

# Simmons Longitudinal Study

Age 30 Newsletter—Summer 2004

Simmons Longitudinal Study

Adaptation & Development Across the Lifespan

Simmons College

School of Social Work

**T**he summer is finally here! After this intensely cold winter, we thought the warm weather would never come. We hope this newsletter finds you well and ready to enjoy the upcoming summer. While some of you may be relaxing poolside, the Simmons Longitudinal Study staff are busy writing papers and presenting data at various conferences based on all the information you provided during your age 30 interviews. Thanks to you for all of your help, we have a lot of great information on which to report!

In this issue, we provide you with some highlights from the age 30 interviews. In the past, we have received several requests for specific findings from the SLS. Your wish is our command! In this issue you will find an article on social support, an article revealing your predictions of life at age 30, and an article comparing your parents' 30 to your 30.

We would like to thank those of you who returned your Winter 2003 postcards and extend a special congratulations to all the winners of the Winter 2003 Drawing. Each winner was awarded \$100. Don't forget to fill out and return the enclosed postcard and your name could appear in the next newsletter (and you could be \$100 richer)!

Sincerely,

Helen Reinherz, Project Director

## \$100 WINNERS!

Fill out the enclosed postcard and your name could appear here in future newsletters!



## Family Matters!!!



The word has really been getting out! Recently, Dr. Helen Reinherz, Project Director, summarized and released an overview of findings from the Simmons Longitudinal Study (SLS) that have been published throughout the years. This review of findings has gained international recognition - it was recently featured in a Chilean newspaper, written in Spanish of course! Some major findings from the SLS were also summarized in a recent widely circulated press release. Please visit our website ([www.simmons.edu/ssw/sls/releases.shtml](http://www.simmons.edu/ssw/sls/releases.shtml)) to view this article.

Although we often take the data from your inter-

views and publish them in scientific journals, we are always pleased when the media picks up our stories. Now, we are bringing the major findings to you - we thought you might be interested in three themes particularly relevant to family: protective family factors, divorce, and working mothers.

### Protective Family Factors

The study overview presented by Dr. Reinherz highlights one of the main goals of the Simmons Longitudinal Study: to identify protective family factors that help children, adolescents, and young adults overcome difficult times in their lives. In general, protective factors are the ingredi-

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## FROM 18 TO 30: How accurate were you at predicting your future?

During your age 18 interview, you were asked to predict what you thought your life would be like at age 30. Probably an unfair question at best, given all that has happened in the past twelve years. Nevertheless, you graciously answered our questions and gave your best estimates of what you thought your life would be like. Below you'll find a set of your predictions about where you'd be at 30, and we follow your predictions with a little taste of reality.

### PREDICTION: In terms of your career:

38% of you predicted you would be "very successful"  
61% of you predicted you would be "successful"  
1% of you predicted you would be "not very successful"

### REALITY:

At age 30, you were asked to rate your satisfaction with your current job:

31% of you were "very satisfied"  
41% of you were "mostly satisfied"  
22% of you were "somewhat satisfied"  
6% of you were "not at all satisfied"



### RESULT:

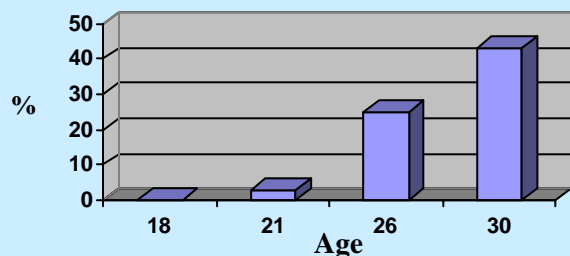
99% of you predicted you would be "successful" or "very successful" in terms of work/career at age 30. We didn't actually ask you how "successful" you were at age 30, but what we did find is that you were satisfied with your careers; that is, almost 75% of you reported being "very satisfied" or "mostly satisfied" with your primary job at age 30. That's good news!

### PREDICTION: In terms of marriage:

90% of you predicted you would be married by age 30  
3% of you predicted you would never get married

### REALITY:

By age 18, none of you were married  
By age 21, 3% of you were married  
By age 26, 25% of you were married  
By age 30, 43% of you were married



### RESULT:

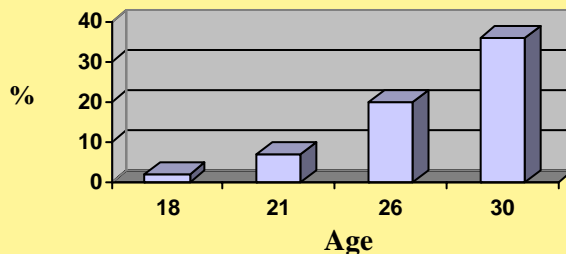
At 18, an overwhelming 90% of you predicted you would be married by age 30 – interestingly the data showed that only 43% had "taken the plunge" and made the commitment to marriage by age 30. In sum, fewer than one half of you predicted your marital status– who knew?!

### PREDICTION: In terms of children:

75% of you predicted you would have a child by age 30  
5% of you predicted you would never have a child

### REALITY:

By age 18, 2% of you had a child  
By age 21, 7% of you had a child  
By age 26, 20% of you had a child  
By age 30, 36% of you had a child



### RESULT:

Similar to your predictions concerning marriage, a large majority (75%) predicted you would have made the transition to parenthood by age 30, but data revealed that fewer of you (36%) had become parents by age 30. Just like national statistics indicate, the transition to parenthood has been pushed back.

### PREDICTION:

What will be the 3 most important things to you at 30?  
83% of you predicted your family  
53% of you predicted career/work  
45% of you predicted friends/relationships with others

### REALITY:

96% of you said your family  
82% of you said marriage/having a significant other  
77% of you said a sense of accomplishment

### RESULT:

Even at the age of 18, many of you recognized the great importance of family and correctly predicted the significant role it would play in your lives at age 30. Both families-of-origin (the families you are born into) and families-of-creation (the families you create) are important sources of social support and strength (and annoyance at times!).

**Now that you have turned 30, do you feel as though you have lived up to your great expectations?**

Although you may not yet be in the stage of life you predicted when you were 18 years old, at age 30 over 75% of you were satisfied with your life overall... and that says a lot!

*As for your predictions...  
Don't quit your day jobs!*

## THE BENEFITS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

People need people. How many times in the last week have you relied on someone for a small favor, to lend you something, or for some much needed advice? It turns out that this support is more vital than you may think... especially during emerging adulthood. Some of you may remember the term “emerging adulthood,” from our previous newsletter. To refresh your memory, “emerging adulthood” is the term used to describe the period between adolescence and adulthood (18-30) when individuals feel they are no longer adolescents, but not quite adults yet either. During this stage of life, emerging adults are beginning to establish themselves outside of their families-of-origin as they prepare for adulthood. Creating a social support network of adult friendships, colleague relationships, and intimate partnerships becomes extremely important. During emerging adulthood, social support seems to be particularly influential, even serving as a protective factor.

During these years, emerging adults experience an increase in satisfaction with social support and in overall well-being. However, and not surprisingly, emerging adults who have mental health problems do not fare as well. In general, individuals with mental health problems report lower levels of satisfaction with social support. A closer look at emerging adults with mental health problems reveals two important groups: *remitters* (those who had a mental health problem by age 18, but no problem between 18 and 30) and *persisters* (those who had a mental health problem by age 18, and continued to have a problem between 18 and 30).

The focus of this specific research paper (presented March 14, 2004 at the Society for Research in



Adolescence by SLS Senior Research Associate Jennifer Tanner) was to understand what makes remitters different from persisters. Why do some emerging adults recover from a disorder while others continue to experience problems into adulthood? We, as researchers, want to under-

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ents that help create conditions to assist youth in overcoming issues that otherwise could cause problems in their lives. Data from you (our SLS study members) have revealed several interesting findings about what constitutes a protective family factor. Over the years we have found that each of the following serves as a protective factor:

- \* *Having a family member to turn to for advice*
- \* *Having a family member to confide in*
- \* *Having a cohesive (close and supportive) family*

These few factors are related to many positive outcomes.

For example:

- Adolescents who had a *family member they considered a confidant or felt comfortable asking advice from* had fewer behavioral and emotional problems at age 18.
- At age 18, adolescents who *had a family member in whom they could confide* were less likely to develop depression and had fewer behavioral and emotional problems than adolescents who did not have a confidant.
- Adolescents who had *cohesive (close and supportive) families* experienced a number of positive outcomes. They were more likely to receive school and community honors and had higher grade point averages. They were also less likely to experience a number of behavioral and emotional problems.

In sum, the benefits of a close, supportive family are numerous and far-reaching. A close family is a tremendous resource that can support a child or adolescent throughout his/her life.

### Divorce

Do you think divorce affects children? Research on whether divorce has negative effects on children is complex. The answer to this question is – in some ways “yes,” and in some ways “no.” Findings from the SLS have helped make the association between divorce and its effects on children a little clearer. At ages 9 and 15, children and adolescents whose parents were divorced experienced more behavioral and emotional problems in the short-term than children and adolescents whose parents were not divorced. However, these effects were only short-term. When a di-

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# AGE 30: THEN & NOW

**D**o you ever wonder what life was like for your parents when they were 30? Did they experience the same issues that you are experiencing now? What were the social expectations for marriage, career, education, and having children? Did your parents feel pressure to get married and have children?

Have you heard the saying “you can’t compare apples and oranges?” Similarly, we cannot make exact comparisons between you at age 30 and your parents when they were 30 because the information we have on you and your parent is not *exactly* the same. What we can do is obtain an idea of your life at age 30 compared to your parents’ lives at roughly age 30. Let’s see how things have changed...or stayed the same...

## Parenting

**Then:** Almost all of your parents (98%) had made the transition to parenthood by age 30. Only nine of you have mothers who had not become a parent by age 30!

**Now:** By age 30, 36% of you had become parents.

**Comparison:** As you can see, there is quite a dramatic increase in the age at which people are making the transition to parenthood. Your parents may have experienced some societal or familial pressure to settle down and start a family. Today, it seems that most 30-year-olds are afforded the opportunity to experience more of “life” before they become parents. Societal and personal factors, such as women pursuing their career goals, furthering their educations, and delaying pregnancies to travel or spend time with their partners have all impacted this trend. During your parents’ generation, women were not only younger when they started having children, but they also had more children! Twenty percent of your parents had not only one, but four or more children by age 30!!! Of

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*(Social Support continued from page 3)*

stand these differences so that we can learn what helps people recover from mental health problem(s). Comparisons between the two groups (remitters and persisters), at age 30, revealed several interesting differences. Remitters were more likely to be married, parents, and homeowners by age 30. On the other hand, persisters were less likely to have made transitions to marriage and parenthood and less likely to own homes. So, what might help explain these differences? One interpretation of the group differences is that by engaging in “stabilizing” roles, such as being a spouse or parent, it is possible that the risk of mental health problems is weakened. By becoming committed to such roles, individuals are sometimes pushed to provide consistent care to others, thus, “stabilizing” their own behaviors and moods.

A second key difference between the two groups was the extent to which remitters and persisters reported interpersonal problems. Dr. Tanner investigated whether the two groups differed on the extent to which they reported the following interpersonal problems:

- \* **Reports of not having a close friend/companion**
- \* **Reports of not having people you can depend on**

- \* **Reports of not seeing enough of the people you feel close to**
- \* **Reports of not having enough close friends**
- \* **Reports of not having someone who shows you love/ affection**

Over the course of emerging adulthood, from 18 to 30, remitters experienced a decrease in **all** of these interpersonal problems. That is, those who did not experience mental health problems during emerging adulthood seemed better able to resolve interpersonal problems they had previously experienced. In contrast, persisters experienced either increases in interpersonal problems or their level of problems remained high. These are striking findings! By resolving interpersonal problems, remitters were able to increase the quality of their social support systems. These findings underscore the tremendous importance of strong social support, especially during emerging adulthood.

The importance of friends, families, colleagues, and intimate partners sometimes goes unrecognized. These results remind us to call our friends and family and thank them for all of their support.

(Age 30: Then & Now continued from page 4)

those of you who have children, only seven percent of you have four or more children (the majority of you have two children).

### Work/Career

**Then:** At age 30, 93% of your fathers and 23% of your mothers were working.

**Now:** At age 30, 93% of you (males) and 84% of you (females) were working.

**Comparison:** While the percentage of working 30-year-old males has remained the same over the past 25 years, there has been an increase in the number of women in the work force. FYI: Although women are asserting themselves in the workplace more than ever, full-time employed men continue to earn significantly more than full-time employed women. Hmmm...

### Homemakers/Stay-at-Home-Parents

**Then:** At age 30, 78% of your mothers were homemakers.

**Now:** At age 30, 10% of you (females) were homemakers.

**Result:** In the past quarter century, there has been a tremendous shift in homemaker status. Many women are no longer expected or afforded the opportunity to stay home and take care of the children and the house. As illustrated above, more women are out in the work force, which may be due to the increased cost of living as well as women pursuing their career goals.

### Education

**Then:** 12% of your fathers had completed a college degree by age 30 and 7% of your mothers had completed a college degree by age 30.

**Now:** 37% of you (males) had completed a college degree by age 30 and 41% of you (females) had completed a college degree by age 30.

**Result:** As you can see, education has become an increasingly common characteristic of contemporary young adults. Your parents may not have been able to afford or attend college because they were raising children. Nowadays, some parents begin investing in their child's college education fund before their child is even born!

**What will life be like when your children are 30?**

**We can only imagine...**

(Family Matters continued from page 3)

orce occurs, initially children may need some time to adjust to the changes in their lives. This is quite contrary to the grim outlook for children of divorce painted by some researchers. Some parents may feel pressure to stay together "for the sake of the children," but this is not always the best option. In general, research suggests that *family conflict* affects children's well-being more than divorce or separation.

While divorce may have some negative, temporary effects, divorce, per se, is not as harmful as family conflict.



### **Working Mothers**

Findings from the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that in 1976, 31 percent of women with a child (age 1 or younger) were involved in the work force. Currently, 59 percent of mothers work. This is a growing topic of interest to us and we imagine, to many of you. Do you think children whose mothers stay at home fare better than children whose mothers work? According to our findings, at age 9, children whose mothers were working performed no worse, and in some cases better, than children whose mothers remained at home. Additionally, children whose mothers returned to school to further their educations showed *improved* performance in school and behavior. Perhaps you predicted this effect. Or, perhaps you thought that children who grew up with their mothers at home would fare better than those whose mothers worked. Are the findings a bit surprising?

Well, what did Dr. Reinherz conclude from this review of 20 years of study? **Family matters!!!** As this summary of findings describes, the family has a *strong* influence on children's development and not necessarily in the ways that you might think.

Your participation in the Simmons Longitudinal Study has enabled SLS researchers to identify factors that contribute to positive and healthy development in children. These factors will be taken into consideration when planning programs and interventions to prevent children from developing problems.

**"At age 9, children whose mothers were working performed no worse, and in some cases better, than children whose mothers remained at home."**

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**Return your postcard by June 30th**



***And be entered in a raffle for one of five chances to win \$100***

(Or be entered to win by submitting your information via email at [sls@simmons.edu](mailto:sls@simmons.edu))



### **THE SLS EXPERIENCE: An Insider's Perspective**

During your age 30 interview, you were asked to reflect upon your experience as a member of the Simmons Longitudinal Study. More specifically, your interviewer said to you “I would like to hear from you about what it has been like to be a member of this study for the past 25 years.” By compiling all of your responses to this question, we attempted to “stand in your shoes.”

We were extremely happy to discover that the majority of you had very positive and insightful things to say about your experiences thus far with the SLS. An overwhelming number of you reported that you thought your experiences with the study were “interesting.” Many of you said that you really liked receiving the newsletters and you enjoyed reading the names of your childhood classmates who won the drawings. Many of you also alluded to feelings of connectedness. You said that being part of the SLS helped you feel “linked” with your childhood and with people who grew up with you. One study member explained, “It’s a weird feeling of community. A belongingness to something special and unique. I feel privileged to be a part of it and it has been fun to exchange stories with others in the study after the fact- nobody else.”

A number of you remarked on how the questions your interviewer asked made you reflect upon and think about your life in a different way than you normally would. One of you reported, “It [the interview] helps me to look back and see where I was and how I am now.” Another study member reflected, “It’s almost therapeutic in a way- you get to open up to a stranger, you never get to do that. It

has been a good thing because it has made me think about my life more introspectively.” We are pleased to hear that the interview process helps you think about your life in a unique way.

You also spoke about the feeling of importance that you gained from being in the study and the sense that you were contributing to society. “I wanted to help maintain the study. It’s been a positive experience even though I feel on the spot sometimes during the interviews with my personal information. SLS has made my information feel important. I am glad I can contribute.” Another study member said, “I think it’s great. I think being a part of this is a great achievement. I find it to be a valuable study and at this point I feel it is my responsibility to participate.” We are happy to know that many of you realize the great value and importance of your contributions to the study.

The SLS staff strive to make your experiences with the study as pleasant and as comfortable as possible so we were thrilled to hear that many of you enjoyed your interviews. One respondent stated, “It’s comforting- it’s been a part of my life for more [years] than not. You guys are like aunts/uncles I hear from every four years and can talk to.” Your feedback is extremely important to us as we are constantly trying to improve the interview process and your overall experience as a member of the SLS. For those of you who would like to know more about the study (history of the study, why you were chosen, the goals of the study, a list of publications, and much more) – we invite you to visit our website [www.simmons.edu/gssw/sls](http://www.simmons.edu/gssw/sls). If you have questions or concerns about the study feel free to contact us at [sls@simmons.edu](mailto:sls@simmons.edu) or (617) 521-3932.

Thank you for your continued dedication to the Simmons Longitudinal Study!