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## Epiphany Through Chaos

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**Sibel Borquez Senior**

Border Crossing, Cultural Negotiations, and the Search for Identity

**Epiphany Through Chaos**

Capstone Professor: Professor Qun Wang

Division of Humanities and Communication Fall

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Senior Project Proposal Essay	3
Research Essay: Epiphany Through Chaos	5-12
Bibliography	13-14
Final Synthesis Essay	15

## Senior Project Proposal

My name's Sibel Borquez majoring in Human Communications with a focus in pre-law. For my capstone project I will be doing a research essay. Our theme for our class is identity; therefore I will be researching how children are deeply shaped by divorce in their families and the effects on their identity. Where I will be answering main questions like: Why do children go through an identity crisis when their parents are going through a divorce? And how do the struggles of a divorce or a separation in the family form the children's identity and self?

I chose this focus area because I wanted to connect it with my major and career path. I want to become a family lawyer in the future; therefore, researching and learning about the psychology of a divorce and how it affects the children and parents is a big resource that will help me understand my clients.

Our class theme this semester was Border Crossing, Cultural Negotiations, and the Search for Identity. This research project connects to Border Crossing in a metaphorical way where children in families who are separated or divided have plenty of crossings of values, morals, and beliefs from two different sides after the divorce. Children are exposed to two different perspectives which are both important to the child; therefore crossing from one side to the other unconsciously. The children begin to behave differently with both parents trying to please each one and their own set of values. The cultural negotiations is how they have one culture at one point as a way of life in their home when both parents are together and suddenly it all changes with the divorce of their parents. They find themselves divided into two separate cultures or way of living where they try to fit in the guidelines for both. Most children in divorced families tend to have an identity crisis the first few years, they are impacted by the

struggles of a divorce and it's hard for them to grasp a firm hold of the change at such a fast pace. Divorce and other family problems shape children and their identity as individuals.

With this project I aspire to inform and enlighten not only society but the people working with kids whose parents have or are going through a divorce; like teachers, lawyers, even parents. These people knowing how these children are affected could be a big resource on helping these children with their emotions and these children can learn who they are. This is why the title of my essay is Epiphany Through Chaos. These children may suffer of some sort of identity crisis through all the chaos going on at home for the first years of a divorce, but research shows that they are likely to be stronger in their identity after 5 years if their parents divorce. Meaning that they are shaped and molded by their experiences.

For my research I will be collecting data and statistics from books and online scholarly articles, especially psychological articles. I have many expectations for this research essay and I plan on having a specific timeline to expand the work and research.

On October 4, I plan on working on my abstract, which is what my research is going to be about. On the week of October 10, I will be working on my research questions and trying to align them on how this essay will be structured. From October 20 to December 10 I will be conducting my research from going to the library and looking up books to doing online research. This will end in the week of Dec 12 where I will be creating and going to Office Max to print my poster board.

## Epiphany Through Chaos

There are plenty of questions that arise when a family is going through a divorce. The most important questions are those regarding the children, in this essay I will be talking about how children are deeply shaped by divorce in their families and the effects on their identity. Why do children go through an identity crisis when their parents are going through a divorce? How do the struggles of a divorce or a separation in the family form the children's identity and self?

It's very normal to wonder why we are the way we are. Is a person more prone to be aggressive because of their genetics or the environment they were raised in as a child? Scientists have confirmed that your innate qualities and genetics, nature, and environment and unique experiences, nurture, impact who you will become in life. However, how much does each contribute to a person's behavior?

Psychology today describes identity as something that can " be acquired from parents, peers, and other role models Children come to define themselves in terms of how they think their parents see them. If their parents see them as worthless, they will come to define themselves as worthless. Psychologists believe that identity is a matter of finding oneself in this social world."

As humans we are affected by both our genes and environment. Both create and shape who we are; our identity. When we pass through a chaotic life struggle or have a great experience with something our identity is being shaped, by how it affects us emotionally. Home life and the environment in the home have a lot to do with the development of a person's identity, especially as a child. When a child's parents go through a divorce they are highly

affected emotionally and their world changes in an instant. Conflict between parents before and during the separation period is a severe stressor for children. This also ties in on how the parents handle the divorce will be how their children will respond to the problems that will arise due to it.

It may be helpful to understand a little about divorce and the typical effects it has on men, women and children. The divorce rate in the United States is the highest in the world at the moment. Fifty percent of marriages end in divorce. Sixty-seven percent of all second marriages end in divorce. As high as these statistics are, what is also true is that the divorce rate appears to be dropping a small percentage. The reasons for this change are not very clear. But there are certain reasons that can tie in to it like many people cannot afford to divorce, many people cannot afford to marry. Another reason is that the generation of baby boomers, who account for a large proportion of our population are no longer in their 20s and 30s, the ages when divorce is most prevalent. The expectation society has is that divorced life is less satisfying than married life. Divorce is associated with an increase in depression, where people experience loss of partner, hopes and dreams they had together, and lifestyle. This affects the parents which children are able to see when a parent is emotionally stable and when they're not, and this affects the children. Seeing that the people they most rely on aren't emotionally stable can have some really chaotic consequences in the child. The parent being too busy with their own emotional problems will most likely disregard his or her child's emotional and mental health. Something that affects most parents during this transition is the financial reality of divorce: the same resources must now support almost twice the expenses in the household.

Children's psychological reactions to their parents' divorce vary in degree dependent on

three factors: the quality of their relationship with each of their parents before the separation, the intensity and duration of the parental conflict, and the parents' ability to focus on the needs of children in their divorce and be strong emotionally. Many times however, the parents are too caught up in their own emotional distress to notice their children's. Older studies showed boys had greater social and academic adjustment problems than girls. New evidence indicates that when children have a hard time, boys and girls suffer equally; they just differ in how they suffer. Boys are more externally symptomatic than girls, they act out their anger, frustration and hurt. They may get into trouble in school, fight more with peers and parents. Girls tend to internalize their distress. They may become depressed, develop headaches or stomach aches, and have changes in their eating and sleeping patterns. These are ways that a child unconsciously shows how their emotions are.

Divorce also has some positive effects for children. Single parents are often closer to their children than married parents were. This is can also be negative as when a child takes on too much responsibility because one or both parents are not functioning well as a parent. Another reason is when a parent talks to a child about how hurt they are by the other parent putting pressure and emotional distress on the child. Often a separated parent will make an effort to spend quality time with the children and pay attention to their desires, like taking to Disneyland or parks. And you can imagine that some children might find some benefit in celebrating two Christmases and birthdays each year with their parents separated. If both parents remarry, they may have twice as many supportive adults that can look after him or her. Parents can control their conflict during their divorce process and after, the children can experience freedom from daily household tension between parents. The decision to end a



relationship can be traumatic, chaotic, and filled with contradictory emotions.

There are also specific feelings, attitudes, and dynamics associated with whether one is in the role of the initiator or the receiver of the decision to breakup. For example, it is not unusual for the initiator to experience fear, relief, distance, impatience, resentment, doubt, and guilt. Like this when a party has not initiated the divorce, they may feel shock, betrayal, loss of control, victimization, decreased self esteem, insecurity, anger, a desire for revenge and wishes to reconcile. However, this is not always the case, every single family is different. There could be a family that can handle it well and has good communication or a family that is aggressive, only likes to put stress, doesn't communicate properly and is violent. There could be many different types of cases and each different case affects the children in different manners. There can't be a pinpoint to suggest that all o the children from divorced families are all affected a certain way because that's not realistic. Every child from a divorced family react differently because depending on the environment they are in, their genes, and their personal decisions. Research shows that children from divorced families are prone to being more vulnerable emotionally making them more prone to doing drugs, alcoholism, promiscuity and low self esteem.

Now a days, one-quarter of young adults between the age of 18 and 35 are grown children of divorce. These 15 million young people across America have a very different take on divorce. Most of them are relatively successful. They don't see themselves as victims or damaged goods. Most have graduated from high school, maybe gone to college or beyond, gotten jobs, gotten married, had kids. When they hear the debate about damaged children of divorce, they cringe. "That's not me," they say. This is due to the fact that these adults have

found who they are their identity is no stablished unlike when they were children in the first few years of their parents divorce.

It turns out that any kind of divorce, whether or not it's amicable, gives children an entirely new and burdensome job. After a divorce, the parents no longer have to confront to their different worlds —their different values, beliefs and lifestyles. In fact, their inability to handle that challenge may have led to the divorce. But the big job of making sense of the parents' two different worlds does not go away once the divorce papers are signed. Instead, this job gets handed to the child alone.

The divorce itself does not affect children in a negative way. The effects result more often from the feeling of uncertainty of what is going to happen after the divorce, from the level of conflict between the parents and from how the parenting after the divorce is done. The consequences of a divorce for children are mostly that they have to move to a different home and sometimes to a different school and that they will not see and be with both their parents at the same time any more. In most of the cases, they will live with their mother and they will see their father much less.

Overall children of divorced families have problems to adjust to the new situation especially When their divorced parents keep on fighting. The bigger the conflict and the longer it lasts, the more the children seem to be affected. To adjust to their new situation takes them 2 years or more.

The age of children plays a role in how they react to the divorce. Effects of divorce on children under 9 years are that they tend to blame themselves for the divorce. They also dream about their parents getting back together again some day. Adolescents, children between 9 and

13 years, react in the opposite direction. They tend to behave more independent. They feel betrayed by their divorced parents. Mistrust enters the relationship. They feel they have to take care of themselves, to take things in their own hands. Mum and dad are apparently putting their interest first.

During divorce and separation, the child's emotional well-being is at considerable risk. It is important to ensure the child has continuous and ready access to the parent with whom the child has developed an emotional attachment. That parent is usually the mother.

Studies point out patterns of behavior that build a child's secure attachment to a primary caregiver. These are: loving physical contact between the adult and child, the caregiver's regular ability to soothe the child by holding, the caregiver's sensitivity to the child's signals and the ability to time interventions in harmony with the child's rhythms, the mutual delight the adult and child have by being in each other's company, and the creation of an environment that permits the child to derive a sense of the consequences of his or her own actions. When parents provide these elements to the young child, they create a foundation for an emotionally healthy life. In addition, they build into the child's personality a resilience that in future years will enable the individual to cope with life's problems and challenges successfully.

However, this isn't the case with most cases in the parenting that goes on after a divorce which can be a lot for a parent to take in now a child is even more affected. Many grown children of divorce in a research said they had to grow up negotiating two wholly separate worlds. They rose to the challenge by becoming a different person with each of their parents. They had a mom-self and a dad-self inside them and pulled out the one they needed depending on where they were that day. They had to grow up fast and often felt much less

emotionally safe than their peers with married parents, even compared with some whose parents were unhappily married.

This silent conflict between two worlds went to the heart of the child's identity. The children of divorce come to feel like divided selves with their family. These cases however vary from family to family. Every case is different some children coming from violent homes other from very communicative homes, and others maybe from homes that were already divided but where still living together. There are many different aspects that can affect a child's identity and a big one is home life, how parents treat them, and if their parents are able to communicate at their level what's going on. As an example, personally, I come from a divided home, I understand how my parents divorce shaped me into the person I am today. The first years of a divorce are always hard on all of the family members emotionally. This actually gave me an insight of what I wanted my career to be. I want to help families who are going through divorce with their cases. I decided my goal was to be a family lawyer. My parents divorce shaped me as a person and helped me understand and grow up in ways that now I know were different and I am thankful for it. Every person's identity is shaped by the different environments and stages of their life that they pass through. To me my parents divorce affected me emotionally the first few years as I adapted to my new way of life, at the same time it gave me a realization of who I wanted to become. I wanted to help families who were passing through the exact same thing. I started my dreams of becoming a family lawyer.

To normalize client's experiences during this time, a lawyer may to know that typical emotional stages have been identified with ending a relationship. It may also be helpful to understand that marriages do not breakdown overnight; the breakup is not the result of one

incident; nor is the breakup the entire fault of one party. The emotional breaking up process typically extends over several years and is confounded by each party being at different stages in the emotional process while in the same stage of the physical (or legal) process.

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### Final Synthesis Essay

This research project on identity on children in divorced families connected to the theme for this years capstone which was, “addressing some of the critical issues in literary and cultural studies such as: how is human experience represented and/or (mis)re-presented in literature? How is border crossing defined in literary studies? Why are cultural negotiations critical in understanding today's society? Is the reader response tradition in literary criticism valid? How do we define our relationship with some of the great literary works? How does that understanding help us find our own identity toward the eventual goal of the achievement of self-actualization?”

Identity is very well studied by psychologists there are many things that affect who we are from environment, our parents or role models to genes. In this specific case I looked at children from divorced families and their identities. In this process I learned that it can be a big and chaotic first few years of a divorce to a child as he or she feels like their world changed in a heartbeat and feels off balance emotionally. The first few years are the hard ones since the child needs to adapt to his or her new way of living. After understanding how their knew life will be is acceptance and healing from the pervious events. As the child grows older they have a clearer view of who they are and who they would like to be. Their identity being formed throughout their lives with every problem and every decision they make.

This essay helped me understand the psychology of why these children struggle with identity and how as a family lawyer I would be able to help the family as a whole by knowing



how they are feeling. I could be able to get down to their problems faster and know how to talk and deal with these situations from their point of view as well.