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Differences in Married Versus Maritally Disrupted Children's Frequency of Contact With Their Mothers

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DIFFERENCES IN MARRIED VERSUS MARITALLY DISRUPTED CHILDREN'S FREQUENCY OF CONTACT WITH THEIR MOTHERS

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ABSTRACT

DIFFERENCES IN MARRIED VERSUS MARITALLY DISRUPTED CHILDREN'S FREQUENCY OF CONTACT WITH THEIR MOTHERS.

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This study explores the effects of children's marital status on the frequency of contact they have with their mothers. As American society ages and marital disruption remains high, it is important to determine if there are differences in the relationships adult children have with their aging parents. A secondary analysis was conducted on data collected in 1986 for the General Social Survey. Two hypotheses were created from theory:

(1) From dependency and obligation theories, it was predicted that maritally disrupted adult children would report having greater contact with their mothers than married adult children.

(2) From status and resource adjustment theories, it was predicted that married adult children would report having greater contact with their mothers than maritally disrupted adult children.

Cross-tabular analysis revealed that marital disruption did not significantly affect the frequency of contact adult children report having with their mothers except when geographic proximity to parent's home was "near." Then, married respondents had significantly more frequent contact with mothers than did maritally disrupted respondents ($p<0.05$). With few exceptions, all respondents saw their mothers on a weekly or greater basis. It is concluded that the adult child-parent relationship perseveres regardless of

marital status and even when potentially influencing factors such as respondent's age, gender, income, number of siblings and number of children are controlled. Familial exchange is not significantly affected by marital disruption.

This thesis is dedicated to my family:

Mom and Paul, Dad and Melva, my sea-star, Serena, Nana and Abuelita,

Ana Marie (la bambina) and Pedro Ramirez (mi tio).

Isn't life extraordinary?

"To forgotten faces and faded loves, sitting still was never enough."

"As all things must surely have to end, and great loves will one day have to part,

I know that I am meant for this world."

The Smashing Pumpkins

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades an increase in the number of divorces in the United States has led to fundamental changes in American family relations. The majority of past research regarding the impact of divorce on intergenerational family relationships has focused on the causes and effects of divorce within the nuclear family, specifically how divorce affects each member of the divorcing couple, and, if applicable, their children. More recently, the effects of divorce within the extended family have been examined. An increase in life expectancy coupled with declining mortality rates has increased the number of years parents and children may share together; high divorce rates may affect the relationships adult children have with their aging parents during this time.

The legal and formal dissolution of a marriage in the United States is called divorce and can be measured in different numerical ways (Benokraitis 1993). Divorce rates per 1,000 population in the United States increased drastically in the 1960s and the 1970s, stabilizing in the 1980s (Cherlin 1981; Smyer and Hofland 1982; Norton and Moorman 1987; Bumpass 1990; Benokraitis 1993). Although divorce rates since 1980 have dropped slightly, it is expected that between one-half and two-thirds of recently contracted first marriages will end in divorce (Kitson and Morgan 1990). While the percent rate of increase in the level of lifetime divorce has been nearly constant for more than 100 years (Bumpass 1990), the proportion of all marriages in a given year ending in

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The format of this thesis follows current style requirements of the *American Sociological Review*.

divorce has increased at a faster rate since the mid-nineteenth century (Cherlin 1981).

Since most couples separate before they become legally divorced, it may be assumed that rates of separation are also increasing (Cherlin 1981). Official census records on separation are suspect as to their accuracy and sometimes difficult to interpret (Cherlin 1981). Some people may not admit to being separated or may lie about having ever been married, while others may separate for an extended period or never legally divorce (Cherlin 1981). What is known is that separation can be as traumatic or greater than divorce (Cherlin 1981; Spanier and Hanson 1982). Separation is a disruption, if not a preliminary formal dissolution, to a marriage.

These trends suggest that many, if not the majority, of recent first marriages will end in disruption, affecting in some manner all of the individuals within the disrupted family. The focus of past research has been on the effects of divorce on each spouse, their children and most recently, on the parents of the divorcing couple. However, "if information is lacking on the effect on close family relations of divorce and remarriage, we know even less about the impact on kinship bonds which span more than a single generation" (Smyer and Hofland 1982:67).

As American society ages and divorce rates remain high, it is important to determine how marital disruption affects the adult child-parent relationship. Current divorce patterns could affect the family support system between older adults and their children and grandchildren. To what extent can the family or the government be relied upon in times of marital dishevel? How capable are each in providing support to needy family members? Just as parents of divorced adult children may help assume some of the functions formerly fulfilled by two parents, the family continues to bestow a

preponderance of support to the elderly (Shanas 1979; Smyer and Hofland 1982; Johnson 1988). Informal supports may be impaired by divorce as in the case of a divorced adult child who does not have the time or resources to provide home care for their aging parent. Adversely, informal supports may be enhanced by divorce, as in the case of a divorced adult child who moves in with their aging parent for help with child-sitting. If an increase in divorce rates affects the need or ability of family members to rely on one another, then maybe formal supports such as institutionalization and day care may need further development to fill the gaps.

Past trends and future projections of divorce rates and life expectancy in the United States have modified our conception of the future structure and size of the extended family. As the needs and abilities of family members change with increases in divorce rates and longevity it becomes important to understand how they may affect familial support in the future. Public policy has thus far correctly assumed that families carry the majority of the responsibility for older adults in times of need (Shanas 1979). However, divorced adult children may not have the time or emotional resources to accommodate the needs of their parents (Smyer and Hofland 1982). This is why it is important to determine if there are differences in the relationships adult married versus maritally disrupted children have with their aging parents.

Theories that may predict the types of relationships that adult children have with their parent(s) are exchange and equity, dependency and obligation, and status and resource adjustment. Theories of exchange and equity focus on familial reciprocity across the life span while an assessment of the adult child's need and ability characterizes the predictions made by the other theories. From these arise three possible relationships: (1)

that there are no significant differences in the amount of contact married and maritally disrupted adult children have with their mothers; (2) that maritally disrupted adult children have more contact with their mothers than married adult children; and (3) that married adult children have more contact with their mothers than maritally disrupted adult children.

Determining if marital discord of an adult child significantly affects how often they keep in contact with their parent(s) is especially important in a culture in which people are living longer and in which marital disruption has become commonplace. Service planners need to determine if familial support to and by the elderly is being undermined by divorce. If maritally disrupted adult children report significantly less contact with their parent(s) than do married adult children, then policies and programs may need to be revised and expanded to assist people in times of need. If there are no significant differences in reported contact between married versus maritally disrupted adult children and their parent(s), then practitioners can focus their attention to other matters.

Gender has been examined as a potentially significant factor in adult child-parent relationships. Women are more likely to care for their parents than are men (Shanas 1979; Smyer and Hofland 1982), to be more deeply involved in family relationships than men (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1986), and to report larger, denser support networks and higher levels of interaction with non-resident family members than men (Antonucci 1990). These findings of gendered pattern of contact have been attributed to cultural assignment of gender roles and women's socialization to perform nurturant tasks (Spitze and Logan 1990:421). However, women are also more likely to be more adversely affected by divorce (Smyer and Hofland 1982; Weitzman 1985). For example, women are more

likely to be awarded custody of young children; at the same time, they are often granted inadequate provisions further diminished by noncompliance and inflation. The yearly rise in cost of living is often not considered when settlements are awarded (Weitzman 1985). As a result, women may be faced with living below poverty level or seeking (more) employment, either of which would affect their ability to, or need for, support (Smyer and Hofland 1982; Weitzman 1985). If paid employment limits a child's ability to spend time with his or her parent(s), an increase in female labor force participation may affect gender differences in familial contact and support.

Other factors that could logically affect adult children's or elderly parent's ability to support or contact one another include the gender of both adult children and parent, distances separating adult children from their parent (as it is a measure of availability), the adult child's number of siblings (as they could potentially provide for either their divorced sibling or parent[s]), and the adult child's number of children (as this could limit the resources adult children are able to give to their parents).

This study investigates differences in the relationships married versus maritally disrupted adult children report having with their mothers. Do maritally disrupted children report different amounts of contact with mothers than married children? This study utilizes a large and varied representative sample to add further illumination to past findings of mixed evaluation and in areas where theorized effects warrant further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The number of studies that may be cited on the general causes and effects of divorce are numerous. Specific research on how divorce affects an adult child's relationship with his/her parent(s) has not been as extensive. Additionally, there is much variation in the procedures and outcomes of this research. Dependent variables are operationally defined differently. For example, 'contact' may be defined as visiting, telephoning and/or writing; 'exchange' may involve money, contact by visiting, telephoning, writing or all of the above. Some studies may define their dependent variables similarly, but study different populations. They may collect their information from the adult child, mother, father or any combination of the three. This variation in methodology may produce disparate results. Because of mixed or limited results, more research is needed in the area of adult child-parent relationships especially as current divorce and separation patterns may be changing the familial support system.

Responses gathered from adult children in previous studies show differences between married and divorced adult children by gender, geographic distance from the parent(s), number of respondent's children and siblings, respondent's age and income. The following review of literature will cover results from previous studies in adult child-parent relationships concerning these variables.

THE ADULT CHILD PERSPECTIVE

Cicirelli (1983) compared amount of help (as assessed from 16 types of services) provided to elderly parents by adult children with marital disruption and intact marriages. Children with disrupted marriages gave significantly less total help and less help with 7 of 16 specific services than children with intact marriages. A further comparison of these children revealed that the children with marital disruption perceived the elderly parents' need for help as significantly less, felt less filial (son-like or daughter-like behavior; assuming the relation of a child) obligation and thought that their ability to help was limited, primarily due to job responsibilities.

Spitze and Logan (1990) found that adult daughters report about 50 percent more visits, calls, and hours of help to parents than do sons, although daughters with several siblings were more likely than daughters with one sibling to visit infrequently. Studies of the effects of gender and the marital status of adult children on intergenerational support and interaction have produced inconsistent findings. In one study, Lang and Brody (1983) found that middle-aged daughters who were widowed, separated or divorced gave three times more help (personal care and instrumental assistance) to their elderly mothers than married daughters. Hoyert (1991) found that never married sons provided less financial and household assistance to parents than married sons, but that married daughters were less likely to provide this help than never married daughters.

Geographic distance and the exchange of household assistance are generally inversely related (Hoyert 1991); the further away the adult child lives from his/her parent(s), the less help is given. Of course, sharing a household with an elderly mother was found to be the strongest predictor for the amount of help given by adult daughters

(Lang and Brody 1983). Fischer (1981) examined visiting and telephoning frequency of geographically near (living within 20 miles of each other) and far (living 50 miles or further from each other) adult daughter-mother dyads by marital and parental status of the adult daughter. Results indicated that: (1) the majority of far dyads regardless of marital/parental status tended to visit with each other less than once a month; (2) among near dyads, the majority of married daughters with children saw their mothers at least once a week, as compared to married daughters without children and single daughters who saw their mothers less; (3) among far dyads, more married daughters without children and single daughters telephoned less than once a week, more married with children daughters telephoned once a week or more; and, (4) among near dyads, only married daughters without children were more likely to telephone once a week or less.

Variation in the number of siblings may influence adult child-parent relationships. Spitze and Logan (1990) found that the number of siblings was negatively associated with the number of visits and telephone calls between children and their parents. There was an interaction effect, indicating that women were more negatively influenced in their helping and visiting behaviors by the number of other siblings than were men. As the number of siblings went up, the frequency of communication went down. Regardless of the gender of the respondent, the number of brothers decreased the number of visits and telephone calls significantly. Generally, the number of siblings was found to reduce contact and help provided by adult children to their parents.

Previous research has also explored the effects of income, age, race and number of adult child's dependent children on assistance provided to elderly parents by adult children. In a study by Hoyert (1991), white parents were less likely to receive financial

assistance than were black parents. Income was positively related to receiving household help from adult children and older parents were more likely to receive financial help from children than younger parents. A study by Lang and Brody (1983) found that older ages of daughters were significantly associated with greater parental-care responsibilities while being married and being employed reduced provisions by adult daughters to their parents. Finally, adult children who were parents of young children were significantly less likely to give assistance to their parents than their counterparts who did not have young children (Eggebeen 1992).

The present study includes respondent's gender, age, income, geographic distance from his/her mother's home, number of children and siblings in determining their weight, if any, on frequency of contact between married versus maritally disrupted adult children and their mothers. Contact, whether face-to-face, by telephone, or by letter, may be among the many elements of an adult child-parent relationship that can be affected by an adult child's divorce.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE PARENT

While the present study will analyze responses from the adult child perspective, responses from the aging parent are just as important. Parents of divorcing children face potential strain when the marriage of offspring end. Older parents of divorced children may be caught between traditional views of divorce as bad and the newer concept of divorce as reasonable, even perhaps desirable (Johnson and Vinick 1982). Parents can therefore intervene following the divorce of their children, assuming greater responsibility/involvement depending on their children's needs, or they can be

disassociated from the situation, either voluntarily, by geographic distance, or through a weakening of the parent-child bond (Johnson 1988).

Although many of the studies reviewed deal with giving/helping behaviors and not specifically contact, contact may be a token of helping. Emotional support can be developed through visiting, phoning, and/or writing, and help with child care or household duties can be received through visitation.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Since past research has met with inconsistent findings, the following theories are proposed to explain differences, if any, in contact between married and maritally disrupted adult children and their parents: exchange and equity theories, dependancy and obligation theories, and status and resource adjustment theories. These theories are not mutually exclusive. Elements of duty and responsibility as well as attachment are common to all. Although this study utilizes responses from adult children to test differences in contact with mothers, the theories presented combine components from the perspective of both the adult child and the parent to make predictions. These theories are used as tools to explain hypothetical situations in adult child-parent relationships. As this study is intended to be exploratory in nature, two possible combinations of relationships that married versus divorced adult children could have with their mothers are tested.

Hypothesis 1: Maritally disrupted adult children will report having greater contact with their mothers than married adult children.

Hypothesis 2: Married adult children will report having greater contact with their mothers than maritally disrupted adult children.

Predicting Similarities: Exchange and Equity Theory

Originating in economic theories, theories of exchange have since been modified to help explain non-economic relationships between people. Social exchange theory asserts that "benefits obtained through social processes are contingent upon benefits provided in exchange" (Emerson 1992:32). A gift or altruistic act performed in a non-contingent context may initiate a reciprocal transaction by the receiver; if continued, these gifts or acts may become a series of transactions between long-term partners. Eventually, the gifts/acts may lose their paired contingency, honoring the social exchange relationship itself and not the previous gift/act received. Theories of equity further state that people will seek to maintain a balance in their exchange relationships (Cicirelli 1989). If an imbalance occurs, people experience distress; the under-benefitted will reduce exchange until more is received from the over-benefitted and balance is restored (Cicirelli 1989). Imbalance, however, characterizes the relationships between children and their parents. During the course of a life cycle, one typically moves from possessing few, if any, assets, to acquiring some resources, and finally, to losing some of their commodities and health with age. Children may be the recipients of support from their parents for many years until they are able to support themselves. Adult children of elderly parents may find that the imbalance in their exchange relationships with parents has shifted: their resources in later life are greater than that of their parents and they may be called upon to render support. According to exchange/equity theory, adult children would care for their elderly parents based on a sense of responsibility after having been cared for throughout their youth by their parents. From this perspective, one would not expect the marital status of adult children to have an effect on contact with their mothers because the most significant

factor, obligation, would be experienced by both; the exchange relationship would have been established since the child's birth.

Predicting That Maritally Disrupted Adult Children Will Report Having Greater Contact with Their Mothers than Married Adult Children: Dependancy and Obligation Theory

Obligation theory holds that the principle of giving is a sense of duty based on cultural norms (Cicirelli 1989). Deutsch notes that "the duty to help another is intensified in relation to those for whose personal development and welfare we are responsible, such as those who are considered to be legitimately dependent upon us" and that need is the dominant motivator of obligation (Deutsch 1975:146). When a man and woman divorce, she is typically awarded custody of dependent children and about one-third of his salary for alimony and child support (Weitzman 1985). Her "need" increases while his decreases (he has fewer people to support). Even if young children are not involved, women are typically more disadvantaged by divorce than are men as their marriage may have kept them from participating full-time in the work force, making it more difficult for them to secure a job later. According to obligation theory, then, one would expect that maritally disrupted adult daughters would need more help than married adult daughters; maritally disrupted adult daughters would therefore have more contact with their aging mothers than married adult daughters based on her need. This disparity should be even greater when income is low (as they would be more in need) and when dependent children are involved (in attempt to overcome the deficit from inadequate child support).

If the above assessment of a divorce situation is correct, then maritally disrupted adult sons would have more resources to provide help to their mothers than maritally

disrupted adult daughters. Maritally disrupted adult sons would have frequent contact with their mothers based on his ability to provide (he has greater income) and his freedom from child-care responsibility (he has more time).

Predicting That Married Adult Children Will Report Having Greater Contact with Their Mothers than Maritally Disrupted Adult Children: Status and Resource Adjustment Theory

The same situation that would allow one to predict that maritally disrupted adult children would have more contact with their aging mothers than married adult children may also be used to predict the opposite effect. Adult daughters, as they are more adversely affected economically by divorce than adult sons, may not have the ability to provide for her mothers. Child-rearing and/or job responsibilities may impose restraints rendering daughters incapable of keeping close contact with their mothers. In addition, adult children, male or female, must adjust to the traumatic experience of separation and divorce; they may not have the emotional resources to cope with their aging mothers (Smyer and Hofland 1982). At the same time, elderly mothers may attach a certain amount of stigma on their children following separation or divorce (Spanier and Hanson 1982) and therefore, contact between the two may diminish. One may predict, then, that married adult children would have greater contact with their mothers than do maritally disrupted adult children.

Differences by Control Variables

According to these theories, marital status may or may not have an effect on frequency of contact with mothers. In addition, the presence of children and level of income may especially influence the amount of contact. In order to control for these possible effects and others, respondent's income, number of children, age, proximity to parent's house, number of siblings and the presence of dependent children living in respondent's house are held constant to further define the effect of marital status on familial contact.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The statistical package utilized for this study was SAS. Analysis of the data included descriptive statistics of frequency distributions, cross-tabulations of data by control variables and chi-square test for significance and strength of the relationship. This chapter discusses the methodology of this study, including the sample selection, definition and coding of the variables and statistical analysis.

Data for this analysis was collected for the 1986 General Social Survey (GSS). This year of the GSS was used for this study because questions were asked of the respondents which allowed an analysis of contact with their family as well as a wealth of other information. A total of 1,470 people were surveyed and the 335 respondents who answered all questions regarding the variables in this study were included in this analysis. The GSS survey consisted of an independently drawn sample of English-speaking persons, 18 years of age or over, living in non-institutional arrangements within the United States. Respondents were selected by a multistage area probability sample to the block or segment level. Selection began by stratifying Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas and counties by region, age and race which produced Primary Sampling Units (PSUs). Block groups and enumeration districts were selected from PSUs and interviews were conducted in a specified travel pattern from the first dwelling unit until quotas were filled. Quotas were determined by the 1970 Census tract data and called for about equal numbers of men and women. An equal number of employed and unemployed women and a proper

proportion of men over and under 35 were additional quota requirements, as employed women and young men under 35 were deemed to be more unavailable for interviewing than their counterparts.

DEPENDENT VARIABLE: CONTACT

The dependent variable "contact" was constructed from two questions on the GSS. Respondents were asked: "How often do you see or visit your mother?" and "How often do you have any other contact with your mother besides visiting, either by telephone or letter?" Responses were originally coded as one of the following: "lives in same household," "daily," "at least several times a week," "at least once a week," "at least once a month," "several times a year," "less often," "don't know," "no answer" or "not applicable." Responses for both questions were tested and found to be significantly correlated with one another ($p=0.001$). Adding the responses for each question produced a continuous measure of contact with respondent's mother, which was then separated into three categories. Based on the original coding scale, respondent's were separated by contact frequencies of "weekly or greater," "monthly" or "yearly."

An attempt was made for the dependent variable to measure contact with both parents. Respondents were asked the same questions on the GSS regarding contact with their fathers: "How often do you see or visit your father?" and "How often do you have any other contact with your father besides visiting, either by telephone or letter?" Responses to these questions were tested along with the responses for questions regarding contact with mothers and all were significantly correlated with one another ($p=0.001$). Adding the responses produced a continuous measure of contact with both parents,

however, cases were not counted if there was a missing response to any one of the four questions. This resulted in too few cases for proper analysis.

Next, to further measure contact with both parents, cross-tabulations and chi-square analyses were conducted separately for contact with mothers and fathers. There were no meaningful differences between contact with mothers and fathers. Tables for contact with mothers only will be discussed.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE: MARITAL STATUS

Marital status was the independent variable and was measured by asking the respondents, "Are you currently--married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?" At first, only respondents who were either married or divorced were considered for this study. However, there were not a large number of divorced cases (n=42) as compared to married cases (n=281). In their analysis of the role of extended kin in the adjustment to marital disruption, Spanier and Hanson (1982) combine the responses of both married and separated respondents. They argue that divorce is often delayed due to the bureaucracy of the courts and that separation is the more crucial social-psychological event.

In order to see if responses from divorced and separated persons could be combined for this study (in large part to increase the number of cases for comparison), a chi-square and correlational analysis were conducted on the dependent variable contact. The t-test for the correlation coefficient indicated no significant differences between responses from divorced and separated respondents ($F=1.29$, $p=0.6807$). As shown in Table 1, cross-tabular analysis also revealed no significant differences between responses

Table 1: Chi-square Test for Differences in Responses from Divorced and Separated Adult Children on Frequency of Contact with Mothers

Frequency of Contact	Divorced (N=42)	Separated (N=12)
Weekly or greater (N=23)	47.62% (20)	25.00% (3)
Monthly (N=13)	19.05% (8)	41.67% (5)
Yearly or less (N=18)	33.33% (14)	33.33% (4)

Chi-square=3.105
d.f.=2
p=0.212

from divorced and separated individuals (p=0.212). The two groups were combined to form a new group "maritally disrupted" (n=54).

CONTROL VARIABLES

According to the theories presented, the respondent's gender, number of siblings, number of children, age, income, and geographic proximity to their mothers home could affect the amount of contact between adult children and their mothers. These variables were controlled to further examine the effects of marital status, if any, on amount of contact between married and maritally disrupted adult children and their mothers.

Gender

Respondent's sex was coded by the interviewer as either "male" or "female." When respondents were not separated by marital status, gender had a significant effect of contact with mothers (p=0.002, n=335) with females reporting more frequent contact than did males.

Age

Respondents were asked, "What is your date of birth?" The response was coded by the interviewer by subtracting the year of birth from the survey year. This study chose to separate respondents into three categories, those between the ages of 20-39, 40-49 and 50-69 based on findings showing significant differences in helping behaviors females ages 40-49 and 50 and over gave to their elderly mothers (Lang and Brody 1983). When respondents were not separated by marital status, age had a significant effect on contact

with mothers (p=0.01, n=335) with younger respondents reporting more frequent contact than did older respondents.

Geographic Proximity

The variable geographic proximity was constructed from two questions on the GSS. Respondents were asked: "About how long would it take you to get to where your mother lives? Think of the time it usually takes door to door." Responses were coded as "less than 15 minutes," "between 15 and 30 minutes," "between 30 minutes and 1 hour," "between 1-2 hours," "between 2-3 hours," "between 3-5 hours," "between 5-12 hours," "over 12 hours," "no answer" and "not applicable." The frequencies were examined and it was determined that a separation of responses into categories of "less than 1 hour" and "1 hour or more" would split geographic proximity dichotomously into "near" and "far."

When respondents were not separated by marital status, geographic proximity had a significant effect on contact with mothers (p=0.000, n=335) with respondents living "near" reporting more frequent contact than did respondents living "far" from their mothers.

Number of Siblings

Respondents were asked, "How many brothers and sisters did you have? Please count those born alive, but no longer living, as well as those alive now. Also include stepbrothers and stepsisters, and children adopted by your parents." Responses originally ranged from "none" to "sixty-eight;" for this study, responses were grouped into categories of "none," "one" or "two or more" to control for other potential providers to

mothers. When respondents were not separated by marital status, the number of siblings did not significantly affect contact with mothers (p=0.194, n=335). Generally, the majority of all respondents reported frequent contact with mothers regardless of the number of their siblings.

Income

Respondents were asked, "In which of these groups did your total family income, from all sources, fall last year before taxes, that is?" Responses ranged from "under $1,000" to "$60,000 or over." The SAS program ranked income as evenly as possible by frequency into three categories. A total family income of $19,999 or less qualified respondents as having a "low" income, incomes between $20,000-34,000 were considered "medium" and incomes of $35,000 and over were labeled "high." When respondents were not separated by marital status, income had a significant effect on contact with mothers (p=0.008, n=335); respondents from lower incomes reported more frequent contact than did respondents from higher incomes.

Number of Children

Respondents were asked, "How many children have you ever had? Please count all that were born alive at any time (including any you had from a previous marriage)." Responses originally ranged from "none" to "eight or more;" for this study, responses were grouped into categories of "none," "one" or "two or more." According to Hypothesis 1, an increase in the number of children may lead to increases in contact with mothers; according to Hypothesis 2, an increase in the number of children may lead to

decreases in contact with mothers. When respondents were not separated by marital status, the number of children did not significantly affect contact with mothers (p=0.289, n=335). Generally, all respondents reported frequent contact with mothers regardless of the number of their children.

Since this question did not ask whether the children of the respondent were living at home, or, more specifically, living at the home of the respondent, two other measures for this variable were constructed for this study. Respondents were asked on the GSS the number of household members under 6 years of age, between 6-12 years of age and between 13-17 years of age.

One measure used to deduce the number of respondent's dependent children was constructed by separating respondents with and those without children under 6 years of age living in the same household by responses to the first question. When respondents were not separated by marital status, the effect of having children under 6 years old was almost of statistical significance (p=0.057, n=335). Respondents with children under 6 years old reported more frequent contact than did those without children under 6 years old.

Another measure was constructed by adding responses to all three questions regarding the ages of children living in the same household as the respondent. Categories were then created by separating respondents with and those without children under 17 years of age living in the same household. When respondents were not separated by marital status, the effect of having children under 17 years old was significant (p=0.023, n=335). Respondents with children under 17 years old reported more frequent contact than did those without children under 17 years old.

Separation in this manner also tested for significant differences in contact with elderly parents based on the age differences of children living in the respondent's house.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study tests for differences in the amount of contact married versus maritally disrupted adult children have with their aging mothers, controlling for respondent's gender, age, income, number of children, number of siblings, and geographic distance to his/her mother's home. Descriptive statistics of the sample include frequency and percentage distributions, cross-tabulations of data by control variables and chi-square test for significance and strength of the relationship. This chapter discloses the results of these analyses.

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The total number of cases included for respondent's contact with their mother was 335, most of whom (84%) were married and 16 percent of whom were divorced or separated. There were about an equal number of male (44%) and female (56%) respondents. The majority of the respondents (70%) were between the ages of 20-39, 24 percent of the sample were between the ages of 40-49 and 6 percent of the sample were between the ages of 50-69. The respondents were generally equally divided across income groups: 30 percent of the sample were ranked as having a low income ($19,999 or less), 33 percent were ranked as middle income ($20,000-34,999) and 37 percent were ranked as having a high income ($35,000 or more). Only a small number of respondents (3%) had no siblings, 20 percent had only one sibling and the majority of the respondents

(76%) had two or more siblings. Just more than half (60%) of the respondents lived "near" (less than 1 hour) their mother and 40 percent lived "far" (1 hour or more).

Three measures were used to control for the effect of respondent's number of children. The first asked, "How many children have you ever had? Please count all that were born alive at any time (including any you had from a previous marriage);" responses were separated into categories of "none," "one" or "two or more." About an equal number of respondents had no children (17%) or had one child (18%) while the majority (65%) had two or more children. The second measure asked for the number of household members under 6 years of age. A greater number of respondents (63%) had children under 6 years of age living in the same household than did those who did not (37%). Finally, fewer respondents (33%) had children under 17 years of age living in the same household than did those who did not (67%).

ADULT CHILDREN'S MARITAL STATUS AND CONTACT WITH MOTHERS

As shown in Table 2, the marital status of adult children was not found to have a significant effect of frequency of contact with mothers. There was a tendency for married versus maritally disrupted respondents to have more frequent contact with their mothers. Fifty-four percent of married adult children had contact with their mothers on a weekly or greater basis as compared to 43 percent of maritally disrupted adult children, however, their reported differences were not great enough to be statistically significant ($p=0.223$).

Table 2: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=281)	Maritally Disrupted (N=54)
Weekly or greater (N=174)	53.74% (151)	42.59% (23)
Monthly (N=78)	23.13% (65)	24.07% (13)
Yearly or less (N=83)	23.13% (65)	33.33% (18)

Chi-square=3.003
d.f.=2
p=0.223

The Influence of Gender

There were no significant differences by marital status in frequency of contact with mothers when gender was controlled. As indicated in Table 3, there was a tendency for married sons to have more contact with their mothers, but the difference was not significant (p=0.747). Both groups of sons had contact with their mothers more on a weekly or greater basis. Table 4 demonstrates that for females, more married daughters had contact with their mothers on a weekly or greater basis (63% and 45%, respectively) but, again, the difference was not significant (p=0.179).

The Influence of Geographic Proximity

The marital status of adult children was found to have a significant affect on frequency of contact with mothers when distance was controlled. As indicated in Table 5, when the respondents lived "near," less than 1 hour, their mothers, married children had significantly more frequent contact with their mothers (p=0.023). Eighty-two percent of married respondents had contact with their mothers on a weekly or greater basis as compared to 67 percent of respondents from disrupted marriages. Table 6 demonstrates that for children living "far," 1 hour or more, from their mothers, there was not a significant difference in frequency of contact by marital status (p=0.455). Both groups of children had contact with their mothers more on a yearly or less basis.

The Influence of Income

The marital status of adult children was not found to have a significant effect on frequency of contact with mothers when respondent's income was controlled. Tables 7

Table 3: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Is Male

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=126)	Maritally Disrupted (N=21)
Weekly or greater (N=62)	42.86% (54)	38.10% (8)
Monthly (N=46)	31.75% (40)	28.57% (6)
Yearly or less (N=39)	25.40% (32)	33.33% (7)

Chi-square=0.582
d.f.=2
p=0.747

Table 4: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Is Female

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=155)	Maritally Disrupted (N=33)
Weekly or greater (N=112)	62.58% (97)	45.45% (15)
Monthly (N=32)	16.13% (25)	21.21% (7)
Yearly or less (N=44)	21.29% (33)	33.33% (11)

Chi-square=3.439
d.f.=2
p=0.179

Table 5: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Distance Is "Near"

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=174)	Maritally Disrupted (N=28)
Weekly or greater (N=163)	82.76% (144)	67.86% (19)
Monthly (N=35)	16.09% (28)	25.00% (7)
Yearly or less (N=4)	1.15% (2)	7.14% (2)

Chi-square=6.144
d.f.=2
*p=0.046

Table 6: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Distance Is "Far"

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=107)	Maritally Disrupted (N=26)
Weekly or greater (N=11)	6.54% (7)	15.38% (4)
Monthly (N=37)	34.58% (37)	23.08% (6)
Yearly or less (N=79)	58.88% (63)	61.54% (16)

Chi-square=2.858
d.f.=2
p=0.239

and 8 demonstrate that those with low ($19,999 or less) and medium ($20,000-34,999) incomes had contact with their mothers more on a weekly or greater basis, regardless of marital status (p=0.244 and p=0.843, respectively). As indicated in Table 9, for those with high ($35,000 or more) incomes, there was a tendency for married respondents to have more frequent contact with their mothers. Forty-three percent of married children had weekly or greater contact with their mothers while 43 percent of maritally disrupted children had yearly or less contact with their mothers (p=0.311).

The Influence of Age

The marital status of adult children was not found to have a significant effect on frequency of contact with mothers when respondent's age was controlled. Table 10 demonstrates that for respondents between the ages of 20 and 39, both married and maritally disrupted children had contact with their mothers more on weekly or greater basis, respectively, 57 percent and 53 percent (p=0.893). Table 11 demonstrates that for respondents between the ages of 40 and 49, there was a tendency for married children to have weekly or greater contact with their mothers (44%) but more maritally disrupted children had contact with their mothers on a yearly or less basis (39%). The differences between the two groups was not great enough to be significant (p=0.672). Table 12 also demonstrates that for respondents between the ages of 50 and 69 there was a tendency for married children to have weekly or greater contact with their mothers (43%) but more maritally disrupted children had contact with their mothers on a yearly or less basis (67%). Again, the differences between the two groups was not great enough to be significant (p=0.518).

Table 7: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Income Is "Low"

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=67)	Maritally Disrupted (N=33)
Weekly or greater (N=54)	59.70% (40)	42.42% (14)
Monthly (N=16)	14.93% (10)	18.18% (6)
Yearly or less (N=30)	25.37% (17)	39.39% (13)

Chi-square=2.818
d.f.=2
p=0.244

Table 8: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Income Is "Medium"

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=97)	Maritally Disrupted (N=14)
Weekly or greater (N=68)	61.86% (60)	57.14% (8)
Monthly (N=25)	21.65% (21)	28.57% (4)
Yearly or less (N=18)	16.49% (16)	14.29% (2)

Chi-square=0.341
d.f.=2
p=0.843

Table 9: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Income Is "High"

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=117)	Maritally Disrupted (N=7)
Weekly or greater (N=52)	43.59% (51)	14.29% (1)
Monthly (N=37)	29.06% (34)	42.86% (3)
Yearly or less (N=35)	27.35% (32)	42.86% (3)

Chi-square=2.337
d.f.=2
p=0.311

Table 10: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Is Between the Ages of 20-39

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=206)	Maritally Disrupted (N=30)
Weekly or greater (N=134)	57.28% (118)	53.33% (16)
Monthly (N=54)	22.82% (47)	23.33% (7)
Yearly or less (N=48)	19.90% (41)	23.33% (7)

Chi-square=0.226
d.f.=2
p=0.893

Table 11: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Is Between the Ages of 40-49

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=61)	Maritally Disrupted (N=18)
Weekly or greater (N=33)	44.26% (27)	33.33% (6)
Monthly (N=21)	26.23% (16)	27.78% (5)
Yearly or less (N=25)	29.51% (18)	38.89% (7)

Chi-square=0.796
d.f.=2
p=0.672

Table 12: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Is Between the Ages of 50-69

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=14)	Maritally Disrupted (N=6)
Weekly or greater (N=7)	42.86% (6)	16.67% (1)
Monthly (N=3)	14.29% (2)	16.67% (1)
Yearly or less (N=10)	42.86% (6)	66.67% (4)

Chi-square=1.315
d.f.=2
p=0.518

The Influence of Number of Children

The marital status of adult children was not found to have a significant effect on frequency of contact with mothers when the number of respondent's children was controlled. As indicated in Table 13, there was a tendency for married children to have more frequent contact with their mothers among respondents with no children. Married respondents had contact with their mothers more on a weekly or greater basis (46%) compared to maritally disrupted respondents who had contact with their mothers more on a monthly basis (50%, p=0.699). Table 14 demonstrates that respondents with one child tended to have contact with their mothers on a weekly or greater basis regardless of their marital status: 53 percent of married respondents had weekly or greater contact as compared to 50 percent of maritally disrupted children (p=0.808). The same trend appeared for respondents with two or more children as demonstrated in Table 15: 56 percent of married respondents had weekly or greater contact with their mothers as compared to 41 percent of maritally disrupted respondents (p=0.197).

The Influence of Children under 6 Years Old

The marital status of adult children was not found to have a significant effect on frequency of contact with mothers when the number of children under 6 years of age living in respondent's household was controlled. As indicated in Table 16, when there was no child under the age of 6 years in the house, married respondents had a tendency to have more frequent contact with their mothers. Married respondents had contact with their mothers more on a weekly or greater basis (50%) as compared to maritally disrupted respondents who had contact with their mothers more on a yearly or less basis (39%,

Table 13: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Has Had No Children

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=52)	Maritally Disrupted (N=6)
Weekly or greater (N=26)	46.15% (24)	33.33% (2)
Monthly (N=20)	32.69% (17)	50.00% (3)
Yearly or less (N=12)	21.15% (11)	16.67% (1)

Chi-square=0.717
d.f.=2
p=0.699

Table 14: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Has Had One Child

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=43)	Maritally Disrupted (N=16)
Weekly or greater (N=31)	53.49% (23)	50.00% (8)
Monthly (N=13)	23.26% (10)	18.75% (3)
Yearly or less (N=15)	23.26% (10)	31.25% (5)

Chi-square=0.428
d.f.=2
p=0.808

Table 15: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Has Had Two or More Children

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=186)	Maritally Disrupted (N=32)
Weekly or greater (N=117)	55.91% (104)	40.63% (13)
Monthly (N=45)	20.43% (38)	21.88% (7)
Yearly or less (N=56)	23.66% (44)	37.50% (12)

Chi-square=3.254
d.f.=2
p=0.197

Table 16: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Has No Children under the Age of 6 Living in the Household

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=166)	Maritally Disrupted (N=44)
Weekly or greater (N=99)	50.00% (83)	36.36% (16)
Monthly (N=56)	27.11% (45)	25.00% (11)
Yearly or less (N=55)	22.89% (38)	38.64% (17)

Chi-square=4.722
d.f.=2
p=0.094

p=0.09). As indicated in Table 17, when there was a child under 6 years old in the house, both groups had weekly or greater contact with their mothers: 59 percent of married children as compared to 70 percent of maritally disrupted children (p=0.618).

The Influence of Children under 17 Years Old

The marital status of adult children was not found to have a significant effect on frequency of contact with mothers when the number of children under 17 years of age living in respondent's household was controlled. As indicated in Table 18, when there was no child under the age of 17 years in the house, married respondents had a tendency to have more frequent contact with their mothers. Married respondents had contact with their mothers more on a weekly or greater basis (46%) as compared to maritally disrupted respondents who had contact with their mothers more on a yearly or less basis (40%, p=0.214). Table 19 demonstrates that when there was a child under 17 years old in the house, both groups had weekly or greater contact with their mothers: 57 percent of married children as compared to 58 percent of maritally disrupted children (p=0.895).

Table 17: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Has Children under the Age of 6 Living in the Household

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=115)	Maritally Disrupted (N=10)
Weekly or greater (N=75)	59.13% (68)	70.00% (7)
Monthly (N=22)	17.39% (20)	20.00% (2)
Yearly or less (N=28)	23.48% (27)	10.00% (1)

Chi-square=0.963
d.f.=2
p=0.618

Table 18: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Has No Children under the Age of 17 Living in the Household

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=81)	Maritally Disrupted (N=30)
Weekly or greater (N=46)	45.68% (37)	30.00% (9)
Monthly (N=33)	29.63% (24)	30.00% (9)
Yearly or less (N=32)	24.69% (20)	40.00% (12)

Chi-square=3.079
d.f.=2
p=0.214

Table 19: Chi-square Test for the Effect of Marital Status on Frequency of Contact with Mothers When Respondent Has Children under the Age of 17 Living in the Household

Frequency of Contact	Married (N=200)	Maritally Disrupted (N=24)
Weekly or greater (N=128)	57.00% (114)	58.33% (14)
Monthly (N=45)	20.50% (41)	16.67% (4)
Yearly or less (N=51)	22.50% (45)	25.00% (6)

Chi-square=0.222
d.f.=2
p=0.895

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

This study tested the effects of marital status on the frequency of contact adult children have with their mothers. Based on theory, the following hypotheses were formed:

(1) From dependency and obligation theories, it was predicted that maritally disrupted adult children would report having greater contact with their mothers than married adult children.

(2) From status and resource adjustment theories, it was predicted that married adult children would report having greater contact with their mothers than maritally disrupted adult children.

In general, cross-tabular analysis revealed that marital disruption did not significantly affect the frequency of contact adult children report having with their mothers. Being maritally disrupted did not significantly increase contact with mothers (Hypothesis 1) nor did being maritally disrupted decrease contact with mothers (Hypothesis 2). Adult children and their mothers remain in frequent contact. With few exceptions, all respondents saw their mothers on a weekly or greater basis. Of all the cross-tabulation analyses, the few exceptions occurred when distance, respondent's income, age and children were controlled. Of these, the only table of statistical significance was when distance from respondents' home to their parent's home was "near," less than one hour away.

The adult child-parent relationship perseveres regardless of marital status and even when potentially influencing factors such as respondent's gender, age, income, number of siblings and number of children are controlled. It is not known from this data in what context contact was being made between adult children and their mothers. According to exchange/equity theory, it is not as important who initiates the contact; of critical relevance is that the exchange is maintained. Balance and equitability in family relationships are not necessarily deciding factors either since imbalance would have characterized adult child-parent relationships throughout their time together. Their relationship is affirmed through contact whether the adult child or parent is the recipient of informal support.

DISTANCE

When geographic proximity from respondent's home to his/her mother's home was controlled, there were significant differences in reported contact married versus maritally disrupted children had with their mothers when distance was "near," less than one hour, and an exception to the general tendency of having weekly or greater contact with mothers when distance was "far," one hour or more.

When Distance was "Near"

While both groups of children had contact with their mothers more on a weekly or greater basis, married children had significantly more frequent contact with mothers as compared to divorced or separated children. This finding supports the hypothesis predicted by status and resource adjustment theory, that marital disruption adversely

affects the economical and/or emotional resource ability of adult children to provide for their mothers. There was a tendency for married respondents to have greater contact with mothers as compared to maritally disrupted respondents. Except in this instance, however, their reported differences were not statistically significant.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE GENERAL TENDENCY OF ALL RESPONDENTS REPORTING CONTACT WITH MOTHERS MORE ON A WEEKLY OR GREATER BASIS

The findings of this study do not provide statistically significant support to the literature reviewed in Chapter II. The exceptions noted below parallel the findings of Cicirelli (1983) in that children from disrupted marriages tended to have less contact with their mothers than did children from intact marriages. Cicirelli concluded that children with marital disruption perceived the elderly parents' need for help as significantly less, felt less filial obligation and thought that their ability to help was limited, in large part due to job responsibilities.

When Distance was "Far"

Both married and maritally disrupted adult children who lived 1 hour or more away had contact with their mothers more on a yearly or less basis (59% and 62%, respectively), fewer respondents had monthly contact (35% and 23%, respectively) and the smallest portion of respondents had weekly or greater contact (7% and 15%, respectively). Their reported differences were not significant. Logically, respondents

living far from their mothers would have less contact as it would be more difficult, inconvenient or expensive to keep frequent communication.

When Income was "High"

Maritally disrupted respondents had contact with mothers equally on a monthly and yearly or less basis (43%), while married respondents still followed the general tendency to have contact more on a weekly or greater basis (62%). Since this exception occurred when income was "high," perhaps children from disrupted marriages could afford formal supports, either for themselves or their mothers. They would therefore have more reason to have less contact with their mothers. Married children, however, could afford formal supports as well, and yet, they remained in frequent contact with their mothers. Again, perhaps maritally disrupted children have a lessened perception of their parent's need for help, their own ability to help or their sense of obligation to help, causing them to report a lower frequency of contact with their mothers than did married children (Cicirelli 1983).

When Respondent is Between the Ages of 50-69

Maritally disrupted respondents in the oldest age group had contact more on a yearly or less basis (67%) and less on a monthly and weekly or greater basis (17% equally). Comparatively, married respondents had contact with their mothers more on a weekly or greater and yearly or less basis (equally 43%). The tendency of both groups of adult children in the category of oldest respondents were exceptions to the general rule that contact occurs more on a weekly or greater basis. Older age may decrease contact as

it may limit their ability to keep in close contact. Health and resources as they may diminish in older age may render older respondents incapable of keeping frequent contact. Additionally, older maritally disrupted respondents probably have more traditional values and may view divorce as negative. They may have feelings of guilt or embarrassment about their marital disruption causing them to avoid contact with their even older and perhaps more traditional mothers (Johnson and Vinick 1982).

When There Are No Children

Maritally disrupted respondents with no children had less frequent contact with their mothers than their married counterparts. The combination of being maritally disrupted and not having children may give them a sense of liberation from familial responsibility. When children, no matter how many or what age are present, the general tendency remains that adult children have contact with mothers more on a weekly or greater basis.

LIMITATIONS

This study used a secondary analysis to test for differences in contact married versus maritally disrupted adult children had with their mothers. As the data were not collected specifically for this study, it is not an ideal analysis. Of particular concern are the number of missing cases. The GSS survey may have had a random and representative sample, but 1,135 cases were rejected because the respondent had not answered questions regarding all of the variables used in this analysis. There is no way of knowing what kinds

of bias was introduced by these omissions and therefore the results of this study may not be generalizable.

Other variables which may have affected results were not taken into account because the information was not available from the original survey. (Their inclusion may have made the total number of cases even smaller than that in this analysis.) Of interest is that respondents were asked about the time that it took them to get from their house to their mother's house, but the means of transportation was not specified. One hour by plane versus one hour by motor vehicle are very different distances.

More knowledge about the respondents and their mothers would have allowed for a more descriptive analysis. With regards to the adult children, for instance, it is not known whether this was their first marriage, how many marriages they had had or the length of marriage/separation/divorce. With regards to mothers, information was unavailable to determine their age, health, income or whether they were or had been widowed, separated or divorced.

Feelings of attachment between the adult child and parent could not be measured from this survey. It was not possible to ascertain if the adult child-parent relationship was positive or negative. Nor were the mothers asked the same questions concerning frequency of contact with their adult children. The mothers may have recalled differently how often they were called, written or visited by their child(ren).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Intergenerational contact and the effects of marital separation are already being researched on a national level. Much data are currently available from the National

Survey of Families and Households. This study is unique in that it utilizes data collected from the GSS in 1986 to study how marital disruption affects adult child-parent relationships. Sophisticated studies in this area have begun to include specific types of support given and received from both adult children and their parents, rather than simply operationalizing informal support from "contact." Information is becoming available about elderly parents in abundance, as their numbers are growing. As families restructure following divorce and remarriage, research in step-relations becomes of interest. As more individuals become grandparents and are called upon to care for grandchildren for reasons of divorce, early motherhood or unwed pregnancies, intergenerational contact and support should be further researched.

Critical events such as divorce need to be better understood in how they affect the elderly. American society is aging and elderly parents left without traditional family support due to the divorce of their adult child(ren) should not be neglected. Additionally, family members who care for other family members should be allowed more breaks from the government for saving them tax money that would be supporting formal services.

The present study found that the marital status of adult children did not significantly affect their contact with mothers. But the data for this study was gathered 11 years ago. Already there was a tendency for maritally disrupted adult children to have less contact with their mothers than did married adult children. How has this trend evolved with changes in American demographics? This should be an important question as the baby boomers of yesterday transcend into the elderly cohort of tomorrow.

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