ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON COLLEGE STUDENT’S PERCEPTION OF CURRENT AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS.

by Lakia KayVonne Bethell

A mixed method design, focusing on 123 college students, was used to examine their perceptions of marriage, divorce and personal relationships by exploring levels of trust, attitudes towards marriage, self-esteem and the relationships between parent and child. Four hypotheses tested whether college students who have experienced parental divorce have: (a) lower level of trust towards partners, (b) more negative attitudes towards marriage, (c) lower self-esteem and (d) less positive parent-child relationships compared to those of intact families and whether age and/or race/ethnicity influences these factors and relationships. Four of these participants were also interviewed to further explore their experiences with divorce. Multivariate statistical and Thematic analyses were conducted. Findings suggest the only significant direct difference was with parent-child relationships, while findings on the other variables only indicated significant differences with interactions by age. Qualitative findings indicate that college students with non-married parents still view marriage positively while considering divorce as an option.
THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON COLLEGE STUDENT’S PERCEPTION OF CURRENT AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS.

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Lakia KayVonne Bethell
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Advisor ____________________________
(Dr. Kevin R. Bush)
Reader ____________________________
(Dr. Katherine Kuvalanka)
Reader ____________________________
(Dr. Carolyn Slotten)
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Introduction

The ‘traditional family’ is considered to be nuclear– one man, one woman and their biological children. The dynamics of family, however, are constantly changing with divorce playing a role in these shifting family structures. The U.S. divorce rate in 2007 per 1,000 people was 3.6 and down to 3.5 in 2009. Although these rates have decreased from 7.2 in 1990, the National Center for Health Statistics (2009) still estimate 45%-50% of all first marriages will end in divorce. When marriages include children, the probability of divorce only slightly lessens. Divorce can create a disturbance in a child’s life, causing behavioral, psychological, emotional and other negative long-term effects for them (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Teyber, 2001). Being torn between two parents can create emotional distress for children, and cause confusion when a child has to continuously shift from home to home (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). Within children of divorce, studies have found significant differences in coping strategies between preschoolers and adolescent children, while others describe the gender differences between adolescent children. Boys are seen to act out more and exhibit behaviors that are more aggressive (Furstenberg Jr., 1990) while girls appear more emotionally distant. In other words, boys have the tendency to experience more negative outcomes such as hostility than do girls (Nielsen, 1999). In addition to the differences related to gender, research has shown possible differences in college students attitudes based on race and sometimes how the level of maturity and academic achievement is associated with age. According to their study, Lopez, Melendez, and Rice (2000), found that race/ethnicity significantly impacts parental and child relationships as well as intimate peer relationships. Reported racial/ethnic differences of a college student’s environment in which they were raised might significantly impact how they form attitudes and trust in relationships between parents and peers. Race/Ethnicity has also been found to influence the effect of parental divorce, showing where Caucasian children experience more detrimental effects in comparison with African American/Black children (Kalmijn, 2010).

The interest to study this topic stems from reading many articles that have researched the impact of parental divorce on pre-adolescent children, while very limited research has addressed the impact specifically to college-aged children and their current or perceived future marital relationships. Whereas divorce may be the solution for two adults to end a failed marriage, research shows that it may increase the risk of a variety of problems in adulthood for children
who experience parental divorce (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). Studies where younger children are concerned hint to placing focus on college-aged children of divorce, many even suggests what problems may arise once a young child reaches adulthood, but few focus specifically on college students who are currently or have recently experienced parental divorce.

Portnoy (2008) suggests that with regard to their own romantic relationships in adulthood, children of divorce are more likely to experience marital instability and a slight elevation in their own divorce rates. The purpose of this study is to build upon and add to the current research on the influences of parental divorce, by placing focus on college students’ perceptions of marriage, divorce, and their personal relationships. Since the area of divorce continues to be one of rising concern for the field of Family Science, it is important to study divorce and college students. The increased awareness of the impact on younger children has helped researchers explain and understand child behaviors resulting from such a devastating experience. By focusing on college students who have experienced parental divorce, this study provides insight into perceptions of marriage and divorce from a particular age group who are in a critical developmental stage in their lives where intimate relationships and a sense of self-identity are being established.

**Literature Review**

A plethora of studies have been carried out examining the impact of divorce on children. Researchers have found that there are many characteristics (psychological, emotional, physical and mental) that may be negatively affected in a child – all relative to other factors such as age of child when the divorce occurred, gender of child, and parent-child relationships prior/post separation.

**Adolescent and Pre-pubescent Children**

Considering the volatility of marriages, the nature of childhood has been forever altered – marital disruption has been associated with school problems, grade failure, higher dropout rates and lower attendance and completion of college, leading to a reduction of occupational attainment and income in adulthood (Furstenberg Jr., 1990; Taylor, 2009). Research shows that there are both short-term effects as well as long-term effects consequent to a marital dissolution. Evidence suggest that, on average, adults who experienced parental divorce as children have poor psychological adjustment, lower socioeconomic attainment, and greater marital instability compared to adults reared in a nuclear family (Simons, Lin, Gordon, Conger, & Lorenz, 1999).
While on one hand, researchers found that adolescents of divorce are more likely to hold favorable attitudes toward divorce (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999); other research shows that adolescents of divorce are less likely to look favorably on divorce than adolescents of non-divorced parents (Eldar-Avidan, Haj-Yahia, Greenbaum, 2009). Such arguments are contradictory and one must consider intervening variables such as the personality of an individual child and age of child as to why this may be so. Kalter, Alpern, Spence, and Plunkett, (1984) found evidence from their study that children of divorce report higher scores on measures of internal locus of control assuming the responsibility of their parents’ divorce. In assuming this responsibility, a child’s personality changes to accommodate their feelings of guilt and helplessness. The age of a child at the time of parental divorce is a determinant of their ability to adjust and cope, and whether they will have more long-term difficulties (Malone et al., 2004). Coping, however, is easier for younger children when they have the support of peers and the consistent involvement of parents, compared to isolation from the non-residential parent (Halpenny, Greene, & Hogan, 2008). A significant aspect of parental divorce is the battle for custody, for families with children who are under the legal age of 18. The age of a child greatly influences which parent receives custodial rights, but as a child grows and become self-reliant, they have more of an opportunity to speak out on which parent they would prefer living with (Fox & Kelly, 1995). On a short-term basis, children may become emotionally distressed with increased feelings of depression and anxiety as a result of living between parents (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). More than the quantity of time a non-resident parent spends with a child after divorce, the quality of time spent is important to the child’s adjustment and helps to reduce the negative effects of feeling isolated and confused (Simons et al., 1999). The less parent-child interactions occur, the more likely the child is to develop difficulties in personal relationships, and low self-esteem and a negative outlook on life for future relationships. As a result, the child’s entire attitude towards relationships, attachments, marriage and divorce may change.

**College Students**

Unlike with younger children (birth through adolescence), very little research has been done on the impact of divorce on the specific population of young adult college students who have experienced divorce beyond their adolescent years, and while in undergraduate level of college. Compared to younger children, college students of divorce are more resilient and experience lower levels of adjustment problems (McIntyre, Heron, McIntyre, Burton, & Engler,
Some research has not been able to uniquely identify why college students have such resilience to their parental divorce compared to younger children (McIntyre et al., 2003). However, studies that used Erik Erikson’s Stages of psychological development suggest that it is because of the successful completion of Stage 5 (Identity v. Identity Confusion), where adult children have secured a sense of self and can process the divorce better than children and adolescents who have not yet successfully completed this stage (Corn & Raab, 2007). Parental divorce may have a negative impact on adult children’s relationship quality and stability, but research also shows that if the divorce occurred during the childhood of the adult of focus, the marital disruption of that individual would be relatively higher (Amato, 2001). During their formative years, it is important that children have good role models of positive, healthy relationships and experience low levels of parental conflict which might lead to devastating effects as a young adult. The example that parents set for their children during these critical years of development has a direct impact on long-term outcomes (Green & King, 2009).

College students of divorce have a higher social responsibility than their peers from intact families (McIntyre et al., 2003). Social responsibility refers to the duty a college student has to promote the development of or be accountable for the welfare of others in the “group” (in this situation, the family). McIntyre et al. (2003) believes that social responsibility might be a reason why college students of divorce are more resilient to this experience than younger children of divorce. They also found that college students reported more distress than their peers, although this distress reflects more on social communication style rather than any impacts from the parental divorce. The length of time that a parent’s marriage appeared ‘intact’ raises questions for adult children of divorce that might include questioning their own ability to maintain a meaningful relationship, or whether relationships are even worth having if they are going to end up broken. When a college student is trying to form an intimate relationship of their own and experience parental divorce during this time, they do so with a reduced ability to trust, and a limited view on what a lasting relationship looks like (Bryant, 2006).

Research has also shown differences in ethnicity regarding the dissolution of marriages in general, where ‘Black’ couples face a higher risk in comparison with ‘Whites’ (Bulanda & Brown, 2007). Additionally, embeddedness, which is the connection between an attitude and other units of the cognitive system (social event or situation), has also been found in early studies of adults as an important factor that links attitude with divorce and personal relationships. For
those with divorce attitudes embedded more strongly, they are more likely to influence
evaluations of divorce as an option or possibility (Prislin & Ouellette, 1996).

As past research does very little to address the influences of recent or current experiences
with parental divorce on college students, it is important to complete a more in-depth study to
determine the differences within a college student population to build upon the previously
established body of knowledge with children and adolescents.

The current study focused on college students and tested four hypotheses: (a) college
students who have experienced parental divorce will report lower level of trust towards partners,
(b) college students who have experienced parental divorce will report more negative attitudes
towards marriage, (c) college students who have experienced parental divorce will report lower
self-esteem and (d) college students who have experienced parental divorce will report less
positive parent-child interactions compared to those of intact families and whether age and/or
race/ethnicity influences these factors and relationships. Further to these hypotheses, this study
was guided by two exploratory questions: (1) what specific impact does parental divorce have on
adult college students’ perception of marriage and divorce? and (2) what subsequent influence do
these perceptions have on the college student’s current/future personal relationships? In doing
so, this study addressed gaps within previous research directly related to college students.

**Theoretical Framework**

Marshall (1998) describes symbolic interaction theory as one that focuses upon the ways
in which meanings emerge through interaction. This theory emphasizes daily exchanges
between individuals so as to develop an understanding of basic human interactions via three core
principles: meaning, language and thought. One’s identity of self is derived from how they
perceive things, how they speak in relation to others and what is meaningful. Interpreting a
situation, understanding verbal and nonverbal communication as to how it relates to one’s self
and someone/thing else is the underlying concept of understanding this theory.

In relation to college students of divorce, this theory can be used to understand how a
college student interprets relationships, how they ascribe meaning and value to their own life
since their parents divorced. Do they interpret relationships as doomed to failure because of the
interactions between their parents within marriage, or does the college student believe that
divorce is not inevitable, and that it’s simply one response to a couple’s inability to effectively
communicate?
Method

Participant Eligibility:
For the quantitative portion (first phase) of the study, the only eligibility requirement was that participants were college students and had an interest in a study on parental divorce. Since the main purpose of this study was to gain insight into college students’ perceptions of marital relationships as impacted by parental divorce, there were certain criteria to be met for invitation and inclusion to participate in the qualitative portion (second phase) of the study. The first criterion was that the participant had a personal experience of parental divorce or has parents who are currently separated and/or currently experiencing parental divorce. In addition, the participant must have had this experience within the last 5 years. The rationale for this decision was to allow for recruitment of participants who could still recall events that occurred before, during and after the experience, while still capturing the influences it would have on the specific population and time that the study focuses on.

Participants:
123 undergraduate college students (23 male and 100 female) participated in the study (see Table 1 for the summarized demographic information). Their ages ranged from 18 to 26 years (M=21.70, Md=22.67). There were 105 Caucasian participants and 18 of other ethnicities (inclusive of African-American, Hispanic and Asian-American). Seventy-four participants were single, but not currently in a relationship, 46 were single, in a committed relationship, while 3 were in a cohabiting relationship with a romantic partner. Ninety-three participants had married parents and 26 were not married (inclusive of divorced, separated and in the process of divorce categories). 122 participants reported being heterosexual and one reported being homosexual. The participants were a convenience sample selected from two Family Studies and Social Work (FSW) classes at a large Midwest university, as this course includes students from the entire student body population with varied majors.

Four of these participants were interviewed for the qualitative portion of the study; three heterosexual Caucasian females, 19, 20 and 23 years of age and one heterosexual African-American male aged 20.

Materials:
The first item administered to all participants in the study was a questionnaire regarding basic demographics (Appendix A). This provided the background information on each
participant and helped with determining which candidates met the criteria necessary for the invitation into the qualitative phase of the study.

*Parent-Child Relationships – (Appendix D)*

Parent-child relationships were assessed with four items that measure the students’ perceptions of the frequency and severity of conflict between them and their parents, as well as their perceptions of their satisfaction with their relationship with each parent, and how well they get along with each parent. The two conflict items have been used in previous research with adolescents (Bush & Lash, 2004), while the relationship assessment questions were created for this study. The Cronbach alpha for this study was .898.

*Trust-Interpersonal Relationship Scale –*

This scale measures the trust within close interpersonal relationships on three subscales (Rempel, Holmes & Zanna, 1985). The *Predictability* subscale emphasizes the consistency and stability of a partner’s specific behaviors based on past experience. The *Dependability* subscale concentrates on the dispositional qualities of the partner which warrant confidence in the face of risk and potential hurt. The final subscale of *Faith* centers on feelings of confidence in the relationship and the responsiveness and caring expected from the partner in the face of an uncertain future. The scale contains 17 items and uses a 7-point response scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) with high scores reflecting greater trust. Examples of items are the following: “I am certain my partner will not cheat on me, even if the opportunity arose and there is no chance that he/she will get caught,” (dependability) “I feel very uncomfortable when my partner has to make decisions which will affect me personally,” (predictability) and “When I share my problems with my partner, I know he/she will respond in a loving way even before I say anything” (faith). Rempel, Holmes and Zanna, (1985) reported that the overall Cronbach alpha was .81 for the overall trust scale and .80, .72 and .70 for faith, dependability and predictability subscales respectively. The Cronbach alpha for this study was .908 for the overall trust scale and .918, .736, and .742 for faith, dependability and predictability subscales respectively.

*The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale –*

This scales measures the general positive and negative feelings one has about themselves. This scale contains 10 items and uses a 4-point response scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree) with a higher score reflecting greater self esteem (Rosenberg, 1965).
Examples of the items are the following: “I am able to do things as well as most other people,” and “All in all, I am inclined to feel I am a failure” (reverse coded). Over many years, various researchers have shown reliability to be acceptable with alphas between .70 and .85. The Cronbach alpha for this study was .885.

*The Marital Attitude Scale* –

This scale measures a person’s subjective opinion on the institution of marriage that can be used for both married and never-married individuals (Braaten & Rosén, 1998). This scale contains 23 items and uses a 4-point response scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree) with a higher score reflecting a more positive attitude towards marriage. Examples of the items are the following: “People should marry,” and “Most people are either unhappy in their marriage or divorced” (reverse coded). Braaten and Rosén (1998) reported the internal reliability yielded a coefficient alpha of .82, indicating an acceptable degree of internal consistency. The Cronbach alpha for this study was .870.

*Qualitative Interview Guide* –

A 5-item interview guide along with additional probing questions for each item was used. A series of open ended questions were asked, designed to provide the respondent the opportunity describe in his/her own words the impact of his/her parents’ divorce. Sample questions included: Please tell me about your parent’s divorce? How do you feel about marriage? (A full list is attached in Appendix E). The information gathered from these interviews was then analyzed and used to compare for similarities with past research, seek responses to gaps in the current literature, and find trends in the perceptions that college students have, resulting from parental divorce. Additionally, the information obtained from these interviews was used to help further understand the findings of the quantitative data.

**Procedures:**

This study was completed in two phases. The first part used several instruments along with a general biographical questionnaire to gather demographic data, perceptions of divorce and marriage relationships, self-esteem, as well as trust and confidence levels in current intimate partners (previously described). Packets inclusive of all the instruments for each participant were prepared beforehand and administered in the selected classes for completion. For students who chose not to participate in the study, they were given an alternative activity requiring equal effort.
Part two included an in-depth personal interview with each of the second phase (criterion-met) participants. Once all of the data were collected and entered into the computer for phase I, the demographic information was reviewed for participants who met the criteria for inclusion in phase two. An email invitation (Appendix F) was then extended to these college students and followed up with a phone call. Out of 26 participants in the “other” classification of parent’s marital status, 8 were invited to participate in the study, but only 4 gave their consent to participate and were interviewed. Upon acceptance, the participants were asked whether they want to complete the interview over the phone or in person. All of the persons determined that they would prefer phone interviews because of distance restraints. Times were then set up for each interview. Soon after, the interviews began and were digitally recorded. The interviews lasted on average 15 minutes. As interviews were completed, the principal investigator transcribed the responses verbatim for each participant (inclusive of all long pauses, sobs, laughs and fillers such as “ahs” and “ums”, etc.). Once the transcription was finished, the analysis of the interviews began.

Ethical Considerations:

In accordance with the requirements of the Institutional Review Board, I gained written informed consent from each participant before commencing the study. By signing this document, the participant acknowledged that they were made fully aware of the nature of the study, their rights as participants, freedom to discontinue the study at anytime without prejudice or penalty as well as the understanding that all information received would be kept confidential.

Similarly for phase two, an informed consent form was emailed to each participant as they all opted for phone interviews. Their response to the email invitation and verbal consent before commencing the audio recording served as informed consent for participation in the second phase of the study.

Analysis

There were two levels of data analysis as this study used a mixed method.

Quantitative Process

The quantitative data received for each individual participating on the various instruments/materials described above were entered into a statistical program for computation and analysis. The researcher’s task was to investigate the effects of Parental Marital Status
(PMS), Age and Ethnicity on college students’ Marital Attitude (MA), Self-Esteem (SE), Parent-Child Relationship (PCR) and Trust. In doing so, four hypotheses were being tested: compared to college students of intact families, college students who have experienced parental divorce were expected to report lower level of trust towards partners, more negative attitudes towards marriage, lower self-esteem and less positive parent-child relationships.

Four factorial design ANOVA models were constructed for each target variable (MA, SE, PCR and Trust). Backwards model selection method was used to obtain the best model for each target variable on parental divorce. Reverse coding was applied to the items with negative valences so that the higher participant response for each item reflected a more positive outcome of the target variable. Scale means for the each response variable were used in the ANOVA model.

The predictor variables, PMS, Age and Ethnicity were dichotomized to increase representation for comparative purposes. PMS was classified as Married or other, since there was very little representation in the individual categories not classified as “married”. Similarly with Ethnicity, this variable was classified as Caucasian or other. To dichotomize age, it was first computed as the difference between the birth date and the date of conducting the survey (months were converted to one decimal place for age, and days were ignored). Age groups were then created and participants were placed into one of two groups: Old (greater or equal to the median of 22.67) or Young (less than the median). The purpose of this dichotomy was to further determine if Age had true significant impacts on the target variable being that near significant findings were present during initial analysis of data. All tests were calculated at $\alpha=.05$ significance level.

Qualitative Process

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe the use of inductive thematic analysis, which was used to analyze the qualitative results of this study. After transcription, each interview was thoroughly read and notes were taken to establish initial codes from the thoughts or concepts. For example, one participant explained how she believed she did not need a man in her life, modeling the independence of her mother because “growing up in a house with all of this [stresses of divorce] and seeing [her] parents, [she’s] always hated marriage;” next to this quote an initial comment of “witnessed parental interaction” was coded. Another participant reported that her “dad stopped communicating with me after I got my first crush.” With her mom the
participant stated that their “communication was not the same, but she was great at encouraging me to stay in school;” next to these comments the primary author wrote “communicative parent” or “non-communicative parent.” Once all of the transcripts were initially coded, these codes were then grouped with others having similar concepts and renamed to better reflect their broader meanings. Respectively, the previous examples of initial codes were renamed “attitudes/behavior of parents” and “parent-child communication.” A coding chart was then created, which listed each code, a description of each code, and the supporting evidence (i.e., quotes) from each participant’s transcript that was relevant to each code. The coding chart then became an important tool for finding patterns of similarities between the codes in order to develop themes. For example, the codes of “Attitudes/behavior of parents” and “parent-child communication” became sub-categories of the theme Parental interactions as influential.” These themes were then used in conjunction with the findings from the quantitative analysis to suggest why interactions resulting from parental divorce influences college students to perceive marital or current relationships the way they do.

Results

Marital Attitude (MA)

For the MA scale, the dichotomized variables Parental Marital Status (PMS), Age and Ethnicity (ETH) were first compared using a full model to determine how they interacted. PMS did not have a direct significant impact on the outcome of Marital Attitude. However, there was an interaction with ethnicity and age that was significant at the $p = 0.0676$ level, suggesting a possible trend towards statistical significance. Meaning, when dichotomized, Caucasian participants showed no significant difference between young and old students on MA ($p = 0.7108$) however, the older group of students within the non Caucasian category had a more positive outlook on Marital Attitude than younger groups of students with non Caucasian parents ($p = 0.0741$). (See Table 2)

Self-Esteem (SE)

With regards to Self-Esteem, none of the direct effects (PMS, AGE, ETH) were significant. However, there was a significant interaction between AGE and PMS ($p = 0.0191$), suggesting that the Younger students with married parents reported higher levels of self-esteem than Younger students with parents not married ($p = 0.0326$). Additionally, for students with
PMS classified as Married, there was not a significant difference between the Young and Old age groups ($p = 0.2234$), but for students classified as having parents with an Other PMS (divorced, separated etc.), there was a significant difference in Self-Esteem; Older students with Other PMS reported higher levels of Self-Esteem than Younger students with divorced or separated parents ($p = 0.0448$) (See Table 3)

**Parent-Child Relationship (PCR)**

Examination of the compared means indicated that there was a direct significant difference in parent-child relationship by PMS ($p = 0.0413$). There was also an interaction between Age and PMS, nearing significance ($p = 0.0540$). Further results indicate that Younger students with Married parents have a more positive relationship than Younger students with Other parental marital statuses ($p = 0.0015$). As for Older college students with Married parents, they reported having better PCR than Younger students with Other parental marital statuses ($p = 0.0280$). (See Table 4)

**Trust in Interpersonal Relationships (Trust)**

Analysis yielded no significant results related to Trust. The dichotomized variables used (PMS, Age, ETH) showed no significant interaction or main effect. (See Table 5)

**Qualitative Results** —

The preliminary stages of analysis led to 16 initial codes that were later combined into 9 broader grouping of codes because of the similarity of their content. Subsequently, 5 themes emerged from the thematic analysis of this study. The participants shared their experiences with parental divorce, how they felt about marriage and divorce after their experiences, along with other contributing factors that influence their feelings/opinions. More specifically, the participants discussed: (a) their ideal vision of marriage; (b) the option of divorce; (c) the awareness of self; (d) religion as an important factor relevant to personal, intimate relationships; and (e) reflections on the interactions with and between their parents. These themes and sub-themes are discussed below.

**Vision of Marriage**

Three of the four participants expressed that they have always believed marriage to be meaningful to them. The fourth participant shared her original feelings of fear towards marriage and her current change of heart, accepting marriage as good.
Marriage as a positive. The value of marriage as important is evident from the responses of the participants. It was generally discussed that marriage is a partnership and that when both people in the relationship work jointly to achieve their goals, marriage will be a great experience. This is best conveyed by Participant 1301:

I think marriage is an awesome experience. It should be a balance between the couple, not one sided. They both should work together to accomplish personal goals and goals as a married couple.

Participant 1302 also agreed: “I think marriage is what you make it. I think marriage is important only when the two people are working together with a common goal – happiness.” Similarly, Participant 1036 concluded that: “I think it’s a good thing and I think in society, people have more of a negative perspective on it, which kind of annoys me. I see more of the positive than other people do.”

Marriage as a negative. There was only one participant who expressed negative feelings toward marriage, but it was significant in that she discussed her previous adamancy against marriage that she no longer has. Participant 1128 portrays a vivid picture as to why she feared and despised marriage:

Obviously growing up in a house with all of this and seeing my parents, I’ve always hated marriage. I used to hate going to weddings, I thought it was awkward and I thought ‘what are they doing?’ I guess I was just worried about it. […] As my parents kind of went through the divorce and stuff, it made me think even more like… Oh no… do these people know what they are doing? Like this is forever and ever, like the rest of your life. You’re choosing to get married and so um… it kind of freaked me out. I thought… ‘I’m never gonna get married, I don’t need a boyfriend and I don’t need a husband. Anything I wanna do in my life, I can do without one’.

“Only marry when”. This idea of when to marry was a common response with two of the participants. They provided suggestions that might encourage the sanctity of marriage, rather than the need for divorce. Participant 1302 stated that “people need to stop getting married for the wrong reasons (money, children, success, selfish[ness] etc.). Participant 1301 goes further to say that:

You should only marry if you believe you are ready whole heartedly for it and to the person closest to the perfect person you feel is best for you. But do not go based only on
your heart; use your head as well because the heart can lust after the wrong person. For example, if you have limited funds coming in, try not to marry someone who has no goals to meet and only spends and spends because then money will cause the marriage to end.

**Divorce, the Option**

All of the four participants felt that divorce was not good to some degree and that couples need to exhaust all options in resolving their marital problems before seeking an exit. Only two of the four participants felt that divorce should still be made available to those who want it. Participant 1036 stated “I would say it’s an option if I am completely unhappy, but not if it’s something like my parents fought over money”. One participant was completely against it and another participant didn’t provide a definitive opinion on whether divorce should be an option, but stated that there are exceptions to every rule.

**“Working it out”**. Related to feeling toward divorce, a theme that appeared throughout the participants’ responses was this idea of couples doing what they must to make their marriage work. Since all four participants feel that marriage is good, it seems logical that all four of them would believe that couples should work together to save their marriage when problems arise. Participant 1128 stated:

I mean obviously it’s a really hard situation for anyone and it’s like, I… I believe that is like people like should be able to work things out.

Additionally, Participant 1036 stated:

I think people do it too quickly and I think you know – one little mishap in a relationship and we have the option of getting a divorce.

Participant 1301 puts it this way:

I think it should not happen, no matter the situation. One should always try to mend things.

Finally, participant 1302 mentioned that “people just divorce for the smallest things now-a-days.”

So for these participants, and possibly other college students in their position, by working on the problems in a marriage a couple may avoid having to get divorced.

**Divorce as a negative.** A theme that emerged from the findings reflected participants’ strong feelings against divorce. The two participants who had these strong feelings shared their
personal reactions as well as stories on how parental divorce poses a challenge for families. In
the following paragraph Participant 1301 illustrates what his family’s experience was:

I’ve seen how divorce tore my family apart and how it truly hurt my mom in unspeakable
ways. In watching this, I realize that I don’t like what divorce can create in a family and
therefore, I am against divorce.

Participant 1128 combines her personal experience with that of a friend and how parental divorce
impacts the children in a negative way:

It just breaks my heart […] Like I say, I had a friend’s parents who just split during this
last semester of college, or was it in the Fall… last October… and she was absolutely just
heartbroken and I just wanted to cry for her because I remembered how hard it was and
so I just think divorce is really, it’s really hard for kids because it really sticks them in the
middle.

Self Concepts

In addition to feelings toward parents, divorce and marriage, a theme that emerged from
the findings is related to feelings and belief of self. The findings show that some of the
participants are struggling with their experiences with parental divorce, but are acknowledging
their struggles and dealing with them as best as they can. Two of the participants mentioned
feelings regarding who they are and how they feel about their self as it related to their
experiences with parental divorce. Participant 1128 discussed being afraid of marriage, the
impact fear had on her relationship and a positive change with her feelings:

I was worried about [marriage] and kind of thought well, I’m kind of Ms. Independent.
Probably the first year of my dating relationships with [my boyfriend], I really lived in
fear. During my Freshman year of college I was kind of this, just really sad and broken
girl about relationships […] but the Lord spoke to my heart in a way I can’t describe and
I just graduated a month ago and I’m ready to get married.

Participant 1301 had a much more negative self image. He discusses how these self concepts
came to be:

I don’t feel like I’m important. I’m scared that I will mess up like [my father]. I hate
being compared to that man. I wonder what people think of me, and I don’t want people
to know what’s going on in my head sometimes – hating that man, hating other people,
and getting mad with myself for feeling that way because I don’t want to be so angry all the time.

For Participant 1302 she describes her feelings toward her parents and how those interactions have impacted her personal relationships:

[Their] relationship was great before the divorce. I mean they argued and fought, but they were together and we didn’t have to split homes all the time. [My dad] worked a lot and traveled a lot, he criticized me if I brought home a report card with all A’s and 1 C. I guess it was all strained afterwards. Nothing was ever the same. I’ve always told the guys that I like, I don’t want a relationship like my parents.

A more positive response was illustrated by Participant 1036; the experiences with her parents helped her to be better at resolving conflict:

My parents started fighting a lot, mostly about financial stuff and it kind of drove them apart. I think I’m more mature than they are with dealing with conflict.

**Religion as a value**

In addition to their self concepts, some of the participant’s opinions reflect personal beliefs separate and apart from witnessed parental behavior. Two out of the four participants discussed religious affiliations and how these affiliations played a role in their feelings toward marriage. Participant 1301 simply noted being taken to church which impacted his feelings of marriage being good:

[My mother] took us to church and told us the importance of family. There are other things I would say made me feel marriage is a good thing – church, my grandparents and other people I see married, ya know?

Participant 1128 shared her involvement of Christian activities and her personal relationship with Christ, making her faith her foundation regarding beliefs:

I went on this summer project with Campus Crusades for Christ, it’s like a non-denominational Christian organization on college campuses and I’m a Christian. And somewhere along that 11 weeks and summer project, just had my heart really soften to what God um… intended for marriage to be. I think that if two people love the Lord, which they should do in the first place, then [divorce] should never happen. I feel so strongly about divorce because of my faith – like my foundation about divorce comes from my foundation of my faith.
Thus, having religious beliefs guide some participants’ attitude toward marriage and divorce in spite of their parents’ marital status.

**Parental Interaction**

Another contributing factor that helps in understanding parental divorce in college students was the theme on parental interactions. As expected, not all of the participants had the most positive interaction with their parents. In witnessing parental behavior that was abusive, conflictual or even negligent, or through experiencing interactions with their parents themselves, the participants developed unique attitudes toward their parents.

“Conflict and Abuse.” All four participants discussed observing parental behavior that was physically, psychologically or emotionally disturbing. Participant 1128 noted her father’s alcoholic behavior that led to her parents’ divorce and shares her relief that her father only never abused her – just himself:

> He became addicted to alcohol and then the further time went on, the more severe it became […] Like I’m blessed to have like uh… had an alcoholic parent who never abused me. Like I was never abused like physically, sexually, mentally. Like he would just kind of drink and sleep.

Other participant’s experiences with conflict and abuse were not as non-threatening as in the above example. Participant 1036 mentioned that there was “a lot of shouting but not really a lot of cursing at each other.” Participant 1302 “had seen the arguments and abuse but thought it was normal. They were controlling, abusive and cheating”, and Participant 1301 claimed that “my father beat my mom all the time and mom tried to hide it from me and my sister.” Whether it was only on occasion, or on a more consistent basis, each of these participants experienced some form of substantially devastating parental behavior that showed up in their responses.

**Communication with parents.** Three of the four participants discussed the communication between them and their parents. Each participant’s account varied from the other. Participant 1128 kept a good relationship with her parents as much as possible, but most of the communication mentioned her as mediator: “My dad would always ask me how my mom was doing and that sort of thing and vice versa and I kind of thought I was in the middle.” Participant 1302 noted that “My dad stopped communicating with me after I got my first crush […] my mom’s] communication was not the same, but she was great at encouraging me to stay in school.” Participant 1301 expressed that he has always had a good relationship with his mother,
but it was his father where there lacked communication: “There is no speaking between us; my father and I – never care to hear his name again, much less speak to him.”

Participant 1301 further reflected on situations that occurred and repeatedly expressed why he does not care to have further interactions or any form of relationship with his father:

My father was distant […] even more distant during the divorce and difficult to get along with. He just didn’t care for us. I guess he was just mean, cruel. Harsh with his words, never owned or paid for anything. I can remember my dad never being there for my mom. I hate what my father did to me and my sister, but most especially to my mom. I could care less about him. He makes me sick. Out of sight, out of mind. I cannot bear the thought of my father.

Discussion

There are countless studies and literature that has shown how Parental Divorce has a significant impact on children, whether positively or negatively. When viewing age as a determining factor of how children of parental divorce cope, adjust and view marriage or divorce, many of these studies simply compare children/adolescents to older adults and report the differences between these age brackets. Very few studies recognize the degree to which age influences this impact on children of divorce within the population of adult college students. The findings from the current study suggests that the age of the college student has some influence on the impact of parental divorce and their relationship with their parents.

The first hypothesis was that college students who have experienced parental divorce will report lower levels of trust towards partners compared to those of intact families. This hypothesis was not supported. Although the overall scale for Trust in interpersonal relationship as well as the three subscales showed great reliability, it yielded no significant results. One potential issue with this instrument was that some of the participants reported on a current relationship while others reported on past relationships that occurred during the last year. Furthermore, college students are at a stage in their life where they are still exploring who they are and what they want for their lives (personally and academically); this uncertainty of what they want in a relationship or how much they might truly trust their partner may be why there were no significant results from the trust scale. The researcher did not have explicit details regarding the nature of the student’s relationship; therefore it is uncertain whether the
relationship being referred to on the trust scale was a healthy one (or whether it was a past or current relationship). Prior acts of personal/partner infidelity, or violence in the relationship would definitely impact the responses on trust in interpersonal relationships; it may even be due to issues where the participants’ parents cheated on one another in current/past marriage. Even more so, there may be a lack of motivation by the participant to answer truthfully because of a recent situation occurring in the relationship just before participating in the study. Additionally, fatigue, eagerness to finish the study, and/or the design of the instrument are also factors that might have contributed to the lack of significant result.

The qualitative findings show an example of a ‘lack of trust’ in interpersonal relationships as a result of experiencing parental divorce. Participant 1128 vividly expressed her hesitation for the first year of her current romantic relationship because she feared that her relationship might end up like her parents. Furthermore, she questioned how to trust a man and be confident that the relationship would last and that her partner would always be there. As viewed through symbolic interaction, the relationship between self and society is important. With Participant 1128, she questions the I part of herself (who she thinks she is), creating feelings of herself from which she develops various attitudes (including lack of trust in intimate partners).

The second hypothesis was that college students who have experienced parental divorce will report more negative attitudes toward marriage compared to those of intact families. While this hypothesis was not supported, there were some interesting findings regarding age and parental marital status. College students who have experienced parental divorce may have more negative attitudes toward marriage in comparison to younger children, however these attitudes depend on a combination of other factors (such as age, ethnicity, high conflict, etc.) and are not the case for all situations.

Researchers such as Amato and Booth (1991) have found that the attitudes towards divorce of college students with divorced parents may be more liberal compared with their counterparts. Having experienced parental divorce, a college student may be more liberal, not necessarily seeing divorce in a negative light, but as a positive option. This is especially so when there is an event going on in the home that is undesirable; divorce then seems like an escape. The qualitative findings supports that some college students who experience parental divorce might have more liberal attitudes. With two of the four participants expressing that divorce
should continue to be an option and three out of the four participants believing that couples separate too quickly and not try to resolve their differences. The ‘generalized other’ assumption of the symbolic interaction theory helps us to understand why participants might feel this way; generally, it is because of responses and behaviors they observe from the people around them. The participants might feel that the couples they observe, including their parents, are separating/divorcing because they do not try hard enough to make their marriages work.

The qualitative findings of this study produced examples where attitudes towards marriage and divorce appeared dependent on the level of conflict within the relationship before and during the divorce process. A relationship with high parental conflict before divorce accounts for the child learning negative or dysfunctional behaviors, ideas and expectations of conflict in a marital relationship (Riggio & Fite, 2006). All of the participants from the qualitative portion of the study have experienced some level of parental conflict and have noted how they do not desire a relationship like their parents; definitively deciding against divorce. On the contrary, if the individual is grounded in some form of belief, regardless of parental divorce, analysis of the results show that such individuals will remain set against divorce, having a more conservative attitude towards divorce. The qualitative findings from Participant 1128 support this idea:

“I think [divorce] is really hard. I think it’s something that I pray people don’t ever have to go through, but [um…] I mean it happens, but I don’t know. I mean whether my parents would have divorced or not, I would still think there’s got to be an alternative.”

Previous research suggests that adult offspring of parental divorce are not as optimistic about marriage as are adults from intact families and have an open mind to the possibility of divorce (Riggio and Fite, 2006; Amato and Booth, 1991). Individuals from divorced families report lower general expectations of relationship success than individuals from intact families. This study did not find any significance to show that parental marital status does impact marital attitude. However, in presenting the trend toward statistical significance between the interaction of age and ethnicity, the findings suggests that younger, non Caucasian college students may have more negative attitudes on marriage than the older non Caucasian students. Continued studies with larger non Caucasian samples are necessary to gain significant support. Such negative attitudes on marriage may then lead to marital instability and/or dissolution. Researchers have suggested that ethnicity is a major factor associated with marital satisfaction.
and that Caucasians have higher marital quality and more marital stability than do people of other races (especially African-Americans) (Bryant, Taylor, Lincoln, Chatters & Jackson, 2008; Bulanda & Brown, 2007). As the participants in this study were all unmarried, longitudinal studies would be needed to delve deeper into such attitudes toward marriage and gain support for these findings.

The literature also suggests that college students are more resilient to the impact of parental divorce than adolescents (McIntyre et al., 2003). This idea was partially supported in the current study, as the quality of parent-child relationships among the college students in the younger category seem to be relatively similar regardless if their parents are married or not. It is possible that the cognitive development of the student as a result of their recent transition into a tertiary education level, having to adjust to these college life changes or other personal characteristics unaccounted for, attributes to why younger college students do not differ in their parent-child relationship regardless of parental marital status. The transition to college requires making personal adjustments as an individual that may be seen by young college students as having little to do with their parent’s marital status and more with the support provided by their parent during this transition. More as expected, the findings suggest that older college students with married parents have better relationships with their parents than those with divorced or separated parents. Several reasons may account for why older college students with divorced or separated parent have less positive parent-child relationships, but the most prominent reason might be that being near the completion of college forces them to think of their current or future relationships more purposefully. In not seeing their parents as good relationship role models, this group of students find themselves faced with more conflict or turmoil, resulting in less positive parent-child relationships.

The third Hypothesis was that college students who have experienced parental divorce report lower self-esteem compared to those of intact families. There is a common theme found in previous research studies where children of divorce experience lower self-esteem along with many other reduced internalized traits (Evans & Bloom, 1996). This theme was partially supported by the findings in this present study. College students reported high self-esteem when their parents were married, but this was only significant for those classified as young. But for the cases where the parents were divorced/separated, it was the older college students who reported having high self-esteem. It is possible that as the college student advances in age, and
subsequently, maturity they rely less on parental opinion or marital status to feel self confident and assured of self. This study does not delve into deeper reasons as to why children of divorce might report lower self-esteem, but a possible reasoning is that the individual then compares their self to others and becomes unsure of what a good relationship is. Additionally, the individual begins to think about how they themselves would be able to maintain a healthy, lasting relationship – possibly stemming from a lack of positive role models demonstrating a healthy relationship. Therefore, the individual develops self doubt and lack of confidence in what they can bring to a relationship. This is seen from the qualitative findings, where Participant 1301 really had a negative concept of himself as a result of his experiences along with the comparison to his father:

“I’ll tell you what my mom thinks; that I have issues […] A lot of the time my mom says I doubt myself and who I am because I’m trying so hard not to be like him. Okay, to be fair, I might have some issues. I’m scared that I will mess up like him. When my mom compares me to him, look like him, act like him, speak like him - I get really pissed ‘cause the last thing I want is to be like him. I wonder what people think of me, and I don’t want people to know what’s going on in my head sometimes.”

In addition to revelations about self concepts, this participant is particularly adamant about not becoming a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ as assumed by the symbolic interaction theory (Wiley, 2003). In being constantly compared to his father, the one man that has hurt his family physically, verbally and emotionally, Participant 1301 explains how he does his best not to become the same way.

The fourth Hypothesis that college students who have experienced parental divorce would report less positive parent-child relationships was supported. It is not surprising that this finding was supported because it is generally anticipated that couples who remain together in a married relationship would interact more regularly with their children compared to divorced/separated families where custody arrangements, divorce settlements and poor inter-parental relationships may impede regular parental involvement (Kelly & Emory, 2003). The college student of divorced parents is then apt to having weaker emotional attachments to one or both parents, especially the non-custodial parent; (Lopez, Melendez & Rice, 2000) which can then attribute to a reduced relationship. Amato and Sabolewski, (2001) also affirms this through their research that adult children with divorced parents reports less positive relationships with
parents compared to those with intact parents. Having weak emotional attachments to one or both parents would imply a lack of communication. Consistent with symbolic interaction, even sparse or non-communication is given symbolic meaning by the child who then misinterprets or concludes that the parent doesn’t care to be involved with them. Participant 1302 affirms this when she describes the discontinued communication between her and her father, and then asks to move back in with her mother.

Limitations & Future Recommendations

This study was conducted in a geographical location that has its own unique make up of typically upper-middle class, to upper-class Caucasian individuals. Being that this is where the participants were derived, it is difficult to obtain a sample representative of college students in the US, or even to all students at the college from which the population was drawn because of the convenience sampling strategy. However, because the sample drew from courses that were a part of the general education requirement, all students were eligible to take the course, thus the sample might be considered fairly representative of the University. Future studies could utilize a more representative sampling method such as stratified random sample across the college campuses within the United States. This would also then increase the potential inclusion of more non Caucasians participants and college students with divorced parents.

In addition to sampling, it is safe to speculate on whether the self-report from the qualitative portion of the study were accurate and comprehensive. As the participants had to recollect experiences, which may not be completely recent, one can cogitate that the memories and recollections may lack full details as parents sometimes shade their children from all the facts or that the participant’s responses are strictly a result of parental divorce. The participants were questioned during their interview as to how much of these experiences relate from parental divorce, but it cannot be stated beyond doubt that all of the responses have direct association.

Since this study only found a trend toward statistical significance on the outlook of Marital Attitude when ethnicity interacts with age, it is suggested that future studies with larger, more diverse samples continue to explore this interaction for more statistical power in assessing ethnic differences.

The qualitative findings of this study brought up several interesting suggestions regarding the association of religious beliefs with attitudes on marriage and divorce. A couple participants
discussed religious affiliations and faith that grounds them in making life decisions. The strength of such grounded beliefs can be a determining factor in how perceptions and attitudes are formed, and decisions are subsequently made. It is suggested that future studies include questions regarding the participant’s belief and delve deeper into the strengths of such beliefs to see if they truly do have significant influence on attitudes, perhaps serving as a protective factor against the development of negative attitudes towards marriage in the context of experiencing parental divorce. The inclusions of such questions are important because it will add to existing research on divorce specific to college students. Also, by taking a closer look at these associations, the findings may raise unforeseen aspects of beliefs/personal values that impact attitudes toward marriage and divorce.

Conclusion

In conclusion, only one of the four hypotheses was supported in that college students who have experienced parental divorce report less positive parent-child relationships compared to those with married parents. The findings of this study suggest that age and parental marital status has an impact on the significance of that parent-child relationship. Age is also seen to be a possible protective factor regarding negative influences of parental divorce. More specifically, older students with divorced or separated parents reported higher levels of self-esteem than those with married parents; although they did report lower quality parent-child relationships. One the other hand, younger students with divorced or separated parents are suggested to have similar relationships with their parents as students with married parents, thus the role of age as a buffer varies depends on the outcome.

The qualitative findings further suggest that the relationship between parent and student are guided by the interactions witnessed and/or experienced by the college student during the parent’s marriage and after their divorce. These experiences help the student to form perceptions of marriage and divorce; perceptions that are not limited to observed parental behavior only, but are inclusive of the student’s personal hopes for marriage.

The notion that college students with divorced/separated parents are more resilient than those with married parents is partially supported as previous research discusses. Many factors, both internal (beliefs and self concepts) and external (witnessed parental interaction/behavior) contributes to the college student’s perception of marriage and divorce and how they cope,
suggesting understanding for this resilience. Furthermore, it is suggested in this study that college students have a level of maturity because of age that enables them to process and interpret parental divorce in a unique way from younger children and adolescents.
References


Table 1: Participant Demographic Information (N=123)

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Table 2:
Analysis of Variance for Marital Attitude

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Table 2b:
Least Square Means for effect for Age and Ethnicity Interaction

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<td>Age$^Y$ x ETH$^O$</td>
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Note. Variables are dichotomized. Age$^{O/Y}$: Age old/young; ETH$^{C/O}$: Ethnicity Caucasian/Other.

Table 3:
Analysis of Variance for Self Esteem

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<th>Self Esteem</th>
<th>Source</th>
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<td>Total</td>
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Table 3b:
Least Square Means for effect for Age and Parental Marital Status

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Note. Variables are dichotomized. Age$^{O/Y}$: Age old/young; PMS$^{M/O}$: Parents Married/Other.
Table 4:
Analysis of Variance for Parent-Child Relationship

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<td>.0018</td>
<td>0.6248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.444</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>.0130</td>
<td>0.1923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMS x Age</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.978</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>.0286</td>
<td>0.0540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S within-group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>error</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4b:
Least Square Means for effect for Age and Parental Marital Status

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent-Child Relationship</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>Age$^O$ x PMS$^M$</th>
<th>Age$^Y$ x PMS$^M$</th>
<th>Age$^Y$ x PMS$^O$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Age$^O$ x PMS$^M$</td>
<td>Age$^Y$ x PMS$^M$</td>
<td>Age$^Y$ x PMS$^O$</td>
<td>0.0280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age$^O$ x PMS$^M$</td>
<td>2.289</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age$^Y$ x PMS$^M$</td>
<td>2.458</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age$^O$ x PMS$^O$</td>
<td>2.279</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age$^Y$ x PMS$^O$</td>
<td>1.994</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Variables are dichotomized. Age$^{O/Y}$: Age old/young; PMS$^{MO}$: Parents Married/Other.

Table 5:
Analysis of Variance for Trust in Interpersonal Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>$\eta^2$</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PMS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.601</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.0322</td>
<td>0.1621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.0617</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>.0018</td>
<td>0.3842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ETH</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>.0130</td>
<td>0.8354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S within-group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>error</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>118</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. There were no significant findings.
Appendix A: Recruitment Script

Hi! My name is Lakia Bethell. I am a graduate student in the department of Family Studies and Social Work at Miami University working with my faculty advisor and committee. The purpose of this study is to find out student’s attitudes towards divorce, marriage and relationships. I will be asking for your name and other personal information on the second page of the demographic questionnaire. All of this contact information will be kept confidential. The reason I am asking for this information, should you be willing to provide it, is so that I can contact you for the invitation into the second phase of this study. This page of your contact information will be torn off and separated from your responses, and will be used to contact those qualified for the second phase of the student to see if they are interested.

The professor will be offering participation in the study as an alternative option to the regular class assignment. The regular class assignment will consist of filling out the same survey used in the study, but just for your own experience as you will not participate in the consent process or hand in your survey. You can simply take your survey with you as you leave. For the students choosing this option (no participation in study) I ask you NOT to write their name, address or any identifying information on your surveys.

Participation in the second phase of the study is not required or expected for each participant. Only participants who have experienced parental divorce in the last three years and have a current or recent romantic relationship will be contacted and asked to participate in the second phase. Also in this study, you will be asked to provide information on some sensitive topics such as your perceptions of divorce, marriage, whether your parents divorced, and questions about your relationship with your parents and any current or recent romantic relationship you might have. Please know that your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that you may choose not to answer any question or discontinue your involvement and participation in this study at any time without prejudice or penalty. To further ensure your privacy and safety, you will be assigned a participant ID at the beginning of the study, which will be the only identifying information on any document you turn in. All of the information collected from you throughout the study will be kept confidential.

Does anyone have any questions? (address questions here)

(Ask students) Do any of you wish to participant in the study? Who would prefer to complete the alternative assignment?

The Teaching assistant for the class will ask students to raise their hands if they want to complete the alternative assignment option (see Appendix G) and then pass out surveys (but not consent forms) and associated reflection assignment to those students. The teaching assistant will then ask students who would like to complete assignment option two, participating in the study, and the researcher (Ms. Bethell) will pass out the surveys with consent form and associated reflection assignment.

Commence with reading of consent form and explaining of participant rights.

(Again ask) Does anyone have any questions? (address questions here)

Inform the participant that they have 30 minutes to complete the surveys or alternative assignments.
Appendix B: Demographic Information Sheet

Participant ID: ____________________

Date of Birth: ________-______-______
(month) (day) (year)

Gender: ____________________________
(a) Female
(b) Male

Sexual Orientation: ____________________________
(a) Heterosexual
(b) Homosexual
(c) Bi-sexual

Ethnic Identity: ____________________________
(a) Caucasian
(b) African-American/Black
(c) Hispanic
(d) Native-American
(e) Asian-American (Japanese, Chinese etc)
(f) Polynesian-American (Hawaiian, American Samoan, etc.)
(g) Other: Please indicate: ____________________________

Student Classification: ____________________________
(a) First Year Student
(b) Sophomore
(c) Junior
(d) Senior
(e) Other: ____________________________

Marital Status: ____________________________
(a) Married
(b) Single, In committed relationship
(c) Single, Not in any relationship
(d) Divorced
(e) Cohabiting with romantic partner

Your Parental Status: ____________________________
(a) Currently a parent
(b) Not currently a parent
(c) Other: ____________________________

Your age at time of divorce: _______________

More than 3 but less than 6 months
More than 6 but less than 12 months
More than 12 but less than 18 months
More than 18 months but less than 2 years
More than 2 years but less than 3 years
More than 3 years but less than 5 years
5 years
More than 5 years

G.P.A: ____________________________

Socio-Economic Status (SES):
(a) Upper class
(b) Upper Middle Class
(c) Middle Class
(d) Lower Middle Class
(e) Lower Class
(f) Approximate annual income of parents: ____________________________

Are your parents: ____________________________
(a) Married
(b) Divorced
(c) Separated
(d) In the process of divorce
(e) Other: ____________________________

If parents are divorced:
Your age at time of divorce: _______________

If parents are separated, but are not divorced:
Your age at time of separation: _______________
Please provide the following information:

Participant ID: __________________

Name: ________________________________________________________________
      (First name) (Middle initial) (Last name)

Mailing Address: _________________________________________________________
      (Street address or P. O. Box) (City, State) (Zip code)

Email Address: _________________________________________________________

Telephone Number: ____________________________________________________
      (If long distance, please include area code.)
Appendix C: Informed Consent – Phase I

I, Lakia Bethell, am the Primary Researcher on this study. I am a graduate student in the department of Family Studies and Social Work at Miami University working with my faculty advisor and committee.

The study which you are being asked to participate will be a mixed method study held in two phases (quantitative and qualitative). If you agree to participate, in the first phase you will complete a brief form requesting general demographical data such as your age, gender and student classification. You will also be given three short scales that measure self-esteem, trust in interpersonal relationships, attitudes towards marriage and parental conflict after divorce. Once phase one has been completed, you will be asked to provide contact information to the researcher should you want to continue on phase two. A formal invitation will be extended to those college students willing to participate in phase two. Phase two includes personal interviews with the participants to get in-depth answers on the impact of their parents’ divorce and the perceptions from experiencing parental divorce on current/marital relationships. The first phase will last approximately 30 minutes and the second phase will last 20 minutes. Your participation in this study makes you eligible for a drawing for a $50 gift card to Walmart. Regardless if you finish the entire study or discontinue during any of the two phases, you will still be entered for this drawing.

It is not expected that your participation in this study holds any risks to you as a participant. This proposed study aims to pose the minimal risks to the participants. Through recalling the experiences of parental divorce or romantic relationships emotional distress may occur. However, should you experience any distress or discomfort, feel free to skip a question, take a break, or discontinue your participation. There is also a list of referrals to counseling hotlines and services on the back of this consent form. There are no expected direct benefits to participation. However, you may find it beneficial to reflect (or discuss for the interview phase) your perceptions/experiences regarding your current, past or future relationship; as well as your parent’s divorce. Additionally, this study may provide useful information to researchers regarding understand individuals’ perceptions of their relationships and parental divorce.

PROOF OF CONSENT
I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I may discontinue my involvement and participation in this study at any time without prejudice or penalty. I understand my participation will assist in the exploration of how a parent’s divorce can influence an adult offspring’s perceptions of marriage and divorce. I understand that, should I participate; the phase two interview will be taped and transcribed into written form for research purposes. I understand that all information collected for this study in written and oral forms will be held in the strictest of confidence. I further understand that, for this research to be effective, certain personal information must be collected. I understand that this information will be maintained in a completely confidential manner and that access to this information will only be available to the interviewer and the faculty advisor (below). My professor Dr. Bush will not have access to identifying information about me or of the extent to which I complete the study. Finally, I understand that, at the conclusion of this study, all records identifying personal participants will be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about the procedures used in this study, please feel free to contact:
Lakia KayVonne, B.A., MSHRM
Graduate Student
513-462-4529

Dr. Sean Newsome
BSW Program Director
513-529-2030

Should you have any questions about the rights of subjects, please feel free to contact:
The Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship
513-529-3600 or humansubjects@muohio.edu

***************************************************************

I understand all of the above, I agree that I am 18 years or older and give my consent to participate in the afore-mentioned study.

Participant Signature: ______________________ Printed Name: ______________________ Date: ___/___/___

Participant ID: _________________________
Informed Consent - for Phase II

I, Lakia Bethell, am the Primary Researcher on this study. I am a graduate student in the department of Family Studies and Social Work at Miami University working with my faculty advisor and committee.

This is the second phase of the study which you are being invited to participate in. This phase includes a personal interview with you in order to get an in-depth understanding on the impact of your parents’ divorce and your perceptions from experiencing parental divorce on current/marital relationships. This phase is expected to last approximately 20 minutes.

It is not expected that your participation in this study holds any risks to you as a participant. This proposed study aims to pose the minimal risks to the participants. Through recalling the experiences of parental divorce or romantic relationships emotional distress may occur. However, should you experience any distress or discomfort, feel free to skip a question, take a break, or discontinue your participation. There is also a list of referrals to counseling hotlines and services on the back of this consent form. There are no expected direct benefits to participation. However, you may find it beneficial to reflect (or discuss for the interview phase) your perceptions/experiences regarding your current, past or future relationship; as well as your parent’s divorce. Additionally, this study may provide useful information to researchers regarding understand individuals’ perceptions of their relationships and parental divorce.

PROOF OF CONSENT
I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I may discontinue my involvement and participation in this study at any time without prejudice or penalty. I understand my participation will assist in the exploration of how a parent’s divorce can influence an adult offspring’s perceptions of marriage and divorce. I understand that the phase two interview will be taped and transcribed into written form for research purposes, but that I have the right to refuse having any conversations recorded of my free will. I understand that all information collected for this study in written and oral forms will be held in the strictest of confidence. I further understand that, for this research to be effective, certain personal information must be collected. I understand that this information will be maintained in a completely confidential manner and that access to this information will only be available to the interviewer and the faculty representative (below). Finally, I understand that, at the conclusion of this study, all records identifying personal participants will be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about the procedures used in this study, please feel free to contact:
Lakia KayVonne, B.A., MSHRM
Graduate Student
513-462-4529

Dr. Sean Newsome
BSW Program Director
513-529-2030

Should you have any questions about the rights of subjects, please feel free to contact:
The Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship
513-529-3600 or humansubjects@muohio.edu

I understand all of the above, and give my consent to have the interview audio taped in the afore-mentioned study.

Participant Signature: _________________________ Printed Name: _________________________ Date: __ / __ / __

I understand all of the above, I agree that I am 18 years or older and give my consent to participate in the afore-mentioned study.

Participant Signature: _________________________ Printed Name: _________________________ Date: __ / __ / __

Participant ID: ____________________________
### Appendix D: Quantitative Questionnaires

**Marital Attitude Scale**

**Instructions:** Below is a list of statements related to marriage. If you strongly agree, circle **SA**. If you agree with the statement, circle **A**. If you disagree, circle **D**. If you strongly disagree, circle **SD**.

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. People should marry.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I have little confidence that my marriage will be a success</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. People should stay married to their spouses for the rest of their Lives.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Most couples are either unhappy in their marriage or are divorced.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I will be satisfied when I get married.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am fearful of marriage.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have doubts about marriage.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. People should only get married if they are sure it will last forever.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. People should feel cautious about entering into a marriage.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Most marriages are unhappy situations.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Marriage is only a legal contract.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Marriage is a sacred act.</td>
<td>SA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. Most marriages aren’t equal partnerships.

14. Most people have to sacrifice too much in marriage.

15. Because half of all marriages end in divorce, marriage seems futile.

*16. If I divorce, I would probably remarry.

17. When people don’t get along, I believe they should divorce.

18. I believe a relationship can be just as strong without having to go through the marriage ceremony.

*19. My lifelong dream includes a happy marriage

20. There is no such thing as a happy marriage.

21. Marriage restricts individuals from achieving their goals.

22. People weren’t meant to stay in one relationship for their entire lives.

*23. Marriage provides companionship that is missing from other types of relationships
The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Instructions: Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle SA. If you agree with the statement, circle A. If you disagree, circle D. If you strongly disagree, circle SD.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. 
   SA  A  D  SD

2. At times, I think I am no good at all. 
   SA  A  D  SD

3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. 
   SA  A  D  SD

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people. 
   SA  A  D  SD

5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of. 
   SA  A  D  SD

6. I certainly feel useless at times. 
   SA  A  D  SD

7. I feel that I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others. 
   SA  A  D  SD

8. I wish I could have more respect for myself. 
   SA  A  D  SD

9. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. 
   SA  A  D  SD

10. I take a positive attitude toward myself. 
    SA  A  D  SD
Parent-Child Relationship Scale

**Instructions:** Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about your relationship with your parents as well as your observation of your parent’s marriage. If you strongly agree, circle **SA**. If you agree with the statement, circle **A**. If you disagree, circle **D**. If you strongly disagree, circle **SD**.

1. I argue with my mother often.
   How often? _____________________
   [SA | A | D | SD]

2. I argue with my father often.
   How often? _____________________
   [SA | A | D | SD]

3. Arguments with my mother are generally severe.
   [SA | A | D | SD]

4. Arguments with my father are generally severe.
   [SA | A | D | SD]

*5. I get along well with my mother.
   [SA | A | D | SD]

*6. I get along well with my father.
   [SA | A | D | SD]

*7. I am satisfied with my relationship with my mother
   [SA | A | D | SD]

*8. I am satisfied with my relationship with my father.
   [SA | A | D | SD]

9. During their marriage, my mother argued with my father often
   [SA | A | D | SD]

10. During their marriage, my father argued with my mother often
    [SA | A | D | SD]

11. During their marriage, my mother was verbally abusive toward my father
    [SA | A | D | SD]

12. During their marriage, my father was verbally abusive toward my mother
    [SA | A | D | SD]
Trust in Interpersonal Relationship Scale

**Instructions**: The following are statements as they relate to someone with whom you have a close interpersonal relationship (*currently or within the last year*). Circle the extent to which you Strongly Disagree (SD) or Strongly Agree (SA).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>My partner has proven to be trustworthy and I am willing to let him/her engage in activities which other partners find too threatening.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Even when I don’t know how my partner will react, I feel comfortable telling him/her anything about myself, even those things of which I am ashamed.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Though times may change and the future is uncertain, I know my partner will always be ready and willing to offer me strength and support.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I am never certain that my partner won’t do something that I dislike or will embarrass me.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>My partner is very unpredictable. I never know how he/she is going to act from one day to the next.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>I feel very uncomfortable when my partner has to make decisions which will affect me personally.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>I have found that my partner is unusually dependable, especially when it comes to things which are important to me.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>My partner behaves in a very consistent manner.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Whenever we have to make an important decision in a situation we have never encountered before, I know my partner will be concerned about my welfare.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Even if I have no reason to expect my partner to share things with me, I still feel certain that he/she will.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>I can rely on my partner to react in a positive way when I expose my weaknesses to him/her.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>When I share my problems with my partner, I know he/she will respond in a loving way even before I say anything.</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-2</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. I am certain that my partner would not cheat on me, even if the opportunity arose and there was no chance that he/she would get caught.

4. I sometimes avoid my partner because he/she is unpredictable and I fear saying or doing something which might create conflict.

15. I can rely on my partner to keep the promises he/she makes to me.

16. When I am with my partner, I feel secure in facing unknown new situations.

17. Even when my partner makes excuses which sound rather unlikely, I am confident that he/she is telling the truth.
Appendix E: Qualitative Interview Guide

Perception on Parental Divorce

Thank you for your participation in this study involving the influences of parental divorce on college student’s perception of relationships. Your participation is voluntary and it is within your right to choose not to answer any question asked. Also, remember that everything that is discussed here will be kept in the strictest of confidence.

1. Please tell me about your parent’s divorce.

2. Describe your parents’ relationship:
   a. Before divorce:
   b. During divorce:
   c. After divorce:
      i. How did your parents manage conflict? (ignore each other, shout a lot, curse)
      ii. What response did your mom/dad have to conflict

3. What was the relationship between you and your parents?
   a. Before divorce:
   b. During divorce:
   c. After divorce:

4. What do you think about marriage?
   a. Have you always felt this way?
   b. How much of your feelings results from your experience of parental divorce?
   c. What do you believe has changed with you after witnessing what your parents went through?

5. What do you think about divorce?
   a. Have you always felt this way?
   b. How much of your feelings results from your experience of parental divorce?
   c. What do you believe has changed with you after witnessing what your parents went through?

End Comments:

Thank you once again for your participation in this study. Your responses have been extremely valuable to my research. Please be assured that everything you have shared will be treated with strict confidence and your privacy in mind. Should you be interested in the results of the study, arrangements can be made to provide you with a copy. (Make note of expressed interest.)
Appendix F: Invitation to Phase II

You are Invited...

Dear (participant’s name),

Just as a quick reminder, my name is Lakia Bethell, and I am the Primary Researcher for the study of Perception on Parental Divorce. I am a graduate student in the department of Family Studies and Social Work at Miami University working with Dr. Kevin R. Bush. Once again, I would like to thank you for your interest and participation in this study thus far.

I am pleased to formally invite you to participate in Phase Two of this study. As mentioned in your consent form from phase one, this study has been divided into two phases; the second phase includes a personal interview with you to get in-depth answers on the impact of your parents’ divorce and what perceptions you may have on current/marital relationships (after experiencing parental divorce). As soon as you receive this invitation, please contact me at the information below to arrange a date, time, and location for your interview completion. The interview should last approximately 20 minutes.

As a reminder, please make note of the following: Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may discontinue your involvement and participation at any time without prejudice or penalty. Also, understand that your participation will assist in the exploration of how a parent’s divorce can influence an adult offspring’s perceptions of marriage and divorce, but should you participate, your interview will be taped/digitally recorded and transcribed into written form for research purposes.

All information collected for this study in written and oral forms will be held in the strictest of confidence and that your information will be maintained in a completely confidential manner so that access to this information will only be available to the interviewer and the faculty advisor.

Your participation is greatly appreciated and I look forward to meeting with you soon!

Kind regards,

Lakia KayVonne Bethell
bethellk@muohio.edu
513.461.4529
Appendix G: Alternative Assignment

Class Assignment #15 – Divorce and Families – Option One

Name: _______________________________ Date: ______________________

Please think about the questions in the survey and briefly reflect your perceptions of the survey:

1. How accurately do you think these questions measure (a) perceptions of divorce and (b) perceptions of marriage and why or why not?

2. Provide one example of how one or more of the questions about marriage/divorce perceptions relates to the material in the course (lecture, text, class discussions, etc), and briefly describe how this item or items relates to the course material.
Appendix H: Counseling Referrals and Hotlines

The Community Crisis and Counseling Center

110 South College Avenue
Oxford, OH 45056-1738
(513) 424 - 5498
(513) 523 - 4149
(513) 894 - 7002
Teen Line
(513) 418 - 6423 x359

Cincinnati Crisis Care Center

(513) 281 - CARE (2273)

Dr. Carol Wochenko, Psychologist

33 W. Walnut Street
Oxford, Ohio 45056
(513) 523 - 1966

Hamilton County Emergency Hotline and Helpline

2400 Reading Rd, Ste. 412
Cincinnati, OH. 45202
Phone: (513) 721 - 2910
Fax: (513) 287 - 8544

Ohio Department of Health

Children and Family Health Services Hotline: (800) 282 - 3435
Report abuse of persons with Developmental Disorders: (800) 231 - 5872
Emergency Response Hotline: (888) 411 - 4142
Help Me Grow Hotline: (800) 755 - 4769

National Youth Crisis Hotline

(800) 448 - 4663