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Healing from Divorce: A Resilient and Intergenerational Framework

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The Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce

- As reported by Amato & Patterson (2017) the intergenerational transmission of divorce “**appears to be a real phenomenon—perhaps as well established as any finding in the social sciences...** marital instability in the family of origin continues to be one of the most reliable predictors of adult divorce” (p. 723).





When Grandparents Divorce, Everyone Hurts

Read Together from packet Sibley (2018)



The Family of Origin's Impact on Commitment

- Much has been written about the significant impact that the family of origin relationships can have on children and their ability to function in future romantic relationships (e.g., Conger et al., 2000, Cui et al., 2011).
- A person's family of origin is where they first learn about the components of relationships, such as, love, honesty, respect, communication (Crittenden, 1997), as well as attachment (Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2011), commitment, and conflict (Weigel, 2007).



Commitment is Crucial

- Central to a healthy marriage is the essential element of commitment which has been found to play a vital role in the establishment and maintenance of a marital relationship (e.g., Robinson & Blanton, 1993).
- As explained by Stanley (2005) “**commitment is at the core of a deeply fulfilling marriage**” (p. 11).
- Emerging adults recognize the importance of commitment as a critical step in personal readiness for marriage (Carroll et. al, 2009).





Commitment Risk Factors

- Parental divorce and conflict
- Having many premarital sexual partners
- Premarital relationship violence
- Pre-engagement cohabitation
- Premarital parenthood
- Relationship Cycling

(e.g., Busby et al., 2013; Johnson, Anderson, & Stith, 2011; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009; Amato & Booth, 2001; Vennum, Lindstrom, Monk, & Adams, 2010)



The Impact of Parental Divorce

- Can significantly increase the odds that offspring will see their own marriages end in divorce
- Some Studies Report
 - Lower relationship satisfaction
 - More conflict
 - Less commitment
- Negative attitudes about marriage and commitment

(e.g., Amato & Patterson, 2007; Segrin, Taylor, & Altman, 2005; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Rhoades et al., 2012; Whitton et al., 2008; Cui, Fincham, & Durtschi, 2011)



A wooden gavel with a brass band is positioned in the center. Below it, a red heart is broken into two pieces. Silhouettes of a family (two adults and a child) are placed on the broken heart. The entire scene is set on a dark wooden surface.

The Consequences of Divorce on Children

Children's Adjustment to Divorce

- According to Amato (2010):
“Research during the last decade continued to show that children with divorced parents, compared with children with continuously married parents, **score lower on a variety of emotional, behavioral, social, health, and academic outcomes, on average.**”

(e.g., Frisco, Muller, & Frank, 2007; Hango & Houseknecht, 2005; Sun & Li, 2002)



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Consequences of Divorce for Men and Women

- According to Amato (2010):
“Research during the last decade has reinforced previous work by showing that divorced individuals, compared with married individuals, **exhibit more symptoms of depression and anxiety, more health problems, more substance use, and a greater risk of overall mortality.**”

(Bierman, Fazio, & Milkie, 2006; Hughes & Waite, 2009; Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, & Elder, 2006; Waite, Luo, & Lewin, 2009; Williams & Umberson, 2004; Zhang & Hayward, 2006)



RESILIENCE

What is Resilience?

- Resilience can be defined as the capability to recover from adversity and be resourceful and strengthened to face life's challenges (Walsh, 2006).
- As Walsh (2006) explained about the resilience framework it is “flexible for application with a broad diversity of families facing a wide range of stressful challenges. It attends to the interaction of individual, family, and social influences and recognizes that there are many, varied pathways in resilience” (p. xi).



What is Resilience?

- Resilience is determined by how an individual, couple, or family choose to respond to adversity.
- Coping + Adaptation + Positive Growth = Resilience
- Learning how to shift from reactive to proactive.
- Crisis can be a horrible experience, but also a time to reassess and create a new life.
- Hope is critical component of meaning making and resilience.

(Walsh, 2016)



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Impact of Negative Examples of Commitment



- Sibley, Springer, Vennum, and Hollist (2015) found that some emerging adults who made the transition to marriage used the negative examples of commitment they had witnessed as fodder for talking to their partner about their fears and what they wanted to avoid in their own relationship.
- Ironically, these discussions seemed to increase commitment as these couples were able to tackle these concerns in an open way (Sibley et al., 2015).

Negative Examples of Commitment



"Their divorce totally made me a better person. Better son, eventually a better father, a better husband... it's not all rainbows and butterflies. If you want to be committed to marriage you have to constantly work at it and it won't always be easy once you say I do and come home from the honeymoon....Because of my parents' divorce I realize you can't just coast. ...So, I think that there's a lot of ways it affected me, but as far as commitment it affected me a lot. It opened my eyes to work that needs to be put into it."

What is More Beneficial?

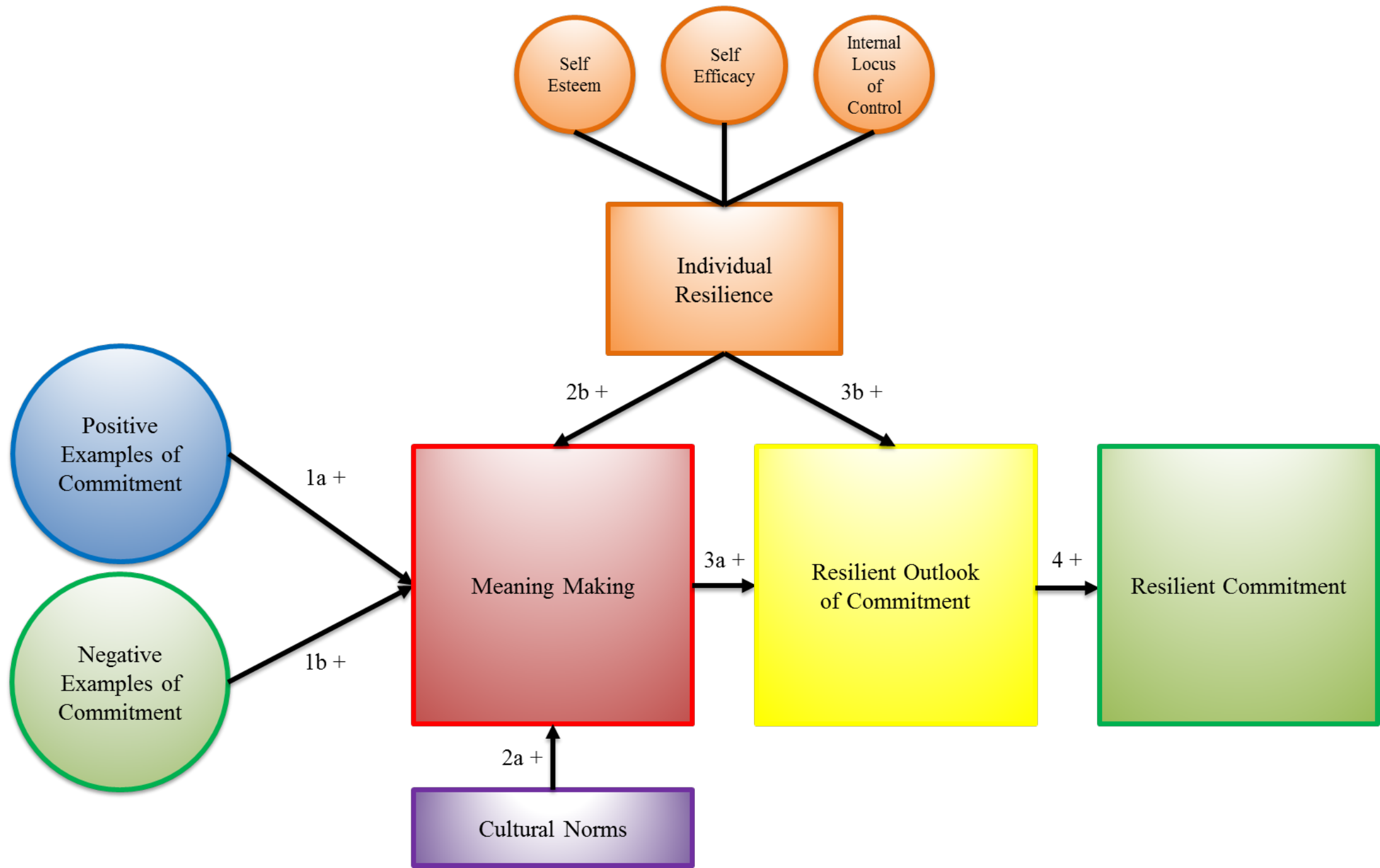


#	Answer		Response	%
1	Negative Examples of Commitment		3	0%
2			7	1%
3			24	3%
4	Both are of Equal Value		361	44%
5			167	20%
6			155	19%
7	Positive Examples of Commitment		108	13%
	Total		825	100%

Resilient Commitment



- Resilient commitment provides a framework for understanding how some people who have witnessed multiple negative examples of commitment are able to not only believe that establishing a committed relationship is worthwhile but that it is achievable.





Refer to Handout

The First Years of Marriage

- Previous research indicated that the first years of marriage tend to be the happiest, with gradual declines in marital satisfaction afterward.
- This is outdated research and discouraging news for those that are hoping to marry someday.
- Researchers previously gave the following reasons for this supposed decline:
 - Life cycle stress as children arrive
 - The inevitable decline from the emotional intensity of falling in love



Marriage Actually Tends to Get Better Over Time

“Although divorce is common these days, about half of all marriages last a lifetime, and the long-term outlook for most of these marriages is upbeat, with happiness and interaction remaining high and discord declining. This optimistic perspective is not sufficiently acknowledged or appreciated in the social science literature on marriage, which has tended to assume that relationship quality declines continuously for the majority of couples. Our theoretical understanding may have been unduly influenced by the many studies of the early years of marriage—studies that include many couples that will divorce after the study is completed. Incorporating insights from the study of long-term, stable marriages may be a useful corrective to this literature” (p. 156-157).

Amato & James (2018)



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Call For Protective Factors



- There has been a call within the field for protective factors that may facilitate strong couple functioning (e.g., Fincham, Stanley, & Beach, 2007).
- The Theory of Resilient Commitment provides an important answer to this call as we look for ways as a field to improve romantic relationship formation and to preserve marriage and families.

Contact the Presenters



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