period. This void shaped the way participants interpreted family roles and later approached intimate relationships. Whereas Kristina and Wrastari (2021) focused primarily on how the quality of post-divorce relationships affects self-concept, the present findings suggest that it is the emotional significance individuals assign to these relationships rather than relationship quality alone that plays a determining role in identity formation.

Nevertheless, the present findings also point to processes of adjustment and psychological maturation among the participants. This is consistent with the work of Samya et al. (2020) and Tonari and Aminah (2023), who found that individuals raised in divorced families remain capable of cultivating self-acceptance, motivation, and psychological well-being through adaptive coping and social support. The majority of participants formed guiding life principles centered on independence, caution in relationships, and a strong determination to avoid replicating their parents' relational dynamics. This pattern is reflected in participants' hopes of building more harmonious families of their own and adopting parenting approaches that differ from those they experienced growing up. Drawing on Erikson's (1968) theoretical framework, this pattern may be interpreted as an individual's attempt to forge identity commitments through critical reflection on difficult life circumstances. Taken together, these results suggest that parental divorce is not solely a source of risk, but may also function as an impetus for the development of clearer personal values and life direction.

Although every participant had experienced parental divorce in early childhood, differences in the quality of parent-child relationships, the degree of family support received, and individual processes of meaning-making led to markedly different trajectories of identity development across participants. Taken together, these findings indicate that identity development among individuals raised in divorced families is not a direct outcome of the divorce event per se, but instead emerges through an ongoing process of interpreting relational experiences, receiving emotional support, and reflecting subjectively on past events. In this respect, the present study broadens the applicability of Erikson's theoretical

framework to non-intact family structures, showing that identity formation is influenced not solely by developmental stage but also by the subjective meaning individuals attribute to their relational experiences, sources of emotional support, and personal histories.

This study offers meaningful qualitative insight into identity development in the aftermath of early parental divorce; nonetheless, certain limitations warrant consideration. First, the sample skewed heavily toward female participants (four women and one man), constraining the extent to which gender-specific variation in coping strategies and identity consolidation could be examined. Second, all participants had experienced parental divorce in early childhood and were subsequently raised by their mothers; consequently, the study does not capture the experiences of those raised primarily by fathers or under shared custody arrangements. Third, the reliance on retrospective self-report data introduces the possibility of recall bias in participants' accounts of early childhood experiences. Subsequent research would benefit from a more gender-balanced sample, as well as the integration of longitudinal designs or multi-informant methods (such as interviews with custodial parents or siblings), in order to deepen understanding of how identity development unfolds over time across varied family configurations.

5 Conclusion

Findings from this study indicate that parental divorce experienced in early childhood represents a critical factor shaping the trajectory of identity formation through young adulthood. Rather than producing a homogeneous effect, the impact of this experience appears to be shaped by three key processes: the subjective meaning individuals attribute to the divorce, the degree to which childhood memories have been psychologically integrated, and the quality of the parent-child relationship in the years following the separation. Notably, in one participant had difficulty recalling childhood experiences, particularly from the period immediately following her parents' divorce, which may reflect protective forgetting or the reduced salience of memories from that time, and may in turn make it harder to construct a coherent personal meaning of the experience during young adulthood.

The quality of the parent-child bond particularly the relationship with the mother in her role as primary caregiver stands out as a critical determinant of emotional development and identity formation. A close maternal attachment appears to strengthen motivation, emotional security, and a more favorable self-concept, whereas a compromised relationship tends to manifest as emotional ambivalence, exemplified by anger that gives way to subsequent guilt. At the same time, differences in the post-divorce paternal relationship further influence how individuals come to understand family dynamics and to formulate their guiding life values in adulthood.

While parental divorce may constitute a risk factor for psychological distress, findings from the present study also underscore participants' resilience and capacity for post-adversity growth. Rather than being solely defined by hardship, individuals in this study reported developing guiding personal values, a stronger orientation toward relational health, and explicit intentions to construct family environments that diverge from those of their upbringing. These results contribute to the broader body of literature on identity formation among adult children of divorce, suggesting that such development is not a direct consequence of the divorce event per se, but is instead shaped by the individual's interpretive processes, the relational quality of post-divorce family dynamics, and the extent to which past experiences are coherently woven into an evolving self-narrative.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that parents or primary caregivers provide developmentally appropriate explanations regarding divorce, allowing children the opportunity to foster a more adaptive understanding of their family transitions. Future research could explore how family cultural background, relationships with extended family,

and experiences with stepparents contribute to identity development following parental divorce.

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