ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND CONFLICT ON COLLEGE STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

By Michelle Marie Moats

This study focuses on college student’s attitudes and perceptions of marriage and divorce in today’s society based on their experience, or lack of experience, with parental divorce. This study also examines if differences exist among college students from divorced families and married-parent families and their perceptions of marriage and divorce. Additionally, this study looks at how parental conflict impacts the formation of college student’s attitudes about marital relationships. A convenience sample strategy was used and surveys were handed out in undergraduate classes at Miami University. A total of 386 students participated in this study. The results of this study show that perceived parental conflict is a strong indicator of how college students form their attitudes of marriage and divorce.
The Effects of Parental Marriage, Divorce and Conflict on College Students' Attitudes Toward Marriage and Divorce

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I would also thank my friends and family, and those who have touched my life along the way. My journey has now come to an end. Thank you all.
Chapter One
Introduction

With the divorce rate in the United States among the highest in the world (Linlin, 1993), the process of marriage and divorce is a highly researched topic within the social sciences. It is estimated that 50 percent of first marriages and 60 percent of second marriages end in divorce (Cohen, 2002). Tanner (2002) predicts that 40 percent of children will have experienced parental divorce by their sixteenth birthday. With the increasing divorce rate and rising number of children from divorced families, it is important to investigate how these children are affected by the experience of parental divorce in today’s society.

Parents play a vital role in their children’s lives, serving as their earliest and most important role model. Children tend to look up to and observe their parents’ behavior from a very young age (Herzog & Cooney, 2002). Throughout childhood, family experiences play a vital role in building children’s attitudes, beliefs and expectations (Ganong, Coleman & Brown, 1981). Children learn about how marriage and family life should be by observing their parents’ marital relationship (Ganong et al., 1981). Rogers and Rose (2002) report that children of divorce experience detrimental side effects such as depression, anger, aggression, parent-child conflict as well as academic decline and lack of positive parental interaction due to parental divorce. In terms of research, a common question among social scientists regarding children and divorce is how these children are affected by their experience and how they are different from those who have not experienced divorce. Cohen (2002) found that children from divorce may experience more internalizing and externalizing behaviors than children from intact families due to experiencing ongoing parental conflict and discord. Experiencing parental divorce may lead a child to trivialize the importance of commitment and view the institution of marriage with negativity (Tasker & Richards, 1994).

Theoretical Perspective

This study focuses on how individuals are affected by the experience of parental divorce as well as how the attitudes and perceptions of marriage and divorce differ among young adults from divorced families and non-divorced families. Influencing this
study is the intergenerational transmission of divorce theory. Herzog and Cooney (2002) note the importance of the intergenerational transmission of divorce theory when discussing the impact of divorce on children. This theory looks at family context, family interaction, and family history of divorce and past histories in regard to marriage, divorce and marital satisfaction (Guttmann, Ben-Asher & Lazar, 1999). The intergenerational transmission of divorce theory asserts that attitudes about marriage and marital styles are passed down to children who experience divorce, meaning that children who come from divorced families are at risk for divorce in their own marriages (Amato, 1996). A central research area related to the intergenerational transmission of divorce theory focuses on individuals from divorced families, but in order to better understand the role family process plays in this theory, it is important to study individuals from non-divorced families as well (Herzog & Cooney, 2002).

The ways in which parents/spouses deal with their problems can impact the success of their marital relationship as well as the way their offspring perceive marital relationships. Jones and Nelson (1996) found that continual conflict between parents creates an unstable environment that teaches children negative views about marriage. Research has shown that children who experience divorce show more internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Cohen, 2002), are more likely to be depressed, have aggression problems and low academic achievement (Rogers & Rose, 2002) and view marriage with more negativity than those children from non-divorced families (Tasker & Richards, 1994). Within the literature, it is also apparent that offspring learn intimate relationship behaviors from observing their parents, and those behaviors are often transmitted over time from parent to child (Amato, 1996).

Statement of Research Problem

As adolescents become young adults, they begin to explore various aspects of life that include dating, intimate relationships and thoughts about future marriage. Research shows many factors are involved in the formation of a young adult’s view of marriage such as their experience or lack of experience with parental divorce (Jones & Nelson, 1996). In their study of young adults and intimate relationships, Sinclair and Nelson (1998) found those students from divorced and intact families do not differ in the ability to experience intimate relationships, contradicting many other studies which have shown
a difference between the two groups. Parental conflict within divorced and non-divorced families can have a detrimental effect on how young adults view marriage. Tasker and Richards (1994) noted that high levels of parental conflict may lead offspring to marry at an early age, engage in early sexual and emotional involvement in their own relationships as well as experience negative feelings about commitment. When discussing intimate relationships of young adults, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) stated that experiencing parental divorce could impact young adults’ attitudes toward marriage, thus leaving many young adults uncommitted to a number of partners in the early dating years due to fear. In relation, Sinclair and Nelson (1998) found that parental divorce can give young adults a feeling of insecurity within their own relationships, leading them to move too fast into an intimate relationship as well as have a greater variety of dating partners and interest in relationships. Franklin, Janoff-Bulman and Roberts (1990) found that college students who experienced parental divorce are less optimistic about their intimate relationship and success of their future marriage.

Parental divorce, in general, is associated with more negative attitudes toward marriage, early sexual behavior and early marriage that are a result of parental conflict within the home and lack of a physical and emotional parent-child relationship (Tasker & Richards, 1994). Having unrealistic ideals about marriage can lead to a strong sense of marital dissatisfaction which be a result of the high divorce rate in our society (Larson, 1988). The focus of this study is to assess the attitudes and perceptions of young adults from divorced and non-divorced families as well as further the research of how young adults feel about divorce and marriage in today’s society.

Justification of Research Problem

The impact divorce has on adolescent children is a highly research area in the social science field. Although extensive research has been done on how children are affected by parental divorce, one research area that lacks depth is the effect of divorce on young adults. It is important to examine how experiencing parental divorce affects young adult’s attitudes and perception of divorce and marriage, as well as their beliefs on the formation of their own intimate relationships. With the high divorce rate and growing prevalence of marriage and divorce in today’s society, it is equally important to research
the attitudes and perceptions of individuals from divorced and non-divorced families as well.
Chapter Two
Literature Review

This study examines the attitudes and perceptions of marriage and divorce among college students in today’s society. Based on a 1981 study by Ganong et al., which examined the perceptions and attitudes of high school students from intact, divorced and reconstituted families, this study looks at how the views of college-aged students from divorced and non-divorced families differ almost two decades later.

The divorce rate in the United States is among the highest in the world (Linlin, 1993). Parental divorce has been an issue of interest for social science researchers and the increase in parental divorce for college students has been widely noted. In 1972, 8.7 percent of college freshman report having experienced parental divorce, while in 1989 the percentage of college freshmen from divorced families rose to 22.6% and again in 1999 to 25.4% (Daniel et al., 2001). It is estimated that 50 percent of first marriages and 60 percent of second marriages end in divorce (Cohen, 2002). Today, more divorced parents are choosing to cohabit with someone before getting remarried, compared to 1970 (Nielson, 1999). About 15% of those divorced cohabitation couples never marry each other (Nielson, 1999).

Review of the Literature

As the divorce rate increases, Daniel et al. (2001) reported that single-parent households would also increase. Parental separation and divorce remains an important factor in our society that contributes to the risks of cognitive, behavioral and emotional development of children today, and it is predicted that 40 percent of children will have experienced parental divorce by their sixteenth birthday (Tanner, 2002). Demographic research shows that, on average, individuals who marry under age thirty as well as marriages where the wife has completed a higher degree of education than her husband, are at an increased risk of divorce (Linlin, 1993). Other variables that increase the risk of divorce are low religious affiliations, low education and income, cohabitation prior to marriage, being in a second marriage and experiencing divorce as a child (Amato & Rodgers, 1997).
Children and Divorce

Parents play a vital role in their children’s lives, serving as their earliest and most important role model. Children tend to look up to and observe their parent’s behavior from a very young age (Herzong & Cooney, 2002). Throughout childhood, family experiences play a vital role in building children’s attitudes, beliefs and expectations (Ganong et al., 1981). Children learn about how marriage and family life should be by observing their parents’ marital relationship (Ganong et al., 1981). A child’s physical, mental and emotional development depends greatly on a strong emotional and physical bond that needs to exist in order for the child to better understand and overcome the divorce experience (Rogers & Rose, 2002).

Much of the research on children of divorce focuses on the effects that parental divorce has on those involved. Children from divorced families may experience internalizing and externalizing behaviors that are associated with their parent’s divorce which include depression, anger, aggression, parent-child conflict as well as academic decline and lack of positive parental interaction (Rogers & Rose, 2002). Cohen (2002) found that children from divorced parents may experience more internalizing and externalizing behaviors than children from intact families due to experiencing ongoing parental conflict and discord (Cohen, 2002). When children experience parental divorce, they may begin to view the institution of marriage with negativity, question their feelings regarding intimate relationships and begin to seek alternatives to marriage such as cohabitation (Tasker & Richards, 1994).

Age at the time of divorce is a significant variable when determining how a child is affected by parental divorce (Goodman & Pickens, 2001). Giuliani (1997) found that when a student experienced divorce during high school, their academic performance was higher than if they had experienced divorce at a younger age during elementary school. During a stressful life event such as parental divorce, a child’s self esteem may be affected as well (Amato, 1993). During and following parental divorce, a child is often caught in the middle of their divorcing parents, which puts even more of a strain on their ability to cope with stress (Goodman & Pickens, 2001). In terms of parental blame, Jennings and Howe (2001) found that when children spend more time with the mother
during and after the divorce, the children are easily influenced by her views, therefore, the children may show more blame toward the father.

Research has found that children are affected greatly by their parents’ divorce, and, in most cases, the impact is negative (Hipke, Wokchik, Sandler & Braver, 2002). Parental divorce may happen suddenly or could be a result of ongoing marital disruption but the effects a child undergoes and his or her ability to overcome the experience continues long after the divorce is final (Yongmin & Yuanzhang, 2002). The risks associated with experiencing parental divorce happen over a continuous period throughout a child’s life, not just during the time of marital disruption (Hipke et al., 2002). In regard to long-term effects, experiencing parental divorce has a greater impact on a child’s behavior and emotions than on their attitudes about their own marriage in the future (Carson & Pauly, 1990). A study by Ganong et al. (1981) assessing the attitudes and beliefs about marriage among adolescents from divorced, single-parent, and reconstituted families found that although those from intact families showed to be somewhat more favorable to marriage, attitudes of those from single-parent and reconstituted families did not show a significant difference (Ganong et al., 1981).

The intergenerational transmission of divorce is a topic of interest to many researchers who study divorce (Herzog & Cooney, 2002). This theory looks at family context, family interaction, and family history of divorce and past histories in regard to marriage, divorce and marital satisfaction (Guttmann et al. , 1999). The intergenerational transmission of divorce asserts that attitudes about marriage and marital styles are passed down to children who experience divorce, meaning that children who come from divorced families are at increased risk for divorce in their own marriages (Amato, 1996). A main research area regarding the intergenerational transmission of divorce focuses on individuals with divorced parents, but in order to better understand the role family process play in this theory, it is important to study individuals from non-divorced families as well (Herzog & Cooney, 2002). Specifically, parental conflict and negative communication are important factors related to the attitudes and beliefs children have about divorce (Herzog & Cooney, 2002).

As adolescents become young adults, they begin to explore various aspects of life that include dating, intimate relationships and thoughts about future marriage. Research
shows many factors are involved in the formation of a young adult’s view of marriage such as their experience or lack of experience with parental divorce (Jones & Nelson, 1996). The presence of interparental hostility and conflict, whether or not they have experienced a divorce between parents, may impact young adults’ attitudes (Jones & Nelson, 1996). When parents have high levels of conflict in their marriage, they provide an environment that creates more negative views and attitudes about marital relationships among their children (Jones & Nelson, 1996). Parental communication and conflict management are marital interactions that should be examined in the parent’s generation and the children’s generation in order to better understand how parental divorce affects their children’s relationship (Herzog & Cooney, 2002).

Gender, age of child at time of the divorce and the degree of conflict between parents are all factors that affect how an individual is affected by parental divorce (Shulman, Scharf, Lumer & Maurer, 2001). In a study examining the age of the child at the time of parental divorce, Zill, Morrison and Coiro (1993) found that behavioral problems evident in adolescence and adulthood were related to experiencing divorce at a young age (five years old and younger) (Sinclair & Nelson, 1995).

Gender Differences

Many researchers who study children and divorce report that gender is an important factor to consider when discussing children’s reactions to parental divorce (Goodman & Pickens, 2001). Sons, as well those children whose mothers do not remarry, are affected more negatively after their parents’ divorce than daughters and those who do remarry (Nielson, 1999). Thus, it is important for sons to maintain a close parent-child bond with their father in order to help overcome the divorce rather than develop social, emotional and psychological disorders (Nielson, 1999). When a mother does not remarry after a divorce, sons and daughters are more likely to experience a higher risk of social, emotional, psychological and academic problems post divorce, as well as low self-esteem and self confidence, poor grades, and internalizing behaviors such as anger, depression and anxiety disorders (Nielson, 1999).

In terms of gender differences, Ganong et al. (1981) found that females express more positive views toward marriage than males regardless of family type. Though there is research to support gender differences in terms of coping due to parental divorce,
Gohm, Oishi, Darlington and Diener (1998) did not find a significant difference in coping strategies between male and female children of divorce. Similarly, Ganong, et al. (1981) found that males, in general, held more favorable views toward divorce than females, although the difference was not statistically significant.

Young Adults and Divorce

Experiencing parental divorce during childhood continues to be a stressful life event for adolescents and young adults (Sinclair & Nelson, 1998). Past research has primarily focused on how divorce affects the emotional and behavioral outcomes of children and adolescents, but there has been very little research on how parental divorce affects young adults’ views and attitudes toward relationships (Carson & Pauly, 1990). This study will go a step beyond current research trends by examining how college-aged individuals from divorced and non-divorced families perceive marriage and divorce in today’s society as well as in their own lives.

Parental conflict within divorced and non-divorced families can have a detrimental effect on how young adults view marriage. For example, parental conflict may lead offspring to marry at an early age, engage in early sexual and emotional involvement in their own relationships as well as experience negative feelings about commitment (Tasker & Richards, 1994). Amato (1999) found that young adults who have experienced parental divorce and a step family situation before they reach late adolescence feel more distant from and less affectionate emotionally with their parents. Young adults are able to look back on their experience during childhood and hold a more adult perspective about how they felt and how they perceived the divorce at the time (Catwright & Seymore, 2002). In a study assessing how young adults perceive parental divorce, Shulman, Scharf, Lumer and Maurer (2001) found that a young adult’s perception of their parents’ divorce included their feelings, past recollections and how they currently feel about divorce in general. Shulman et al. (2001) also reported that young adults were able to recall the sense of loss they encountered during the time of their parents’ divorce. Their study also showed that those young adults who have experienced parental divorce before they were twelve years old reported a higher level of current and past loss than those who were older at the time of divorce (Shulman et al., 2001).
When discussing the intimate relationships of young adults, Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) state that experiencing parental divorce can impact young adults’ attitudes toward marriage thus, leaving many young adults uncommitted to a number of partners in the early dating years due to fear of relationships. Fear of intimate relationships, for many young adults, is shown by their avoidance of intimate relationships (Sinclair & Nelson, 1998). On the other hand, some research shows that young adults of divorce experience a greater variety of dating partners and interest in relationships. Their heightened insecurity due to parental divorce could be a factor that may lead them to move too fast into an intimate relationship (Sinclair & Nelson, 1998). Early dating behavior is also related to the absence of a father, especially due to a divorce situation (Kinnaird & Gerrard, 1986). Gabardi and Rosen (1991) found in their research that male and female young adults possess more negative attitudes toward marriage and have more sexual partners than young adults with married parents. Young adults with divorced parents are able to explore their identity and intimacy issues by having a greater amount of sexual partners, however their fear of intimacy and commitment does not allow them to commit (Sinclair & Nelson, 1998). Some of the affects of parental divorce may trigger young adults to rush into intimate relationships and have more sexual partners than young adults from intact homes (Jones & Nelson, 1996).

Franklin et al. (1990) found that college students who experienced parental divorce are less optimistic about their intimate relationships and their success in future marriage. The California Children of Divorce Study assessed long-term affects of divorce through a longitudinal study of children of divorce over a 10 and 15 year period (Shulman et al., 2001). At the 5-year follow-up, Wallerstein (1991) found that one third of the entire sample reported experiencing moderate to severe depression; 10-year follow-up showed that adult children continued to perceive their parents divorce a major life changing event and continued to experience vivid memories and flashbacks from their past. Wallerstein (1991) also found that at the 10-year mark, when young adults began to explore issues of love, commitment and marriage, they did so with concern, anxiety and fear of the consequences.

In their study of young adults and intimate relationships, Sinclair and Nelson (1998) found those students from divorced and intact families do not differ in the ability
to experience intimate relationships, contradicting many other studies which have shown a difference between the two. Sinclair and Nelson (1998) also suggest that the differences that do exist can be attributed to the fact that negative feelings and effects due to parental divorce may fade over time. Parental divorce, in general, is associated with more negative attitudes toward marriage, early sexual behavior and early marriage that are a result of parental conflict within the home and lack of a physical and emotional parent-child relationship (Tasker & Richards, 1994).

Allen, Stoltenberg and Rosko (1990) found that college students who experience parental divorce report feeling more separated from their families because, in many cases, they are out of the home and are able to accept responsibility of their own lives. Lopez (1991) stated that unresolved emotions such as feelings of anger and resentment due to the divorce could provide a lack of independence in college students from their parents (Jones & Nelson, 1996). A heightened self-esteem over their new found freedom lets college students be in control of good events in their lives such as academic achievements, rather than not having control over bad events such as parental divorce (Nosanow, Hage & Levin, 1999). Allen et al. (1990) also found that individuals from intact families reported feeling a closer bond to their families and that they were able to obtain more support from their families than individuals from divorced parents.

In many cases, depression in college students can be associated with parental divorce (Jones & Nelson, 1996). Academic decline and poor interpersonal relationships are factors that may heighten the level of depression that negatively affects college students who have experienced parental divorce (Jones & Nelson, 1996). Although many studies show that college students experience academic hardships, emotional disorders and poor social development, most do not suffer long-term consequences (Nielson, 1999). In contrast, Amato (1995) reported that the amount of parental conflict before the actual divorce affects long-term consequences of parental divorce. Weiner, Harlow, Adams and Grebstein (1995) found that negative predictors of adjustment in college-aged students from divorce families is related to paternal indifference, lack of paternal caring and maternal indifference, while parental conflict is associated with a negative adjustment for individuals from intact families.
Jones and Nelson (1996) found that college students from intact and non-intact homes did not differ in their expectations of marriage, thus, rejecting their original hypothesis that students from intact homes would have more favorable attitudes than those from non-intact homes. Having unrealistic ideals about marriage can lead to a strong sense of marital dissatisfaction which may relate to the high divorce rate in our society (Larson, 1988). Interestingly, Sprecher, Cate and Levin (1988) also found only minimal differences when comparing marriage attitudes and beliefs of young adults from intact families and divorced families.

It is apparent in the literature that there are many possible effects for individuals who experience parental divorce. Depending on their age at the time of their parents’ divorce, research shows that children and young adults suffer the consequences emotionally, psychologically, interpersonally and academically. The way that parents handle the divorce can ultimately determine how their children react to the change, and in the long run, how they handle their own marital relationship.

*Theoretical Framework*

The way in which parents/spouses deal with their problems can also impact the success of their marital relationship as well as the way their offspring perceive marital relationships. Jones and Nelson (1996) found that continual conflict between parents creates an unstable environment that teaches children negative views about marriage. Research has shown that children who experience divorce show more internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Cohen, 2002), are more likely to be depressed, have aggression problems and low academic achievement (Rogers & Rose, 2002) and view marriage with more negativity than those children from non-divorced families (Tasker & Richards, 1994). Within the literature, it is also apparent that offspring learn intimate relationship behaviors from observing their parents and those behaviors are often transmitted from parent to child (Amato, 1996). The theory supporting these assumptions is the intergenerational transmission of divorce theory.

Herzog and Cooney (2002) note the importance of the intergenerational transmission of divorce theory when discussing the impact of divorce on children. This theory looks at family context, family interaction, and family history of divorce and past histories in regard to marriage, divorce and marital satisfaction (Guttmann et al, 1999).
The intergenerational transmission of divorce theory asserts that attitudes about marriage and marital styles are passed down to children who experience divorce, meaning that children who come from divorced families are at risk for divorce in their own marriages (Amato, 1996). A main research area regarding the intergenerational transmission of divorce theory focuses on individuals from divorced families, but in order to better understand the role family process play in this theory, it is important to study individuals from non-divorced families as well (Herzog & Cooney, 2002).

Based on the literature on young adult’s perception of marriage and divorce, the following research questions have been developed:

**Research Question #1**: Do young adults from divorced and non-divorced families view marriage and divorce differently?

Hypothesis #1: Young adults from divorced families will have more negative views toward marriage and more positive views toward divorce and young adults from non-divorced families will have more positive views toward marriage and more negative views toward divorce.

**Research Question #2**: Are there differences in perceptions and attitudes among young adult males and females?

Hypothesis #1: Males from divorced families will have more negative attitudes toward marriage than females from divorced and non-divorced families and males from non-divorced families.

Hypothesis #2: Males will hold more positive attitudes toward divorce than females.

Hypothesis #3: Females will have more positive views toward marriage regardless of family type.

**Research Question #3**: Does the amount parental conflict within a family impact perceptions and attitudes among young adults?

Hypothesis #1: Young adults who perceive high levels of parental conflict will have more negative attitudes toward marriage and young adults who perceive lower levels of parental conflict will have more positive attitudes toward marriage
Chapter Three
Methodology

This study examines how college students perceive marriage, divorce, and intimate relationships in today’s society. The study also looks at how individuals from divorced and non-divorced families differ in their attitudes about marriage and divorce. This study is modeled on a 1981 study by Ganong, et al. that assessed the marital perception of high school students from single-parent, reconstituted and intact families. Based on Ganong et al. (1981), this study assesses if marital perceptions differ among college students over two decades later.

Recruitment Plan

In order to obtain access to these students for data collection, written invitations were sent to professors asking permission to come into their classes and distribute the questionnaire (see appendix C). The letter described the study in detail and the proposed plan for questionnaire distribution. Any questions regarding the study were to be directed to the project leader or faculty advisor via email or phone.

Depending on the preference of the professor, the questionnaires were either distributed prior to class or after class. A brief summary describing the purpose of the study was read to the class prior to taking the survey, and volunteers were told that the survey would take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. The oral summary took place of a written consent form and by filling out the questionnaire, it was considered informed consent. Volunteers were given the contact information for the office of Human Subjects and for the faculty advisor.

The data were stored in a secure location, locked in a filing cabinet. Participation was kept strictly anonymous and volunteers were told not to put their name or any contact information on the questionnaire that may link the researcher to the participant’s responses. Students had the opportunity at any time to ask questions regarding the study. At any time during or following participation, volunteers having questions regarding their rights as a subject could contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship (513-529-3734).
Students were informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntary. Refusal to participate did not have a penalty and volunteers were able to discontinue the study at anytime, for any reason and without question. Volunteers were also be informed that participation in this study would carry minimal risk to the volunteer, although some questions may have brought about emotional feelings due to the nature of the research topic. Predicted benefits of this study will be a better understanding and knowledge within the discipline of how college students within today’s society view marriage and divorce.

As an incentive for completing the questionnaire, all volunteers had the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for the chance to win a twenty-dollar gift certificate to a local restaurant. The drawing took place after all of the questionnaires had been completed. If students wished to participate in the drawing, they were asked to fill out a card with their email address so that they can be contacted. The winner was notified via email and claimed their prize by showing their student identification card in the office of Family Studies and Social Work.

Data Collection

Each participant was given an informational survey requesting demographic information including age, gender, class standing and family type, as well as information regarding the participant’s family history of marriage and divorce (see appendix A). Three research scales were used in this project: The Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) and The Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard 1986) (see appendix B). The Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (Kurdek, 1994) and The Relationship Questionnaire (Braiker & Kelley, 1979) are formed to make one Conflict Resolution Scale (see appendix B).

Measures

The Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) is a twelve-item instrument that assesses positive and negative attitudes toward divorce (see appendix B). The scale focuses on happiness within marriage, loyalty and the significance of the marriage vow “til death do us part.” Each question uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to (1) to Strongly Agree (5). There are six question statements that report positive attitudes toward divorce and six statements that
measure negative attitudes of divorce. Higher scores represent more positive views toward divorce. Reliability and validity of this instrument were not available. This instrument has been used to assess how an individual perceives divorce.

The *Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale* (Kinnard & Gerrard 1986) is a fourteen-item instrument that assesses positive and negative attitudes toward marriage (see appendix B). This scale measures how an individual views marriage in general. More specifically, this scale assesses attitudes toward marital responsibilities, happiness, freedom and adjustment to marriage. Each question uses a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). Eight of the questions assess positive attitudes about divorce and six statements assess negative attitudes. Higher scores represent more positive views toward marriage. The author’s report that Cronbach’s alpha for the Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale is .77 and that test-retest reliability was found to be .86. It was also found that individuals from reconstituted families had higher test scores, indication more positive attitudes than those from divorced or intact families. This instrument was used to examine attitudes about marriage.

The *Conflict Resolution Style Inventory* (Kurdek, 1994) is a sixteen-item instrument that assesses how children perceive how often their parents use/used the determined styles to deal with arguments between one another. Each item uses a 5-point rating system from Never (1) to Always (5). Four of the items assess conflict engagement, four items assess positive problem solving, four items assess withdrawal and four items assess compliance.

The *Relationship Questionnaire* (Braiker & Kelley, 1979) is a seven-item instrument that assesses how couples deal with certain aspects of their marital relationships. Each item uses a 5-point rating system from Never (1) to Always (5). Combined with The *Conflict Resolution Style Inventory* (Kurdek, 1994), The *Relationship Questionnaire* (Braiker & Kelley, 1979) is used to form The Conflict Resolution Scale. This scale assesses college student’s perception of their parent’s marital relationship and the amount of conflict that existed in their family.

*Discussion of the Sample*

The sample consisted of 386 students from Miami University’s Departments of Family Studies and Social Work, Decision Sciences and Finance. A total of 386 surveys
were handed out with a 100% response rate. The data were collected through a non-random, convenience sample strategy. Given this study’s focus on college student’s attitudes toward marriage and divorce, a convenience sample was the most appropriate strategy for data collection.

For the 386 students surveyed, the age range was 18-33 years old, average age was 24.3 and the median age was 23.5. In terms of academic class standing, .8% of the sample were First Years, 23.3% Sophomores, 44% Juniors, 30.6% Seniors and 1.3% reported Other (Table 1).

Of the 386 students, 35.8% were male and 64.2% were female (Table 1). Respondents answered a question about their ethnicity (Table 1). The majority of students reported being Caucasian (93%), 2.4% reported African American, 1% Asian, .3% Pacific Islander, .8% Hispanic/Latino and 1.3% reported Other, although it was not an option on the questionnaire.

Another item on the demographic questionnaire inquired about the sample’s current relationship status. From the total sample, 44.3% reported that they were Single, 52.3% are dating, 2.3% were engaged, .5% were married and .3% we divorced. Respondents were asked about family type for their families of origin (Table 1). Of the 386 students, 87% were raised in married parent families, 10.6% were raised divorced families and 2.3% were raised in a single-parent family for the majority of their life. Due to the very low percentage of students from single parent families, they were excluded in all analyses, therefore, making the effective sample size 377.
**Table 1: Class Standing, Gender, Ethnicity of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Standing</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>64.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>94.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents answered questions based on their parent’s current marital status. Of the sample, 98.7% have parents who have been married to each other some time in their lives; 1.3% have parents who have never been married to each other, 79.3% answered that their parents of origin are currently married to one another and 20.7% are not currently married to one another. Of those whose parents of origin are not currently
married to one another, 17.9% responded that they are currently divorced from one another. For those who have parents who are currently divorced from each other, 39.7% answered that neither parent is remarried, 21.9% have fathers who are remarried, 19.2% of the sample have mothers who are remarried, and 19.2% responded that both parents are remarried. Students who responded that their parents of origin are currently divorced, answered another question regarding their age at the time of their parent’s divorce. Age at the time of parental divorce ranged from 1 to 28 years old and the average age was 11.7 years old at the time of parental divorce.

Limitations of the Sample

In regard to the sample, there are two main limitations that stand out in this study. The ethnicity of the sample is primarily Caucasian, with very few students being from other ethnic backgrounds. Of the total 386 students sampled, 93% are Caucasian, 2.3% reported African American, 1% Asian, .3% Pacific Islander, .8% Hispanic/Latino and 1.3% Other. The lack of sample diversity was anticipated prior to data collection due to campus demographics and the region where data collection took place. The large percentage of Caucasian students and the small percentage of students from other ethnic backgrounds are limitations in this study because the lack of diversity has an effect on the findings.

Another limitation in these data is family type. The majority of students come from married parent families (87%), 10.6% from divorced families and a very low percentage of students (2.3%) come from single-parent families. The percentage of students from single-parent families is so minimal that including them in the study would not statistically affect data analysis; therefore, students from single parent families were omitted from the statistical analysis. Family type is a limitation because the lack of diversity in family type may limit the generalizability of the findings.

Data Analysis Techniques

After the data were collected, The Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale, The Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale and Conflict Scale were analyzed. The items in The Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) were summed to get an overall score. Scores on the 12-item, Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) ranged from 14 to 50. Higher scores represented more favorable attitudes toward divorce.
The Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) were summed to get an overall score. Scores on the 14-item, Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale ranged from 24 to 63. Higher scores represented more favorable attitudes toward marriage. Each item on the scales ranged from 1 to 5. Each scale had items that were reversed.

Items 1 to 17 on The Conflict Scale were taken from the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI) (Kurdek, 1994). The four CRSI subscales were scored for each item assessing conflict styles in which participant’s perceived their parents took part in. The four subscales were scored assessing conflict engagement, positive problem solving, withdrawal and compliance. Each subscale ranged from 4 to 20 with higher scores representing a stronger participation in a particular style. After the four subscales were scored, the participant’s responses were assigned one conflict style. The assignment of the conflict style was based on the highest scoring subscale. Those with equal scores on 2 or more subscales and those with missing scores for one or more subscale were coded as missing and were not included within the style variable as well as the analysis.

Items 18 to 24 on The Conflict Scale were taken from The Relationship Questionnaire (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). Due to the focus of this study, only items 20 (How often do/did your parents feel angry or resentful toward each other?) and 23 (When your parents argue/argued, how serious were the arguments?) were used in the analysis, the other five items of The Relationship Questionnaire (Braiker & Kelley, 1979) were omitted due to relevance. Item 20 assesses how participants perceive how often their parents were angry and resentful toward one another and item 23 assesses seriousness of parental arguments. Item 20 and 23 were scored individually. Scores ranged from 1 to 5 on each item. The higher scores correlated to how often parents take part in anger as well as the seriousness of their arguments.
Chapter 4
Research Findings

Initially, the main focus of this study was on the perception of marriage and divorce among college students from married, divorced and single-parent families. Data collection has shown an overwhelmingly low percentage of students from single-parent families in comparison to those from married and divorced families. As a result of that low percentage, those students from single-parent families were purposefully excluded from the final data and not included in any analysis of this study.

Of the 377 students from married and divorced families that were included in this study, 63.9% were female and 36.1% were male (Table 2). Age ranged from 18-33 with an average age 24.3. The sample included 93.6% Caucasian, 1.9% African American, 1.1% Asian, .3% Pacific Islander, .8% Hispanic/Latino and 1.1% Other (Table 2). Of those students from divorced families, the age in which the sample experienced parental divorce ranged from 1-28 and the average age was 12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Participants</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Ethnicity of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>93.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis and Research Findings

Hypothesis #1: Young adults from divorced families will have more negative views toward marriage and more positive views toward divorce and young adults from non-divorced families will have more positive views toward marriage and more negative views toward divorce.

The findings did not support the hypothesis that attitudes toward marriage differ based on family type. A univariate analysis of variance was conducted on the Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) by family type. The grand mean on the Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale was 50.16 (n = 373). Sample mean for students from divorced families was 49.69 (n = 40) and the mean score for students from married families was 50.62 (n = 333). A p-value of less than .05 is required in order for the relationship to be considered significant. A p-value of .40 was computed for this scale by family type, thus, there is no significant difference between the attitudes of marriage and students from divorced and married families.

An analysis of variance was conducted on the Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) by family type. The grand mean for family type on the Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) was 35.34 (n = 369). Sample
mean for students from divorced families was 37.34 (n = 40) and the mean score for students from married families was 33.35 (n = 329). A p-value of less than .05 is required in order for the relationship to be considered significant. The computed p-value of attitudes toward divorced based on family type was .00. The mean scores and the computed p-value show a significant relationship between family type and attitudes toward divorce with participants from divorced families having more positive attitudes toward divorce than students from married families.

**Hypothesis #2**: Males from divorced families will have more negative attitudes toward marriage than females from divorced and non-divorced families and males from non-divorced families.

The Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) was analyzed by family type and gender together (Table 4). Mean scores for males from married families were 50.24 and means for males from divorced families 48.36. Mean scores for females from married families were 51 and females from divorced families 51.03, there no significant difference at all between females from divorced and married families. The analysis of variance by gender and family type shows a p-value of .395, therefore not supporting this hypothesis. A p-value of less than .05 is required in order for the relationship to be considered significant.
Table 4: Attitudes Toward Marriage by Gender and Family Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender by Family Type</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married Parents</td>
<td>50.246</td>
<td>.545</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>48.364</td>
<td>1.816</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married Parents</td>
<td>51.009</td>
<td>.415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>51.034</td>
<td>1.119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Hypothesis #3:** Males will hold more positive attitudes toward divorce than females.

There were no findings to support this hypothesis. Analysis of variance was used on the Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) by gender. Mean scores for males were 35.62 and mean scores for females were 35.06. The mean scores of both males and females and a p-value of .555 do not suggest a significant relationship between gender and the attitudes toward divorce. A p-value of less than .05 is required for a significant relationship.

**Hypothesis #4:** Females will have more positive views toward marriage regardless of family type.

Correlation between the Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) and gender showed a computed p-value of .126, suggesting there is not a significant relationship between gender and the attitudes of marriage. A p-value of less than .05 is required for a significant relationship.

In regard to family type, p-value of .408 suggests that there is not a significant relationship between family type and attitudes toward marriage. The mean scores of gender and family type, as shown in table 4, report that females, regardless of family type, are more positive in their views toward marriage than males.
**Hypothesis #5:** Young adults who perceive high levels of parental conflict will have more positive attitudes toward divorce and young adults who perceive lower levels of parental conflict will have more negative attitudes toward divorce.

Analysis of variance was performed using the Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986), the Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986), the four conflict subscales from the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI) (Kurdek, 1994) and items 20 and 23 from the Relationship Questionnaire (Braiker & Kelley, 1979). The four conflict subscales from the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI) (Kurdek, 1994), were collapsed into two final subscales resulting in one positive subscale and one negative subscale. The positive subscale included responses for the positive problem solving subscale, and the negative subscale included responses for the conflict engagement, withdrawal and compliance subscale. The two collapsed subscales were formed due to low numbers on the three negative subscales and higher numbers on the positive problem solving subscale. The two final scales were formed to even out positive and negative conflict styles for the final analysis.

Analysis of variance was performed between the Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) and the two collapsed subscales from the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI) (Kurdek, 1994). Those with missing values on one or more of the subscales were omitted from the analysis. The computed p-value of .000 supports the hypothesis that attitudes toward marriage are related to interparental conflict. Those who scored high on the positive conflict subscale were shown to have more positive attitudes toward marriage. A p-value of less than .05 is required for a significant relationship. The analysis shows that those participants who are more positive in their attitudes toward marriage scored lower on the negative conflict subscale.

Analysis of variance between The Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) and the two collapsed subscales from the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI) (Kurdek, 1994). Analyses show a computed p-value of .004. A p-value of less than .05 is required for a significant relationship. The computed p-value supports the hypothesis that high levels of perceived parental conflict are related to positive attitudes toward divorce. The analysis shows that participants who scored high on the negative conflict style have more positive views toward divorce.
A significant relationship exists between item 20 from the Relationship Questionnaire (Braiker & Kelley, 1979) which assesses how often parents feel angry or resentful toward one another and The Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986). Mean scores for item 20 were 2.32 (n = 364). A p-value of .001 suggests that students with high scores on item 20 also score high on The Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986), showing more positive attitudes toward divorce. There is also a significant relationship between the attitudes of divorce and item 23, which assesses the seriousness of parental arguments. Mean scores for item 23 were 2.61 (n = 361) and a p-value of .000 supports the hypothesis that those students who perceive high levels of conflict have more positive attitudes toward divorce. A p-value of less than .05 is required for a significant relationship.

A significant relationship exists between item 20 from the Relationship Questionnaire (Braiker & Kelley) which assesses how often parents feel angry or resentful toward one another and The Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986). Mean scores were 2.32 (n = 368). A p-value of .004 shows that those who scored low on item 20 scored high on The Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986).

A computed p-value of .005 shows a significant relationship between attitudes toward marriage and item 23, which assesses the seriousness of parental arguments. Mean scores for item 23 were 2.61 (n = 365). A p-value of less than .05 is required for a significant relationship. High scores on The Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986) are significantly related to low scores on item 23. Hypothesis 5 was supported by the findings.
Chapter 5

Discussion

The main focus of this study was to assess college students’ perceptions of marriage and divorce. It was hypothesized that young adults from divorced families would have more negative views toward marriage and more positive views toward divorce than young adults from married-parent families. More specifically, it was hypothesized that females, regardless of family type, would have more positive attitudes toward marriage. On the other hand, it was hypothesized that males from divorced families would hold more negative attitudes toward marriage than both males from married families and females from divorced and married families. Another hypothesis stated that the level of parental conflict within a family would be related to college student’s attitudes toward marriage and divorce. Although this study did not produce significant findings for all hypotheses, gender and attitudes toward divorce were related, and conflict was also significantly related to attitudes toward divorce and attitudes toward marriage for both males and females. This chapter will discuss the findings of this study in relation to existing research and literature, limitations of this study and recommendations for future study.

Discussion of Current Study Related to Existing Literature

The increasing divorce rate in the United States has lead many social science researchers in the direction of studying how divorce affects children. More specifically, how experience, or lack of experience with parental divorce, plays a role in developing children’s attitudes of marriage and divorce in today’s society. Based on a previous study by Ganong et al. (1981) that examined attitudes toward divorce and marriage among adolescents from single-parent, reconstituted and intact families, this current study assessed perceptions of marriage and divorce among college aged students from married and divorced families. Although this study originally intended to include students from single-parent families, the percentage was too small to include them, unlike the study by Ganong et al. (1981) which included 48 students from single-parent families, 48 from reconstituted families and 225 from intact families. Similar to Ganong et al. (1981), the majority of students in this study were from married families.
While much of the current research on divorce tends to focus more on children of divorce and how parental divorce affects their attitudes toward marriage and divorce, little research has been done on children from married families. It is common in the social science field to suggest that parental divorce has a negative impact on children, and many researchers claim that parental divorce negatively impacts children’s personal views about marital relationships as well. A thorough review of the literature has shown conflicting research in terms of how children are affected by parental divorce. While the divorce rate in the United States is among the highest in the world (Linlin, 1993), those who are getting divorced are not just those who have experienced parental divorce as a child. Thus, this study examines if college students from divorced families differ in their attitudes about marital relationships than students from married families. Evidence within the research shows that parental conflict within a family plays a role in how offspring form their attitudes about divorce and marriage, whether or not parents are divorced or married.

*Attitudes Toward Divorce and Attitudes Toward Marriage*

Tasker and Richards (1994) claim that experiencing parental divorce may lead a child to trivialize the importance of commitment and view the institution of marriage with negativity. Similarly, Tasker and Richards (1994) state that parental divorce, in general, is associated with more negative attitudes toward marriage. Other research shows that in regard to long-term effects, experiencing parental divorce has a greater impact on a child’s behavior and emotions than on their attitudes about their own marriage in the future. In terms of attitudes toward marriage, this study did not produce any significant findings showing that college students from divorce and married families differ in their attitudes of marriage.

The findings of this current study were contrary to a study by Gabardi and Rosen (1991) which found that males and females from divorce possess more negative attitudes toward marriage than young adults from married families. In their study, Ganong et al. (1981) found that females were more positive toward marriage than males, regardless of family type. This current study, on the other hand, did not find a significant difference between family type and gender and attitudes toward marriage. This current study did produce findings that show that females do not differ in their attitudes toward marriage,
regardless of family type. This may reflect a change in gender attitudes toward relationships since the study done by Ganong et al. (1981), or due to the sample consisting mostly of students from intact/non-divorced families. Interestingly, the mean scores on the Attitudes Toward Marriage scale were slightly lower for males from divorced families overall, but not different in a statistical manner. In correlation with this current study, Sprecher et al. (1998) found only minimal differences when comparing marriage attitudes and beliefs of young adults from married and divorced families.

In their study, Goodman and Pickens (2001) found that age at the time of parental divorce plays a role in the affects of parental divorce on children, adolescents and young adults. Similarly, Sinclair and Nelson (1998) found that negative feelings due to parental divorce fade over time, this is a possible explanation as to why this study did not find significant differences between the attitudes of marriage among college students from divorced and married families. In theory, if the negative effects of parental divorce fade over time, participants in this study who have experienced parental divorce may have had time to cope with and make sense of their experiences so that they are able to form their own views about marriage and divorce that are not based on their parent’s marital relationship.

Similar to Ganong et al. (1981), this current study did not find any significant differences in attitudes toward divorce by gender, but this study did find significant differences by family type. Based on family type, students from divorced families were found to have more positive attitudes toward divorce than students from married families. The small percentage of students in this current study from divorced families (10.6%) is a limitation of this study. A larger percentage of students from divorced families would have been ideal in order to achieve a stronger representation of the sample, therefore, a more representative response. Regardless, this study found that students from divorce are more positive than students from non-divorced families in their attitudes toward divorce.

The theoretical framework explored in this study was the intergenerational transmission of divorce theory. This theory suggests that children’s attitudes and perceptions are passed down to them from their parents. More specifically, children learn about marital roles and behaviors from observing their parent’s relationship. In regard to the intergenerational transmission of divorce theory, Amato (1996) asserts that children
from divorced families are at an increased risk for divorce in their own marriages. In terms of this current study, this theory supports the findings that those students from divorced families are more positive in their attitudes toward divorce than students from married families. The intergenerational transmission of divorce theory is supported by the findings of attitudes toward divorce, but not attitudes toward marriage, possibly due to the changing attitudes toward marriage among college students in today’s society.

**Parental Conflict and Attitudes Toward Marriage and Divorce**

This study produced significant findings between parental conflict and attitudes toward marriage and divorce. The ways in which parents cope with their problems greatly impact children’s perception of marital relationships. Regardless of family type, this current study showed that students who were more positive toward marriage scored low on parental conflict and students who were more positive toward divorce scored high on their perception of parental conflict. These findings are related to current research regarding parental conflict and attitudes about marital relationships. In their study, Jones and Nelson (1996) claim that continual conflict between parents creates an environment which teaches children negative views about marriage. Similarly, Amato (1995) found that the amount of parental conflict before the actual divorce occurs affects long-term consequences of parental divorce. Thus, experiencing parental divorce itself does not seem to be a strong indicator of possessing negative attitudes toward marriage and positive attitudes toward divorce. Parental conflict, on the other hand, is a stronger predictor of attitudes toward marriage and divorce in this study.

Regardless of whether or not young adults have experienced parental divorce, hostility and conflict between parents has an impact on young adults’ attitudes about marriage (Jones & Nelson, 1996). Parental conflict, as well as negative communication styles, are factors that impact beliefs about divorce and marriage (Herzog & Cooney, 2002). How often parents feel angry toward one another and the seriousness of their arguments, were assessed in this study. It is interesting to consider the significant findings among both attitudes toward divorce and marriage, frequency of parental arguments, as well as the seriousness of those arguments. Students who were more positive toward marriage scored low on the frequency and the seriousness of parental conflict, showing that conflict did impact their views of marriage. The same was true for
attitudes toward divorce. Students who were more positive toward divorce scored high on the frequency and the seriousness of parental conflict, another indication that conflict is related to the formation of attitudes toward divorce.

Limitations of the Study

Data Collection and Sampling Issues

Although the original sample size was 386 college students, sample limitations existed for ethnicity and family type. Of those participants, the vast majority were Caucasian, with a very small number of participants of African American, Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino and other ethnic backgrounds. Having a larger pool of racial backgrounds included in this study may have had an effect on the outcome of this study.

Family type was also a limitation to the overall sample due to an overrepresentation of students from married-parent families. Of the total 386 participants, the largest percentage of participants were raised in married parent families (87%), 10.6% were from divorced families and an even lower percentage of students were raised in single-parent families (2.3%). Due the low percentage of students from single-parent families, they were not included in the final analysis; thus, the final sample size after omitting students from single-parent families was 377. Omitting students from single-parent families was necessary since including them would not have had an effect on the statistical analysis. Ethnicity and family type limit the overall generalizability of the findings due to the lack of diversity. The lack of diversity within the sample, in terms of ethnicity and family type, may be attributed to limiting the significance of hypotheses that focused on family type. A limitation to the findings of this study was the fact that every participant was a college student. The findings do not take into account attitudes and beliefs of those who do not have a college education.

Data were collected through a convenience sampling strategy. This strategy was most appropriate for the target population of college students. Although the original sample yielded 386 participants, as discussed previously, ethnicity and family type within the sample lacked diversity. The very low percentage of participants from single-parent families resulted in omission from the analysis. Lack of diversity can be attributed to the region where data were collected. Demographic diversity could be improved by data collection taking place in a more diverse setting.
Measures

The Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986), The Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Kinnard & Gerrard, 1986), the four conflict subscales from the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory (CRSI) (Kurdek, 1994) and items 20 and 23 from the Relationship Questionnaire (Braiker & Kelley, 1979) were appropriate measures for this study. Though the main focus of this study was on the attitudes toward marriage and divorce among college-aged students, the sample did included non-traditional students over the age of 22. Although a small percentage of those non-traditional participants have been married (.5%), and an even smaller percentage have been divorced (.3%), their experiences with marriage and/or divorce may have affected their responses on the attitudes scales, making it difficult to accurately assess college student’s perception of marriage and divorce.

The intent of the CRSI scale (Kurdek, 1994) was to assess parental conflict within families. Participants were asked to think about their parent’s relationship when answering the items on the questionnaire and their answers were based on how they perceive/perceived conflict that took/takes place between their parents. Although the CRSI was an appropriate measure used in this study, and it did find significant relationships among attitudes, the scale did pose confusion for a few participants. Participants may have been confused if they had never witnessed conflict between their parents due to a divorce at a very young age, or they could not remember, or because their parents did not engage in conflict in front of them. If this was the case, participants just left the items blank. Items that were left without responses were coded as missing and were not included in the analysis. For the most part, the measures used in this study were appropriate for the sample.

For future use of the CRSI scale, it is necessary develop a way for all students to be included in the analysis, although some items may be left blank if participants claim they have never witnessed parental conflict due to a divorce at a very young age, could not remember, or because their parents refrained from conflict in front of them. Rather than omitting those who left items blank, adding an item on the CRSI for those students who were not sure how to answer may be necessary for future use of this scale.
Recommendations for Future Study

The results of this study show that college students from divorced families view divorce more positively than those from married families. The analysis also indicates that parental conflict is related to college student’s attitudes toward marriage and divorce. While the attitudes toward marriage did not differ among family type, further research is necessary to provide a better understanding as to why there is no difference.

In terms of the attitudes toward marriage, a sample with more divorced families and single-parent families may have produced a significant outcome between family type and attitudes toward marriage. A more representative sample of family type and ethnicity may have also produced different findings. In order to get a more representative sample, it is necessary in the future to collect data in settings which include more diverse demographic populations.

Conclusion

This current study was initially based on a study by Ganong, Coleman and Brown (1981) which assessed perceptions of marriage and divorce among adolescents. The purpose of this study was to assess current perceptions of marriage and divorce among college-aged students and examine whether or not attitudes of marriage and divorce differ, or remain constant almost two decades later. While this study was similar to the 1981 study in terms of assessing attitudes toward divorce and marriage, this study only included students from divorced and married-parent families.

Similar to Ganong et al. (1981), this current study did find similar results regarding significant differences in attitudes toward divorce by gender. In contrast to the 1981 study, this study did not find any significant differences among attitudes toward marriage based on gender or family type. The current study goes a step beyond Ganong et al. (1981) in that it looks at the impact of parental conflict on young adults’ perception of marriage and divorce.

In terms of changing attitudes over time, this study found that males from divorce are still more positive toward divorce than males from married families and females regardless of family type. Significant findings regarding parental conflict indicate that experiencing parental divorce is not the only factor that impacts how young adults perceive marital relationships. Regardless of parental divorce status, these findings show
that parental conflict has a greater impact on the attitudes of divorce and marriage among college students in today’s society.

This current study has brought a greater knowledge of how college students perceive marital relationships and how their perceptions are formed based on experience with parental divorce. The findings of this study indicate that experiencing parental divorce is not the strongest predictor of how college students perceive marriage and divorce. In future studies regarding attitudes toward marital relationships, it is important to address other aspects of family life, such as parental conflict, that contribute to the formation of those attitudes rather than focusing primarily on experience with divorce.


Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire
Demographic Questionnaire

♣ Class Standing
First Year    Sophomore    Junior    Senior    Other

♣ Age_____

♣ Gender
            Male    Female

♣ Ethnicity
            Caucasian    African American    American Indian    Asian    Pacific Islander
            Hispanic    Latino

♣ What is your current relationship status?
            Single    Dating    Engaged    Married    Divorced

♣ What family type were you raised in for the majority of your life?
            Intact    Divorced    Single-Parent

♣ Have your parents of origin (biological/adoptive) ever been married?
            Yes    No

♣ Are your (biological/adoptive) parents currently married to each other?
            Yes    No

♣ Are your (biological/adoptive) parents currently divorced from each other?
            Yes    No

            ♣ If so, is either now remarried (to someone else)?
            Yes, my mother is remarried    No, neither are remarried
            Yes, my father is remarried    Yes, both are now remarried.

How old were you at the time of your parent’s divorce? _______
Appendix B: Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale
Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale
Conflict Resolution Scale
Attitudes Toward Divorce Scale
Please respond to each of the following statements by circling the appropriate rating on each scale

1 – Not at all   2 – A little   3 – Somewhat   4 – A lot   5 – Very Much

1) When people marry, they should be willing to stay together no matter what happens. 1 2 3 4 5

2) If people are not happy in their marriage, they owe it to themselves to get a divorce and try to improve their lives. 1 2 3 4 5

3) The marriage vow “till death do us part” represents a sacred commitment to another person and should not be taken lightly. 1 2 3 4 5

4) The negative effects of divorce on children have been greatly exaggerated. 1 2 3 4 5

5) In the long run, American society will be seriously harmed by the high divorce rate. 1 2 3 4 5

6) Many people that get divorced are too weak to make personal sacrifices for the good of their families. 1 2 3 4 5

7) People should feel no great obligation to remain married if they are not satisfied. 1 2 3 4 5

8) Even if people are unhappy with their marriage, they should stay together and try to improve it. 1 2 3 4 5

9) These days, the marriage vow “till death do us part” is just a formality. It doesn’t really mean that people should stay in an unsatisfactory marriage. 1 2 3 4 5

10) Most children of divorced parents experience negative effects of divorce for the rest of their lives. 1 2 3 4 5

11) The fact that most individuals no longer feel that they have to stay in unhappy marital relationships will benefit society. 1 2 3 4 5

12) Most people who get divorced do so as a last resort, only after trying other solutions to the problems in their marriage. 1 2 3 4 5
Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale
Please respond to each of the following statements by circling the appropriate rating on each scale

1 – Not at all   2 – A little   3 – Somewhat   4 – A lot   5 – Very Much

1) If you were to marry, to what extent would you miss the life you had as a single person?  
2) How difficult would it be for you to give up your personal freedom if you were married?  
3) How difficult would it be for you to adjust to married life?  
4) Do you ever have doubts about whether you would enjoy living exclusively with one person after marriage?  
5) Do you think you would enjoy the responsibilities of marriage?  
6) If you marry, how happy do you think you will be?  
7) Do you ever think that you may not have a successful marriage?  
8) Do you ever think you will find someone who would be a good marriage partner?  
9) Do you ever think that you should stay single?  
10) Do you ever worry that the person you marry wouldn’t fulfill his/her responsibilities in the marriage?  
11) Do you ever worry that the person you marry would be violent or abusive to you?  
12) I believe marriage is one of the most important things in life.  
13) A bad marriage is better than no marriage at all.  
14) A person isn’t really grown up until he/she gets married.
Conflict Resolution Scale

Thinking of your parents of origin, use the scale below to rate how you believe they use/used the following styles to deal with arguments or disagreements.

1 – Never  2 – Rarely  3 – Sometimes  4 – Often  5 – Always

1) Launching personal attacks.  1 2 3 4 5
2) Focusing on the problem at hand.  1 2 3 4 5
3) Remaining silent for long periods of time.  1 2 3 4 5
4) Not being willing to stick up for myself.  1 2 3 4 5
5) Exploding and getting out of control.  1 2 3 4 5
6) Sitting down and discussing differences constructively.  1 2 3 4 5
7) Reaching a limit, “shutting down” and refusing to talk any further.  1 2 3 4 5
8) Being too compliant.  1 2 3 4 5
9) Getting carried away and saying things that aren’t really meant.  1 2 3 4 5
10) Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us.  1 2 3 4 5
11) Tuning the other person out.  1 2 3 4 5
12) Not defending my position.  1 2 3 4 5
13) Throwing insults and dig.  1 2 3 4 5
14) Negotiating and compromising.  1 2 3 4 5
15) Withdrawing, acting distant and not interested.  1 2 3 4 5
16) Giving in with little attempt to present your side of the issue.  1 2 3 4 5
17) How often do/did your parents argue with one another?  1 2 3 4 5
18) To what extent did your parents try to change things about one another that bothered them? (e.g., behaviors, attitudes, etc.)  1 2 3 4 5
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Options</th>
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<tr>
<td>19) How much time do/did your parents spend discussing and trying to work out problems between them?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<td>20) How often did your parents feel angry or resentful toward one another?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>21) How committed do you feel your parent’s are/were?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>22) How close do you feel your parents are toward one another?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>23) When your parents’ argue/argued, how serious were the arguments?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>24) To what extent do/did your parents communicate negative feelings toward one another (e.g., frustration, anger, dissatisfaction)?</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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Appendix C: Letter of Invitation
Dear Professor,

My name is Michelle Moats and I am a graduate student in the Department of Family Studies and Social Work. I am currently working on my thesis project researching college student’s attitudes regarding marriage and divorce.

I am writing requesting permission to use your class/classes for my data collection. Depending on your preference, the questionnaire can either be distributed prior to class or after class has ended. The questionnaire will take approximately fifteen minutes to complete and as an incentive, all volunteers will have the opportunity to enter a drawing for a gift certificate to a local restaurant.

I would like to conduct my data collection between January 26-February 13, 2004. Feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have regarding my study or data collection. You may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Thompson by email thompsea@muohio.edu or phone 529-2339 or myself at moatsmm@muohio.edu or 664-6193. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michelle Moats
Graduate Student
Department of Family Studies and Social Work