



# HEALTH PROMOTION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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## JADED OR REJUVENATED: COMPARING YOUNG ADULT PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE FROM DIVORCED AND INTACT HOMES

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores the connections between the dynamics and quality of parental marital relationships and the resulting dynamics, quality, and expectations that young adults have towards their own intimate relationships. Both a pilot and follow-up study were conducted. In order to be eligible, participants had to be 18 years or older and have parents who were either married or divorced. The pilot study had 67 participants, the follow-up study had 94. Participants were asked to provide their parents' marital status as well as rate their level of conflict between parents. Participants also responded to the Romantic Beliefs Scale, Dyadic Trust Scale, and Family Attitudes Scale in both studies. In addition, participants were asked to provide answers to open-ended questions regarding their beliefs on how they were influenced by their parents' marriage and divorce. The results suggest that adults from divorced homes or homes fraught with conflict have less romanticized, more realistic, views of marriage. They also demonstrate an understanding of what can go wrong in a marital relationship and a willingness to work harder in their own marriages.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Given the frequency of relationship termination in the current culture, and given the commonly associated conflict that attends it, this study seeks to understand more fully the linkages between the dynamics and quality of the parental marital relationship and the dynamics, quality, and expectations that young adults have towards their own intimate relationships and marriage. Some people claim that their parents' marriage has jaded them, souring their expectations of marriage in the future. Others claim that their parents' marriage, and subsequent divorce, has made them want to try all the harder to make sure that does not happen to them as well.

The impact of parental divorce on children has been studied to a great degree. Children of divorce are prone to psychological, economical and personal problems, in addition to issues with academic achievement, conduct, and interpersonal relations (Amato & Booth, 2001; Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Most divorce studies are concerned with the short and medium-term effects on a child. However, studies on the long term effects of divorce are sparse, but show that effects do persist into adulthood. Children of divorce are more likely to have marital problems and divorce themselves versus children from intact homes. Children of divorce marry earlier, cohabit more often, are less educated, and tend to have more lenient attitudes toward divorce than children from intact family environments. (Amato, 1996; Amato et al., 1984; Duran-Aydintug, 1997).

Some adult children of divorce make poor choices in relationships, leave relationships too quickly and avoid commitment altogether (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2001). They also report less relationship satisfaction, are more likely to see their own marriages end in divorce (Amato, 1996), and hold more negative views of marriage than children from intact families (Gabardi & Rosen, 1991; Glenn & Kramer, 1987). Children of divorce have witnessed their own parents' marriage fail, and may be afraid of such failure in their own intimate relationships. College students from divorced families are more cynical and critical when it comes to mate selection, compared to students from intact families (Gabardi & Rosen, 2001). Further, children of divorce who experienced higher levels of conflict in their parents' marriage tend to report higher levels of anxiety and fear in relation to their own marriages (Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Overall, children of divorce report lower levels of desire to marry when they are adolescents, but are no less likely to actually marry than children from intact families (Tasker, 1992). Also, children of divorce average a lower age at the time of their first marriage, which may contribute to a higher divorce rate among that group (Glenn & Kramer, 1987). Attitudes toward marrying later in life might be affected by the type of parental divorce an adolescent experienced, their economic situation, and relationships with both parents.

Parental conflict before and after the divorce also affect students' attitudes regarding marriage and the personal relationship behaviors (Kirk, 2002; Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Parental marital conflict is a predictor of doubt when measuring attitudes towards marriage. This supports other research suggesting that parental marital status is not always the most important factor in determining attitudes regarding

relationships and marriage, but rather the *quality* of the marriage or levels of conflict experienced are more important in shaping children's beliefs and attitudes. In regards to students from unhappily intact families, their attitudes towards marriage might be affected by the level of conflict experienced in their home, and are similar to those of students from divorced homes. Students from these types of families may be led to believe that unhappy marriages are the "norm" and therefore are to be tolerated (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992). Conflict levels in the home may be just as important, if not more so, than the parents' marital status (Kirk, 2002). It is also important to note that students' perceptions of their parents' level of conflict is more connected to their adjustment than their parents' actual level of conflict (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992).

By experiencing a parental divorce during childhood or adolescence, young adults sense of intimacy, commitment, security and trust are often threatened in their own relationships (Gabardi & Rosen, 1991). Parental divorce increases the chance that a child will see their own marriage end in divorce (Amato & DeBoer, 2001); on the other hand, children from high conflict homes in which the parents did not divorce have higher levels of divorce. These same children have higher levels of thinking about or contemplating divorce, but not following through. This may be due to the idea that since their parents' marriage lasted, no matter how bad, their concept of marriage is one of permanence (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

Adult children of divorce exhibit a fear of commitment in two different ways. First, most adult children of divorce hold onto notions that if their relationship does not work out, divorce is a viable option and thus provides them with an "out" if the relationship is not successful. They also tend to withhold full commitment to their

marriage, thus “hedging their bets” against failure of the relationship (Glenn & Kramer, 1987). This is shown through high rates of divorce and cohabitation, along with positive attitudes towards divorce of children from divorced homes (Amato, 1996; Booth, Brinkerhoff & White, 1984; Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Secondly, adult children of divorce have a tendency to avoid commitment, which is supported by increased number of dating and sexual partners and non-marriage rates in adult children of divorce (Booth et al., 1984).

Ambivalence about becoming involved in relationships is greater for women from divorced homes than for women from intact homes (Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Additionally, men from divorced homes report greater ambivalence about becoming involved when casually dating than men from intact homes. Young women from divorced homes also report lower relationship satisfaction, no matter how involved in their relationship they are. This suggests that parental divorce does seem to play a part in shaping the experiences that children have when they are dating, both casually and seriously, and the effects appear to be greater for women whose parents are divorced. Children from divorce, especially women, may be more attuned to what can go wrong in a relationship since they experienced a broken marriage firsthand. As a result, they may go into their own relationships with more realistic expectations, and more hesitancy, than someone from an intact family.

Students, both male and female, from divorced families have significantly more sexual partners than students from intact families (Gabardi & Rosen, 1991, 1992). Students from divorced families attribute this behavior to the idea that parental divorce made them have higher standards, so they are more likely to “play the field” in their

quest for a suitable partner (Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Additionally, students from divorced families tend to want more sexual involvement when they are in an exclusive relationship.

Since many children of divorce are determined not to have relationship experiences similar to their parents, it might explain why their dating and sexual activity is increased but their satisfaction levels are decreased. On a more positive note, children of divorce may not be harmed in their own relationships by parental divorce, but instead may be made more aware of the fragility of intimate relationships and as a result pay closer attention to the quality of their own (Booth et al., 1984).

Parents' marital status and dynamics are of central focus in this study that seeks to further investigate whether there is a link between beliefs and attitudes regarding marriage and relationships, and the home environment in which one grew up. Young adults from divorced homes may be more attuned to possible problems that can arise in relationships, or they may avoid commitment altogether. Young adults from intact families that had little or low amounts of conflict between their parents may view their parents' marriage as one they would want to model their own marriage after, or they may be ill-prepared for any level of conflict that may arise in their own intimate relationships. The purpose of this study is to clarify the relationships between the stability and conflict in marriages of parents of young adults, and those young adult's perceptions of marriage in general.

## II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The impact of parental divorce on children has been studied to a great degree. Children of divorce are prone to psychological, economic, and personal problems, in addition to issues with academic achievement, conduct, and interpersonal relations (Amato & Booth, 2001; Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Most divorce studies are concerned with the short and medium-term effects on a child, such as adjustment after divorce, academic achievement, behavior, and relations with parents. However, studies on the long term effects of divorce are sparse, but show that effects do persist into adulthood. Long-term effects include conflict and divorce in the children's own relationships, altered beliefs about marriage and commitment, increased sexual behavior, and psychological distress (e.g. depression).

Prior research suggests that children of divorce are more likely to have marital problems and divorce themselves versus children from intact homes. Children of divorce marry earlier, cohabit more often, are less educated, and tend to have more lenient attitudes toward divorce than children from intact family environments. (Amato, 1996; Amato et al., 1984; Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Given the frequency of relationship termination in the current culture, and given the commonly associated conflict that attends it, this study seeks to understand more fully the linkages between the dynamics and quality of the parental marital relationship and the dynamics, quality, and expectations that young adults have towards their own intimate relationships and marriage. Some people claim that their parents' marriage has jaded them, souring their expectations of marriage in the future. Others claim that their parents' marriage, and subsequent divorce, has made them want to try all the harder to make sure that does not

happen to them as well. By examining the reports of young single adults, this study will help answer the question of “how parents’ marriage and divorce influence young adult’s attitudes and behaviors towards marriage.”

Past research has shown that whether great or small, effects of divorce on children do appear to exist. As previously mentioned, many studies focus on the general or short-term effects of divorce on children. While those effects are certainly worth considering, this particular study aims to further examine long-term effects, or those that affect grown children of divorce, frequently long after the divorce took place. Several studies have yielded findings showing that adult children of divorce may be affected in their own relationships in terms of trust, commitment, dating and sexual behavior, relations with parents, and their attitudes and beliefs regarding marriage and divorce. These studies, when taken together, show a consequence of divorce that is not commonly considered: How does parental divorce affect children when they mature into adults and begin their own intimate relationships?

### *Long Term Effects*

When considering long-term effects of divorce on children, Judith Wallerstein may be regarded as a pioneer in the field, particularly with respect to longitudinal studies. Her work has appeared in many popular national magazines, and more impressively, in several research journals and books including Wallerstein’s own book, *The Unexpected Legacy of Divorce: The 25 Year Landmark Study* (2001). Nevertheless, her work has been scrutinized by other notable researchers. Hetherington (2002) is the first to refute Wallerstein’s claims with her book *For Better or Worse: Divorce*

*Reconsidered.* Hetherington believes that Wallerstein's findings have been grossly exaggerated, and attempts to contradict those findings with her own research.

Wallerstein (2001) recruited her sample in 1971 in an upper- to middle-class suburb of California. Families were measured at baseline, 18 months, 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, and finally 25 years. At 25 years, interviews were conducted with 75% of the original families. The families were referred to Wallerstein by family lawyers, resulting in a non-randomized sample that cannot be generalized to the rest of the population. Additionally, participants were offered counseling in exchange for their participation, which may have resulted in a sample of families adjusting poorly to the divorce who would have been persuaded to participate by such an offer. Another weakness is that there was no control group, thus giving the researchers nothing to compare the results of the study to.

Five years post-divorce, more than one third of the children in the sample were clinically depressed, having problems in school, experiencing problems with friendships and other issues such as sleep disturbances. Only one third of the sample was found to be adjusting well and having good relationships with both parents (Wallerstein, 2001), opposed to findings that indicate 75% of children from divorced families become well-functioning adults (Hetherington, 2002). Wallerstein (1989) also stated that "almost half of the children entered adulthood as worried, underachieving, self-deprecating, and sometimes angry young men and women" (p.299) and "many children were unable to overcome their feelings of being betrayed by parents, and three out of five had an enduring sense of rejection by one or both parents" (p.298). It was then suggested that parental divorce often leads to children making poor choices in relationships

(Wallerstein, 2001), leaving relationships too quickly and avoiding commitment altogether in adulthood (Blakeslee & Wallerstein, 2001).

Many of Wallerstein's conclusions are supported by other studies, such as finding that children of divorce report less relationship satisfaction, and are more likely to see their own marriages end in divorce (Amato, 1996). The conclusion that children of divorce go into adulthood with weaker ties to their parents than children from intact families is also supported by other research. A collection of previous data were used from several sources including computerized databases, data from published research journal articles, and other data gathered from volumes of the Social Science Index and Psychological Abstracts (Amato & Keith, 1991). The data were required to meet 4 criteria: sample included students from divorced and intact homes, at least one measure of student well-being (e.g. graduated from high school) was considered, information was presented in such a way that made calculation of effect size possible, and respondents had to be 18 years of age or older. Outcomes from a meta-analysis were coded into 15 different categories, such as behavior/conduct, social well-being, and marital quality. The findings suggested that children of divorce experience various consequences, including lower psychological well-being (depression), family well-being (lower satisfaction and divorce), and socioeconomic well-being (income, academic achievement).

The main source of discord between Wallerstein and other researchers is Wallerstein's claim that the effects of divorce on children are dramatic and extremely detrimental. While similar effects were found on children of divorce (Amato & Keith, 1991), the effect sizes were weak. It was also noted that sociological research does not

yield the same results as clinical research, as individuals being treated are generally suffering from a disorder which requires psychological intervention. Wallerstein's sample of families were offered free counseling in exchange for their participation, which could have drawn families who were having difficulty and would benefit from such services.

### *Attitudes and Beliefs*

Multiple studies have concluded that children from divorced families hold more negative views of marriage than children from intact families. Data were analyzed from the General Social Surveys which were conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (Glenn & Kramer, 1987) in order to evaluate the "divorce-proneness" (p. 811) of children from divorced homes. Surveys, which were administered face-to-face with 1,500 respondents each year from 1973-1978, 1980, and 1982-1985, selected for the analysis were from participants who indicated parental divorce and were 18 years or older. Six explanations were proposed for why children of divorce tend to have higher divorce rates themselves: absence of modeling of spouse-roles, inadequate social control, inappropriate modeling of spouse roles explanation, greater willingness to resort to divorce, earlier age at marriage, and lower educational attainment (Glenn & Kramer, 1987). The findings indicated that divorce does have a tendency to run in families, and the association is especially strong among white females in the United States. The evidence for absence of modeling of spouse roles and lower educational attainment was not strong enough to indicate an association. Additionally, the greater-willingness-to-resort-to-divorce explanation is not significant on its own, but there is some indication that people from divorced homes may hold more favorable views of

divorce than those from intact homes. There is a low mean age at first marriage for children from divorced homes, which could be a contributing factor to the higher divorce rate among the group. However, this study did not examine the reasons for why people from divorced homes marry earlier than others. The lower-commitment-to-marriage explanation carries the most weight in this study. Children of divorce tend to be cautious and hesitant about marriage during adolescence, but are not any less likely to marry in adulthood. Taken together with the finding that children from divorced homes marry at an earlier age, it seems as though children of divorce are apprehensive about marriage, but are strongly impelled towards it at the same time.

Children of divorce have witnessed their own parents' marriage fail, and may be afraid of such failure in their own intimate relationships. Five hundred college students enrolled in an introductory psychology class were surveyed and asked to complete a series of measures including a demographic data sheet, attitudes towards marriage scale, a sexuality inventory, a psychological screening inventory, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Beck Depression Inventory (Gabardi & Rosen, 1991). Findings indicated that college students from divorced families were more cynical and critical when it came to mate selection, compared to students from intact families. Yet, other studies have shown that there is little or no difference between the two groups. One study of 184 undergraduate students given questionnaires regarding family history, friendships, and relationship competence, found that young adults from divorced homes did not have different perceptions of their self-esteem, issues with intimacy, or romantic relationships than young adults from intact homes (Kirk, 2002). However, the same study revealed that young adults' relationship competence may not be affected by

divorce, but rather by conflict levels in the home. That being, young adults' who had higher levels of perceived conflict in their childhood home environment were negatively affected in terms of self-esteem, fears of intimacy, and satisfaction in romantic relationships.

Further, children of divorce who experienced higher levels of conflict in their parents' marriage tend to report higher levels of anxiety and fear in relation to their own marriages. Sixty college students from divorced homes were interviewed for a study in order to explore young adults' experience with parental divorce, and their resulting attitudes toward cohabitation, marriage, divorce, dating behavior, trust, and commitment (Duran-Aydintug, 1997). More than half of the respondents had favorable attitudes towards marriage; the ones who did not have such favorable attitudes experienced parental conflict during the marriage and after the divorce. In another study of 306 subjects ages 16-17, teenage children of divorce reported less desire to marry in the future than did the teenage children from intact homes, but children from divorced homes, especially girls, were more likely to experience situations which promoted early marriage, such as leaving school, leaving home, and being involved in a steady relationship (Tasker, 1992). Overall, children of divorce report lower levels of desire to marry when they are adolescents, but are no less likely to actually marry than children from intact families.

As previously mentioned, children of divorce average a lower age at the time of their first marriage, which may contribute to a higher divorce rate among that group (Glenn & Kramer, 1987). Attitudes toward marrying later in life might be affected by the type of parental divorce an adolescent experienced, their economic situation, and

relationships with both parents. Parental conflict before and after the divorce are also found to affect students' attitudes regarding marriage and the personal relationship behaviors (Kirk, 2002; Duran-Aydintug, 1997).

Regarding relationships and personal beliefs and attitudes, a study of 300 single, heterosexual college students age 18-25, found no significant difference between students from divorced and intact families (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992). However, parental marital conflict was a predictor of doubt when measuring attitudes towards marriage. This supports other research suggesting that parental marital status is not always the most important factor in determining attitudes regarding relationships and marriage, but rather the *quality* of the marriage or levels of conflict experienced are more important in shaping children's beliefs and attitudes. In regards to students from unhappily intact families, the results indicate that their attitudes towards marriage might be affected by the level of conflict experienced in their home, and are similar to those of students from divorced homes. Students from these types of families may be led to believe that unhappy marriages are the "norm" and therefore are to be tolerated (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992). It appears as though conflict levels in the home may be just as important, if not more so, than the parents' marital status (Kirk, 2002).

### *Sex*

When studying long-term effects of divorce, college aged students are a particularly interesting group to look at, as they are at an age when they might start considering intimate or long-term relationships leading to marriage. In a study examining how parental divorce impacts intimacy development, 300 single, heterosexual college students age 18-25, who had divorced parents or parents married

only one time were included (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992). Students completed a series of questionnaires regarding relationship status, sexual behavior, intimacy, attitudes towards marriage, self esteem and relationship beliefs. Students were also asked about their parents' level of conflict as they were growing up. This is especially interesting, as past research has suggested that students' perceptions of their parents' level of conflict is more connected to their adjustment than their parents' actual level of conflict (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992).

Students, both male and female, from divorced families had significantly more sexual partners than students from intact families (Gabardi & Rosen, 1991, 1992). This is contrary to reports that indicate that only girls from divorced homes respond to parental divorce with increased amounts of sexual behavior. This finding could be due to self-report aspect of the study. Society tends to label females who experience a high level of sexual activity as "easy", whereas males do not receive the same stereotype, and are even seen as being "more of a man" due to high levels of sexual behavior. These reasons may lead participants to over- or under-report, depending on gender. However, girls from divorced homes were significantly more likely to have experienced sexual intercourse than girls from intact homes (Gabardi & Rosen, 1991). Students from divorced families reported wanting more sexual involvement in an exclusive relationship, but there were no differences between students from divorced and intact families when it came to sexual experiences desired on a first date or after several dates. Students from divorced families may *expect* more sexual activity in an exclusive relationship, but results show that what they expect and what they actually experience do not necessarily parallel each other.

In another study (Duran-Aydintug, 1997), students from divorced families admitted to having more dating and sexual partners than students from intact families. Students from divorced families attributed their behavior to the idea that parental divorce made them have higher standards, so they are more likely to “play the field” in their quest for a suitable partner . Also, increased levels of parental conflict after the divorce is a predictor of sexual behavior while going steady. This finding may suggest that students use sexual activity as a means of dealing with the divorce and as a tool for acquiring closeness and intimacy, which may be lost on one or both parents following divorce. Conflict following divorce may be more harmful to the children as the parents are no longer “insulated by marriage”(Gabardi & Rosen, 1992), and that may lead the children to have less contact with their non-custodial parent.

#### *Trust and Commitment*

In a study of 114 college students (Franklin, Janoff-Bulman & Roberts, 1990) where 57 students had divorced parents, found evidence that parental divorce is negatively associated with offspring trust in mothers and fathers. Students were asked to fill out a 4-part questionnaire. Part 4 was the only section that mentioned divorce, and was distributed last in an effort to not taint the students’ reports on the other scales. In section 1, students were asked about their belief in the benevolence of other people. Using a 6 point scale, the participants rated statements such as, “Given the opportunity, people are dishonest.” Students were then asked to complete a 17-item Trust Scale, designed to measure trust in close relationships. While imagining that they were in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of marriage, students used a 6-point scale to evaluate statements about their trust for their “spouse” including, “I feel that I can trust my partner completely.”

Students were also asked to rate their own levels of confidence regarding successfulness of their future intimate relationships, and how optimistic they were that those relationships would indeed be successful. Finally, students were asked about their relationships with their biological mother and father while growing up, in addition to a variety of demographic questions (race, gender, religion). Results indicate that while students with divorced parents report less trust with their parents while growing up, there are no differences between students from divorced and intact homes when measuring trust in their current romantic partner. Students from divorced home did, however, differ from students of intact families on how much they believed they would trust their spouse. Overall, the students from divorced homes appeared to be all too aware that a marriage can end, and that marriage does not guarantee trust between spouses.

By experiencing a parental divorce during childhood or adolescence, young adults sense of intimacy, commitment, security and trust are often threatened in their own relationships (Gabardi & Rosen, 1991). It has also been shown that parental divorce increases the chances that a child will see their own marriage end in divorce. Two possible explanations were examined: children from divorced homes do not have adequate relationship skills (problem solving, expression emotion), and are not as committed to marriage as children from intact homes (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). Data were examined from a 17-year longitudinal study of marital instability over the life course and found that parental divorce nearly doubled the odds that children would see their own marriage end in divorce. Could this be due to the fact that children of divorce do not have a positive role model for a successful marriage? On the other hand, children

from high conflict homes in which the parents did not divorce are not found to have higher levels of divorce. However, these same children reported higher levels of thinking about or contemplating divorce, but not following through. This may be due to the idea that since their parents' marriage lasted, no matter how bad, their concept of marriage is one of permanence (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

Adult children of divorce exhibit a fear of commitment in two different ways. First, most adult children of divorce hold onto notions that if their relationship does not work out, divorce is a viable option and thus provides them with an "out" if the relationship is not successful. They also tend to withhold full commitment to their marriage, thus "hedging their bets" against failure of the relationship (Glenn & Kramer, 1987). This is shown through high rates of divorce and cohabitation, along with positive attitudes towards divorce of children from divorced homes (Amato, 1996; Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Secondly, adult children of divorce have a tendency to avoid commitment. This idea is supported by increased number of dating and sexual partners and non-marriage rates in adult children of divorce (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992).

The notion that parental divorce is detrimental to developing trust in others has been weighed. "Trust" is difficult to define, but for these purposes it is viewed as "an individual's expectations and beliefs about the reliability of others" (King, 2002). Trust is affected by parental divorce due to the possibility that children's ties are severed or altered with one or both of their parents. After divorce, children also become wary in their ideas that a relationship or marriage is permanent (King, 2002). Many studies have concluded that parental divorce does not have an effect on children's trust in people in general, or their beliefs in the benevolence of others (Franklin et al., 1990), but those

studies do not take into consideration special circumstances or the degree to which parents might affect development of trust in other ways. In fact, assumptions about the benevolence of people has been found to be one of the largest indicators of whether or not college-aged students from divorced homes believe they will have a successful marriage (Franklin et al., 1990). Additionally, in the same study students from divorced homes reported lower levels of trust *between* their parents, and trusted both of their parents less while growing up. In one study, it was expected that parental divorce would have a stronger negative impact on the development of trust if a) the divorce occurred when the child was young, b) ties with the parents were weak, and c) the adult child's negative perceptions of relationships are reinforced by unsuccessful intimate relationships of their own (King, 2002). A sample of 2,033 married people, but not couples, age 55 and younger were used in a 17-year longitudinal study of marital instability over the life course. Offspring of the sample set was also included if the children were 19 years of age or older and resided in the parental household at the time of the first telephone interview. If the parents divorced when the child was of a young age (0-4), there was a modest negative association with trusting mothers in adulthood. However, the association was reduced (and non-significant) when the quality of the past parent-teen relationship is factored in. Parental divorce still remains a significant factor, and is consistent with findings that divorce compromises the father-child relationship (Amato & Booth, 1994). However, if fathers can maintain and continue to build strong, healthy relationships with their children post-divorce, the negative effect on father-child trust may be greatly reduced or diminished; often equal to that of children whose parents did not divorce (King, 2002). Boys are found to have significantly higher

amounts of trust in their fathers than girls. Additionally, it was found that 56% of children report becoming less close to their fathers post divorce (King, 2002).

Concern that adult children of divorce have lower levels of trust for others is unsubstantiated by an analysis of other data. Parental divorce is not shown to affect trust in intimates (dating partners). Also, any social support from family or friends does not affect trust in intimates. In general, having positive relationship experiences with a variety of people leads to greater trust in others overall (King, 2002).

Interestingly, men's reports of trust, conflict, and negativity in their dating relationships appear to be related to the marital status of the female partner's family. This effect may exist because men are more hesitant about getting into a relationship with a woman who comes from a divorced family, and may have lower levels of trust, in addition to higher levels of caution and ambivalence about intimate relationships (Jacquet & Surra, 2001).

#### *Dating and Relationship Behavior*

Whether or not experiencing a parental divorce relates to the premarital (dating) relationships of young adults has been examined (Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Areas thought to be affected include love, trust, conflict, ambivalence about involvement, commitment and satisfaction. Participants were recruited by means of random digit dialing. In order to be eligible, one had to be single (never married), age 19-35, currently seeing someone of the opposite gender and have the availability to be interviewed over a 9-month period. Four hundred and four individuals (202 couples) were then separated into 2 groups: intact family or divorced family. Couples were interviewed separately and told not to talk about their interview with their partner. In

the initial interview, participants were asked questions about themselves as individuals (family background, personality traits) then instructed to create a graph of how their relationship has evolved over time. Next, the participants were surveyed in order to assess the characteristics of their relationship. The questions included items from a passionate love scale, a friendship-based love scale, and measures on trust, love, conflict and negativity, ambivalence about getting involved and relationship maintenance. Participants used a Likert scale to rate their answers. The findings concluded that young adults from divorced homes do not have less trust for their partner, but women from divorced homes were more likely to have less trust in their partner's benevolence, and report more passionate love in casual relationships. Women from divorced homes also tend to have greater ambivalence about becoming involved romantically, report higher levels of conflict and negativity in their own relationships, and report lower overall relationship satisfaction.

Taken together, these findings suggest that parental divorce does seem to play a part in shaping the experiences that children have when they are dating, both casually and seriously, and the effects appear to be greater for women whose parents are divorced. Children from divorce, especially women, may be more attuned to what can go wrong in a relationship since they experienced a broken marriage firsthand. As a result, they may go into their own relationships with more realistic expectations, and more hesitancy, than someone from an intact family. Women from divorced families tend to report more conflict and negativity in their dating relationships, as opposed to women from intact families. This may intertwine with the idea that women from divorced families come to expect conflict in a relationship (as a result of experiencing

their own parents' conflict), or that their trust and commitment levels are lower (Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Dating and courtship activity also has a tendency to increase when conflict surrounds the parental divorce, parent-child relationships suffer, and the parent who retains custody of the children remains single. The age of the child at the time of divorce does not appear to play a role in determining dating activity. Since many children of divorce are determined not to have relationship experiences similar to their parents, it might explain why their dating activity is increased but their satisfaction levels are decreased.

### *General Long-Term Effects*

In order to expand previous research to include long-term effects of divorce on children, 3 key areas were focused on: consequences of divorce across many measures of adult well-being, mediating effects of post-divorce arrangements (remarriage, closeness to parents, living in single parent home), and adults whose parents did not divorce but were unhappily married (Amato & Booth, 1991). Data came from the Study of Marital Instability Over the Life Course. Telephone interviews were conducted at 3 different intervals with married persons age 55 and younger. Face-to-face interviews were done at follow-up. Psychological well-being was measured with 2 scales: a 9-item life satisfaction survey and an overall happiness scale. Socioeconomic, social well-being, and family well-being factors were measured as well. These were then compared between the 4 groups: divorced families, very happily intact families (VHI), moderately happily intact families (MHI), and unhappily intact families (UI). Adult children of divorce reported lower levels of life satisfaction than children from married homes, but the difference was not significant. Children from divorced homes reported higher levels

of psychological distress than children from VHI homes, but the results did not differ much from MHI. UI scored *lower* than did children from divorced homes. Family background had little to do with occupational attainment, money earned, assets and perceived economic strain. The evidence suggests that a divorce that causes little disruption in the child's life results in fewer negative effects than does a marriage perceived by the children to be unhappy (Amato & Booth, 1991).

In a 12 year longitudinal study, it was discovered that if conflict between parents is high, children fare better in young adulthood if the marriage of the parents ends in divorce. Alternately, children from families that ended in divorce but had low levels of parental conflict were found to be worse off in young adulthood. Regardless of whether or not parents decide to divorce, marital conflict is negatively linked to the well-being of the children in early adulthood (Amato, Booth, & Loomis, 1995).

Some studies have indicated that there are signs of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem in young children of divorce, but these signs were not found to be significantly different in college students from divorced versus intact families. This finding supports other studies that show no difference in measures of self-esteem and depression between college students from divorced and intact families. In the same study, college aged women whose parents had divorced within the last 18 months were more likely to seek out and make use of social support networks than males. This could be due to the fact that women from divorced homes tend to exhibit more attention-seeking behavior, such as whining and complaining, compared to males in the same group (Gabardi & Rosen, 1991).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that when grandparents divorce, the effects of their divorce can have a domino effect all the way down to their grandchildren, who more than likely were not born at the time of the divorce. Grandparent divorce leads to lowered academic achievement, marital problems, and tension among their own children which in turn has an effect on their grandchildren. The effects are great enough to be non-trivial, with grandchildren whose grandparents are divorced having increased marital discord, poor relationships with both parents, and lower educational attainment (Amato & Cheadle, 2005).

While there are clearly a variety of possible negative effects on children of divorce, some possible positive effects have been discovered as well. Children of divorce tend to have higher rates of maturity as a result of increased responsibility, independence, and an increased awareness of “adult” problems (Gately & Schwebel, 1992). As a result, children may also have a heightened level of self-esteem from overcoming a divorce and successfully handling more responsibility in the home. Males in particular seem to show a higher level of self-esteem after experiencing a parental divorce, as they may be pushed into the “man of the house” role, which in turn gives them more responsibility and status. Males whose father had custody following divorce showed lower levels of anxiety than those from intact families, in addition to higher levels of self-esteem.

#### *Relations With Parents*

A major potential consequence of divorce is decreased parental involvement. In a survey in which intimacy, insecurity, commitment, trust, avoidance and anxiety were measured in relation to one’s gender, parental marital status, and paternal involvement,

it was found that paternal involvement had a significant impact on all measures (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). Studies find that relationships with mothers tend to be better than those with fathers following parental divorce (Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Marital conflict has also been shown to be a factor in poor father-child relationships. As marital quality declines, fathers may withdraw from family life and positive interactions with their children (Amato & Booth, 1994). Findings suggest that the more paternal involvement experienced in childhood and adolescence, the healthier an individual's intimate relationships appear to be in adulthood. If a father can maintain frequent visitations (if not sharing custody) and continue to build a strong relationship with his children, negative effects in children such as distrust can be greatly reduced, if not eliminated (King, 2002). Likewise, the inability to bond with the father and form a meaningful relationship as a result of his absence can have negative effects on adult intimate relationships.

As a whole, these studies contribute to the theory that parental divorce can have consequences on children long after the divorce itself has taken place. Children of divorce seem to have a higher rate of divorce themselves, yet when surveyed, often claim that they try harder to find a suitable partner (Duran-Aydintug, 1997), which is evident in studies showing that children of divorce have higher levels of dating and sexual behavior than students from intact families (Garbardi & Rosen, 1991, 1992). Grown children of divorce may also hold more negative views of marriage (Garbardi & Rosen, 1991; Glenn & Kramer, 1987), and withhold commitment in their own intimate relationships (Glenn & Kramer, 1987). Conflict between parents who remain married can result in children suffering similar consequences to children of divorce (Amato &

Booth, 1991). Parents' marital status and dynamics are of central focus in this study that seeks to further investigate whether there is a link between beliefs and attitudes regarding marriage and relationships, and the home environment in which one grew up. Young adults from divorced homes may be more attuned to possible problems that can arise in relationships, or they may avoid commitment altogether. Young adults from intact families that had little or low amounts of conflict between their parents may view their parents' marriage as one they would want to model their own marriage after, or they may be ill-prepared for any level of conflict that may arise in their own intimate relationships. This study aims to further understand what shapes the attitudes and romantic beliefs of young adults.

#### Research Objectives

Objective 1) Investigate the differences in attitudes and beliefs towards marriage between participants from divorced versus intact homes.

Objective 2) Examine how children of divorce, in their own words, perceive their parent's marriages and how the marital dynamics influence their own intimate lives.

### III. METHOD

The major purpose of this study is to explore attitudes of college students relating to marriage and divorce. It is non-experimental in nature, examines the individual only, and was conducted at a small mid-western university.

*Pilot Study:* To be eligible for the study, one had to be over the age of 18, and have parents who are either married or divorced. Sixty-seven students completed the survey. Nine of the respondents were male, while 58 were female. The average age of the participants was 23, and the average year in school was 3, or junior standing, and respondents were primarily Caucasian. The average respondent was dating, or in an exclusive relationship. Fifty students had parents who were married, 13 had parents who were divorced, and 3 had parents who fell into other categories such as deceased or never married. Of the completed surveys, 47 had valid data. Participants were recruited from undergraduate health promotion and human development courses, and were offered extra credit in return for their participation. This selected sample is one of convenience, and is expected to represent a mostly white, Midwestern, middle-class demographic.

*Follow-up Study:* The eligibility requirements remained the same, in that the participant had to be over the age of 18, and have parents who are either married or divorced. Ninety-four students completed the survey for the follow-up study. Seventeen of the respondents were male and 77 were female. The average age of the participants was 21, and the average year in school was 2, sophomore standing, and respondents were primarily Caucasian. The average respondent was dating, or in an exclusive relationship. Sixty-eight participants had parents who were married, 18 had parents who

were divorced, 5 had parents who fell into other categories and 1 participant did not indicate the marital status of their parents. Participants were again recruited from undergraduate health promotion and human development courses, and were offered extra credit in return for their participation.

### *Independent Variables*

Parental marital status and level of conflict in parents' marriage status was determined from demographic survey data while level of conflict in parent's marriage was determined in response to the question "How frequent was conflict in your parent's marriage?" Respondents used a Likert type scale from 1 (very infrequent) to 7 (very frequent) to respond.

### *Dependent Variables*

Attitudes regarding romance were measured using the Romantic Beliefs Scale (Metts & Sprecher, 1989), which is a 15-item scale with statements such as, "I need to know someone for a long period of time before I fall in love with him or her." This scale was developed as a means to measure beliefs regarding ideas about romanticism. Respondents answered on a 5-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree). Reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = .87$  in the pilot study and  $\alpha = .84$  in the follow up study.

Trust levels in intimate relationships were measured with the Dyadic Trust Scale (Huston & Larzelere, 1980) which is an 8-item scale with statements such as, "My partner is perfectly honest and truthful with me". Participants were asked to rate the statements on a 7-point scale (1: very much disagree, 7: very much agree). Reliability

for the Dyadic Trust Scale was  $\alpha = .92$  in the pilot study and  $\alpha = .81$  in the follow up study.

Attitudes relating to families, advantages of marriage, being single, and living together, as well as the disadvantages, were measured using the Family Attitudes Scale (Clark, D., Kavanagh, D.J., Manicavasagar, V., O'Halloran, P., Piatkowska, O., Rosen, A., & Tennant, C. 1997). This is a 30-item scale which asks participants to respond to questions with a 5-point scale (1: strongly disagree, 5: strongly agree). The scale is divided into 7 sections: Family Attitudes, Advantages of Marriage, Disadvantages of Marriage, Advantages of Singlehood, Disadvantages of Singlehood, and Advantages of Living Together. The Family Attitudes section included statements such as, "It is/was pleasant living with my parents and family" and "I feel/felt accepted at home".

Reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = .72$  in the pilot study and  $\alpha = .58$  in the follow up study. Advantages of Marriage asked participants to rate statements such as "Marriage gives you economic security" and "Marriage give you love, warmth, and happiness".

Reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = .73$  in the pilot study and  $\alpha = .71$  in the follow up study. Disadvantages of Marriage included statements such as "People take one another for granted after they marry". Reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = .66$  in the pilot study and  $\alpha = .73$  in the follow up study. Advantages of Singlehood asked participants to rate statements regarding the positive aspects of being single, such as "Being single allows you the freedom to come and go as you please" and "Being single means you can spend more time at work to get ahead". Reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = .75$  in the pilot study and  $\alpha = .81$  in the follow up study. Participants were then asked to rate the disadvantages of being single, with statements like "It is lonely being single" and "You

miss having children when single”. Reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = .51$  in the pilot study and  $\alpha = .75$  in the follow up study. Advantages of Living Together included statements such as “There are no legal responsibilities when you are living together. Reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = .66$  in the pilot study and  $\alpha = .74$  in the follow up study. In the Disadvantages of Living Together section, participants rated statements like “There is a lack of personal trust and security when you live together”. Reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = .77$  in the pilot study and  $\alpha = .85$  in the follow up study. Note that the fourth question of this scale was missing in the follow up study due to printing errors noticed only after data had been collected. This reliability is based only on the first three questions.

Additionally, in the pilot study participants were asked to provide written responses to 3 open questions. Participants were given the following directions:

This study is trying to help understand the ways in which the dynamics and quality of parents’ marriage influences the expectations, views, and attitudes of young adults toward marriage and intimate relationships. Please take a moment to answer the following three questions:

1. In your own words, how would you describe your biological parents’ marriage (currently, or when they were last together)?
2. How has your parents’ marital relationship influenced your own views of marriage?
3. What other factors or experiences do you feel have been influential or transformational in shaping your views and expectations of marriage?

Following the pilot study, adjustments were made to the survey and recruitment procedures prior to the follow-up data being collected. The adjustments were made not only to clarify some responses, but to gather additional and more in-depth qualitative data as well as an increased amount of data from males and those with divorced parents.

First, participants were asked to give their age at the time their biological parents separated and when they divorced. Also, they were asked to specify the number of siblings they have from their same biological parents.

Conflict between parents can provide as much disruption to a child's life as a parental divorce and therefore it might be beneficial if the parents separate. However, conflict between parents does not always end with divorce and can persist or even get worse as time goes on. In order to measure conflict levels following a parental divorce, participants were asked to rank their parents conflict on a 5-point Likert scale (1: Stopped with divorce, 5: Is still ongoing).

In the pilot study, it was noticed that some participants were not giving thorough responses to the open-ended questions. Therefore, some adjustments were made to encourage sharing more information. Instead of "What other factors or experiences do you feel have been influential or transformational in shaping your views and expectations of marriage?" the question was modified to "Describe how other factors or experiences..." which prompted participants to give specific examples from their life instead of simply listing those factors and experiences. In another question, participants were asked to describe not only how their parents' marital relationship influenced their own view of marriage, but also how it is influencing their behavior in their own intimate relationships.

Another section was added to the survey which inquired about any remarriages by the mother or the father that may have taken place. In the pilot study, it was discovered that many participant's parents had divorced when they were very young and therefore they are much more equipped to report on the dynamics between their biological parent and a step-parent. In the additional section, participants were asked who they spent the majority of their time with growing up, what age they were when the remarriage took place (if any), and whether their parents were still with the spouses they married following the initial divorce. Participants were then asked to describe their parents' remarriage and how it has affected their own views of marriage and behavior in intimate relationships. The questions gave the participants the opportunity to share examples where appropriate.

## IV. RESULTS

### *Pilot Study*

Comparisons of young adults from homes where parents marriages were intact, versus divorced, showed that students from married homes reported significantly ( $p < .05$ ) higher romanticized beliefs (3.11) compared to students with divorced parents (2.66). Alternatively, students from married homes had an average of 5.02 on the Dyadic Trust Scale, while students from divorced families averaged a higher score of 5.92, where a higher score on the scale correlates with a higher level of trust. On the Family Attitudes Scale, students from married homes averaged 3.70 while students from divorced homes averaged 3.48. No statistically significant differences were found on the remaining scales (Advantages of Marriage, Disadvantages of Marriage, Advantages of Being Single, and Disadvantages of Being Single).

Examination of the level of conflict within intact homes indicated that perceptions of the frequency of parental conflict was positively correlated with perceptions of the intensity of conflict ( $r = .64, p = .001$ ), and that there was an inverse correlation between the frequency and intensity of parental conflict and students romanticized beliefs ( $r = -.37, p = .01$  and  $r = -.31, p = .05$ , respectively). In other words, students from homes with high conflict levels had less romanticized notions of relationships. Frequency of parental conflict was also negatively correlated with participants' perceptions of family home life ( $r = -.33, p = .05$ ), as were their perceptions of conflict intensity ( $r = -.37, p = .01$ ). All other correlations were not statistically significant.

Based on a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), themes in responses were identified for each of the prompt questions. Sample statements are then included to illustrate each of the identified themes.

After being asked how their parent's marriage has influenced their own outlook on marriage participants from homes where parents' marriages were intact with low conflict reported rather positively, making statements such as the following:

- "They gave me a positive outlook. I hope my marriage is as strong and loving as theirs."
- "Looking at my parents' relationship, I see the kind of marriage I want to have someday."
- "My parents have influenced my own views and helped me see what I want in my own marriage."
- "I hope I never get divorced and will be able to make everything work well like they did."

Participants from intact homes with moderate to high levels of conflict recognize that problems do arise in marriage and that some of those issues can be overcome, although some cannot. Several participants reported very low marital quality among their parents:

- "My parents' marriage is held together with old memories and their children. My

life growing up was terrible because 95% of what was said revolved around my dad's business. My mom works for my dad and my dad has no appreciation for everything she does for him. My mom deserves so much more."

- “Parents are very separated, always are making jokes about each other, and don’t care to be alone with each other.”
- “They remain married out of religious obligations and fear of being alone.”

This same group of participants recognizes that marriage will not always be easy, and as a result of their parents’ conflict, are aware of what they want or do not want in their marriage:

- “I want to be able to solve conflicts without getting into a fight.”
- “I don’t expect marriage to be easy! I know its going to be a lot of work, and communication is very important. I know there will be conflict, but I don’t expect my marriage to end in divorce, because I know what to expect.”
- “I want better communication between my spouse and myself.”

Some participants have been so negatively affected by their parents’ marriage that they have very pessimistic views going forward in their own lives. Some also realize that divorce might be the solution if problems cannot be resolved:

- “It has made me so scared to love someone.”
- “I don’t want my children to look at me with pity as I do with my mother.”
- “I hate love, it seems to only leave pain in the end. I just hope someday someone will make me realize different.”

As a whole, participants from divorced families realize that marriage can be difficult and take effort to maintain. Many of these participants indicate that since they have endured a parental divorce, they are aware of what they will need to work on in their own marriages, and believe that getting married will not fix existing problems:

- “I realized that it takes a lot of work and if you’re not happy you need to communicate and work at it.”
- “Marriage is a BIG DEAL, and a fairy-tale does not begin after saying ‘I do.’”

Many participants from divorced homes indicate that they do not view divorce as an option, and will work hard in their marriages to avoid fates similar to their own parents.

- “I don’t want to end up like them. I don’t see divorce as an option.”
- “I now think twice about getting married to anyone, it makes me want to wait longer and only get married once.”
- “I don’t want to get divorced. I am aware of what it does to the family and I want to avoid it totally if possible.”

Participants with divorced parents are generally more hesitant to enter into marriage, and report problems with commitment in their current relationships:

- “It has made me so much more careful and apprehensive.”
- “I have a difficult time committing and taking it to the next step. I am extremely cautious and usually threaten to break off my relationship.”

#### *Follow-up Study*

It has been suggested that comparisons be made not only between divorced and intact families, but between divorced, intact with low conflict, and intact with high conflict levels (owing to the corrosive effects of conflict, even in intact marriages, on children). Thus, a grouping variable was created placing respondents into one of three categories, divorced parents, parents who are married but with high levels of conflict, or parents who are married with low levels of conflict. A median split was used on a

combination variable adding reported conflict intensity to conflict frequency for an aggregate estimate of conflict in the home.

As shown in Table 2 (Appendix B), multivariate analysis revealed statistically significant differences between the three groups for three variables: Conflict Frequency, Conflict Intensity, and reported perceptions on the Advantages of Marriage. Subsequent post hoc analysis to determine which pairs within the group had statistically significant differences utilizing the well-known Fisher's LSD revealed that results fell in line as may be expected, at a statistically significant level of  $p < .001$ , participants from homes where the parents were married with low conflict levels reported less frequent (1.74) and less intense (2.00) conflict than participants from homes with parents marriages categorized as higher in conflict (3.00, frequency, and 3.14, intensity, respectively), and those with divorced parents (3.67 for both frequency and intensity). There were no statistically significant differences between reports of those from intact high conflict homes, and those from divorced homes in terms of conflict frequency or intensity reported. It is possible that using the more robust Tukey's HSD method of post-hoc analysis would yield improved results.

Finally, in terms of participants perceptions of the Advantages of Marriage, there were no statistically significant differences between reports of participants with married parents with high conflict and participants with married parents with low conflict. However, statistically significant differences ( $p \leq .01$ ) in perceptions of the Advantages of Marriage did occur between the reports of those from married but low conflict homes (4.05) and those from homes where the parents were divorced (2.8).

Closer examination of the frequency and intensity of conflict for participants with intact marriages, as shown in Table 3 (Appendix C) revealed that the frequency and intensity of conflict are highly correlated ( $r = .67, p \leq .01$ ). However, some differences are noted in the pattern of correlation between the two, with Conflict Frequency being inversely correlated with reported levels of Trust ( $r = -.35, p \leq .05$ ) and Family Attitudes ( $r = -.41, p \leq .01$ ) and positively correlated with respondents reports of the Disadvantages of Marriage ( $r = .37, p \leq .01$ ). Conflict Intensity, on the other hand, was negatively correlated only with respondent's Family Attitudes reports ( $r = -.26, p \leq .05$ ).

Since many participants with parents who were still married reported their parents' marriage as being of high quality, it is not surprising that they would have more favorable attitudes towards marriage. In fact, similar to reports from the pilot study, many participants indicated that they looked up to their parents as a model for how a marriage should be, and hope to emulate their parents' successful relationship in their own lives:

- “My parents’ marriage is very open, loving and respectful. They communicate and fight fairly. They respect each other’s hobbies and differences.”
- “I want my relationship to reflect my parents’. They work together, never against each other. They have taught me it’s about give and take. I grew up in a happy, loving home and that’s what I intend to create myself.”
- “They make me want to always stay married. You can work through any problems you have.”

- “Marriage is extremely important to me. I see how happy my parents are and it makes me want to get married to have that someone I can confide in.”

Participants from intact homes with moderate to high levels of conflict recognize that problems do arise in marriage and that some of those issues can be overcome, although some cannot. Several participants reported very low marital quality among their parents:

- “My parent’s marriage is very unsatisfying on both ends. They love each other but are not in love. There are lots of fights and threatening to leave.”
- “Their marriage seems to be fueled by fighting and anger.”
- “My parents’ marriage is rocky. They are having trouble staying together. Both are completely non-accepting of the other.”

This same group of participants again recognized that marriage will not always be easy which parallels the findings of the pilot study, and as a result of their parents’ conflict, are aware of what they want or do not want in their marriage:

- “I do not want a relationship like my parents. I want one that is tender and loving and does not have so much bickering and fighting.”
- “I want my marriage and relationship to be more equal.”
- “I now see what long-term relationships can turn into and I really hope that when I am married the fireworks don’t completely fade. I also have learned in relationships you should be honest and talk with your partner when something is bothering you.”

Some participants again reported having been so negatively affected by their parents’ marriage that they have very pessimistic views going forward in their own

lives. Some also realize that divorce might be the solution if problems cannot be resolved:

- “It has caused me to be overly cautious in my relationships. I don’t want to be as clueless as my mother was.”
- “I am less trusting and would not rush into a relationship.”
- “[parent’s relationship] makes me scared to get married really influences my views on having things in common with my significant other.”

Participants in the follow-up study were also asked to report their views on their parents’ remarriage, if applicable. Since many children spend just as much, if not more, time living in a blended family, it is possible that their observations of their parents’ and step-parents’ relationship may contribute to their overall view of marriage.

Participants were first asked to describe their biological parents’ remarriage(s).

Participants were prompted to give examples when appropriate. Some reported negative feelings and experiences surrounding their parents’ remarriage:

- “My mother’s remarriage was horrible. He [step-father] was mean to me and my brothers.”
- “My mother took the problems from her first marriage to her second marriage.”

Others noticed a marked change in their biological parent as a result of the remarriage:

- “My mom and step-dad fight in a healthier way than my biological parents did”
- “My dad’s remarriage is good; it has changed him for the better.”
- “Their communication is good, their goals are similar and my dad has become more flexible.”

Participants were then asked to describe how their parents' re-married relationship(s) influenced their own views of marriage and behavior in intimate relationships. Some participants reported being more cautious and worried about the fate of their own marriages:

- “If cheating happens once, it will happen again in the next relationship.”
- “[The remarriage] makes me think that people don't really change.”

While others expressed optimism in finding a lasting relationship and reported learning ways to make a marriage work:

- “[Father's remarriage] showed me that everything can be settled or compromised without fighting.”
- “I want to wait for the right person and not sell myself short.”
- “[Mom's remarriage] has given me faith in the possibility of a long lasting, happy relationship.”
- “I will have a good friendship with my partner before getting married.”

#### IV. DISCUSSION

It has been well documented that divorce does influence children, often in negative ways. However, this research suggests that, in at least one way, young adults from homes where there is divorce or higher conflict may have an acquired strength in that they are less likely to have unrealistic or romanticized notions of relationships. Indeed, further exploration of participants' responses to open ended questions is consistent with these findings. For example, participants from homes where parents marriages were intact with low conflict reported made statements reflecting the fact that they would like to have marriages similar to their parents. These participants reported their parents' marriages as loving and strong and state that they serve as a good example for how a marriage can last. Young adults from intact homes with moderate to high levels of conflict recognize that problems do arise in marriage and that some of those issues can be overcome, although some cannot. Several students reported very low marital quality among their parents and stated that their parents remain together for reasons such as their children and religious beliefs, despite the fact that they are much separated otherwise and do not maintain a close and loving relationship. This same group of students recognizes that marriage will not always be easy, and as a result of their parents' conflict, are aware of what they want or do not want in their marriage.

Some students have been so negatively affected by their parents' marriage that they have very pessimistic views going forward in their own lives. Some also realize that divorce might be the solution if problems cannot be resolved, and report that they are against romantic love or are afraid to love someone else for fear that they will end up in relationships similar to their parents. Taken together, these comments support the

research indicating that marriages fraught with conflict can be just as detrimental, if not more so, as divorce in a child's life.

Preliminary results of the pilot study data showed that students from divorced homes average a lower score on the Romantic Beliefs Scale, which was expected. By experiencing a parental divorce, it is possible that their rose colored glasses have come off, revealing a reality that does not always stand up to high levels of romance. On the other hand, students from divorced homes averaged a higher score than their counterparts on the Dyadic Trust Scale. This finding could be due to the idea that adult children of divorce may have more realistic ideas about what traits they want in a partner, and have therefore chosen more compatible partners in whom they place a great deal of trust. On the other hand, they could be overcompensating in their own relationships for any trust that was lost with their parents as a result of divorce or conflict in the home.

However, in the follow up study, interesting patterns emerged with reports from those with divorced parents revealing similar perceptions of the frequency and intensity of conflict in their parents marriages, both reporting higher levels than those from intact, but low conflict homes. This is perhaps cyclical, or redundant in nature, but the similarity is consistent with prior research on the damaging nature of conflict within marriage when considering the effects of divorce. Furthermore, differences in perceptions of the Advantages of Marriage were the only statistically significant findings from the Multivariate analysis, with those from low conflict intact homes perceiving greater advantages of marriage as compared to those from divorced homes. It is noteworthy, at this point, to mention that thorough examination was challenging,

due to a) small sample sizes (only three in the divorced parents category) and b) disparate sample sizes (up to 19 in the low conflict intact parental marriage category).

As a whole, students from divorced families realize that marriage can be difficult and takes effort to maintain. Many of these students indicate from their open ended questions that since they have endured a parental divorce, they are aware of what they will need to work on in their own marriages, and believe that getting married will not fix existing problems. Many young adults from divorced homes indicate that they do not view divorce as an option, and will work hard in their marriages to avoid fates similar to their own parents. Students with divorced parents are generally more hesitant to enter into marriage, and report problems with commitment in their current relationships. While divorce does have many demonstrated negative repercussions on children, one strength that it seems to have given them is that they have a more realistic view of marriage, and, for the most part, they indicate a willingness to try and work even harder at their own relationships.

Taken together, the qualitative data support the research indicating that marriages fraught with conflict can be just as detrimental, if not more so, as divorce in a child's life. Perhaps participants from divorced homes and homes with conflict are more apt to think negatively about marriage and commitment because they have been exposed to unsuccessful relationships and therefore are almost forced to think about how their parent's relationship dynamics might apply to their own intimate relationships. However, participants from such homes tend to report an interest in making their own marriage work and not following in the paths of their parents. They are more attuned to what can go wrong in a marriage and report insight on what they

will have to do in their own marriage to make it work, such as effective communication. These participants may be better equipped to resolve conflict within their own marriage so as to not follow in the paths of their parents. Conversely, participants from intact, happy homes do not have to come to terms with the difficulties marriages can face on a regular basis. As a result, they may report wanting to duplicate their parents marriage since they haven't had to think about divorce and discord as much as participants from divorce homes. This group believes that marriage is important and can withstand the test of time. These participants report a desire to duplicate their parents' relationship and create living environments for their future children that replicate their up-bringing.

Since the sample size is one of convenience, it cannot easily be generalized to a broader demographic. Also, students will be asked to recall information from many years back, which may not be accurate. Students are asked to self-report levels of conflict in their home, and their perception may not parallel reality. In addition, students who are not from divorced homes or in a dating relationship may see the survey as not pertaining to them, so they may not participate, thus skewing the results of the study. Future research may expand to include participants from a broader geographical demographic as well as a larger age range. Other research options include focusing on the impact of parents' second marriages on children's attitudes regarding marriage, effects of parental divorce taking place when children are already adults, and follow up with participants from divorced homes who go on to get married. It would also be of interest to further compare the attitudes of males versus females. While divorce does have many demonstrated negative repercussions on children, a strength that it seems to have given them is that they have a more realistic view of marriage, and, for the most

part, they indicate a willingness to try and work even harder at their own relationships. This is good news for marriage and family educators. When we have a willing and sincere audience, we can capitalize on that enthusiasm by helping them not just to work harder, but smarter.

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Demographics

Table 1. Demographics

<u>Demographic Factors</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
<u>Age</u>		
18	6.4	6
19	30.9	29
20	28.7	27
21	18.1	17
22	6.4	6
23	4.3	4
31	1.1	1
33	1.1	1
36	1.1	1
45	1.1	1
48	1.1	1
<u>Sex</u>		
Male	18.1	17
Female	81.9	77
<u>Race</u>		
Caucasian	93.6	88
Hispanic	2.1	2
Asian-American	1.1	1
Native American	1.1	1
Other	2.1	2
<u>Year in College</u>		
1	19.1	18
2	41.5	39
3	23.4	22
4	10.6	10
5	3.3	3
Other	2.1	2
<u>Relationship Status</u>		
Single, not dating	33	31
Occasional dating	11.7	11
Dating one person	44.7	42
Cohabiting	6.4	6
First Marriage	3.2	3
Remarried	1.1	1

|

Biological Parents  
Relationship Status

Married	72.3	68
Divorced	19.1	18
Other	7.4	7
Missing	1.1	1

|

Appendix B:  
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities for All Scales

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities for All Scales

	Biological Parents Status	N	Mean	Std Dev	Reliability
Conflict Frequency of Biological Parents	Married Lo Conflict	19	<b>1.74<sup>a,b***</sup></b>	0.65	
	Married Hi Conflict	7	<b>3.00<sup>a***</sup></b>	0.00	
	Divorced	3	<b>3.67<sup>b***</sup></b>	1.15	
Conflict Intensity of Biological Parents		19	<b>2.00<sup>a,b***</sup></b>	0.67	
		7	<b>3.14<sup>a***</sup></b>	0.38	
		3	<b>3.67<sup>b***</sup></b>	1.15	
Romantic Beliefs		19	2.92	.72	0.835
		7	3.10	.52	
		3	2.64	1.14	
Trust		19	5.98	.59	0.811
		7	5.59	.85	
		3	6.08	.44	
Family Attitudes		19	3.73	.57	0.577
		7	3.48	.49	
		3	3.06	1.08	
Advantages of Marriage		19	<b>4.05<sup>a**</sup></b>	.73	0.71
		7	<b>3.74<sup>a**</sup></b>	.80	
		3	<b>2.8<sup>a**</sup></b>	.53	
Disadvantages of Marriage		19	1.74	.58	0.734
		7	1.90	.46	
		3	2.33	1.15	
Advantages of Singlehood		19	3.25	.90	0.812
		7	3.05	1.20	
		3	3.89	.75	
Disadvantages of Singlehood		19	3.74	.84	0.749
		7	3.29	.99	
		3	3.00	.88	
Advantages of Living Together		19	2.25	.74	0.737
		7	2.52	.63	
		3	2.67	.33	
Disadvantages of Living Together		19	2.47	1.16	0.851
		7	2.29	.73	
		3	3.44	1.35	

For Multivariate analysis, significantly different cluster means are **bolded**

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001. Superscripts indicate significantly different pairs within clusters.

Appendix C:  
Correlations of All Variables

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Table 3. Correlations of All Variables with Conflict in Intact Homes

<u>Variables (N)</u>	<u>Conflict Frequency</u>	<u>Conflict Intensity</u>
Conflict Frequency (68)	--	.67**
Conflict Intensity (68)	.67**	--
Romantic Beliefs (68)	-.12	-.08
Trust (33)	-.35*	-.20
Family Attitudes (65)	-.41**	-.26*
Advantages of Marriage (65)	-.04	-.09
Disadvantages of Marriage (65)	.37**	.17
Advantages of Singlehood (65)	-.00	-.08
Disadvantages of Singlehood (65)	.05	.06
Advantages of Living Together (64)	-.00	-.09
Disadvantages of Living Together (50)	.27	.03

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\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

Appendix D:  
Questionnaire: Demographics

- \_\_\_ 1. Age
- \_\_\_ 2. Sex (1) Male (2) Female
- \_\_\_ 3. Ethnic background  
(1) Caucasian (2) African American (3) Hispanic  
(4) Asian-American (5) Native American (6) Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ 4. Year in college?
- \_\_\_ 5. Religious affiliation? (E.g. Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Buddhist, other, none...)
- \_\_\_ 6. On a scale of 1 (Very low) to 5 (Very high), how would you rate your level of spirituality?
- \_\_\_ 7. What is your present relationship status? (**Select one only**)
1. Single, not dating.
  2. Occasional dating, but no exclusive relationship.
  3. Dating one person in an exclusive relationship.
  4. Cohabiting
  5. First Marriage
  6. Remarried
  7. Separated from spouse.
  8. Divorced
  9. Widowed
- \_\_\_ 8. How many exclusive dating relationships have you had since high school?
- \_\_\_ 9. Sexual orientation.
1. Heterosexual
  2. Homosexual
  3. Bisexual

Appendix E:  
Parental Marital Status and Level of Conflict

- \_\_\_ 10. Biological parents' current relationship status.
1. Married to each other.
  2. Separated from each other.
  3. Legally divorced from each other.
  4. Never married, but living together.
  5. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Considering your biological parents marriage now, or when they were last together as a couple, taking all things into account:

In most marriages there is some disagreements and conflict.

- \_\_\_ 2. Overall, would you say that in your parents' marriage, occurrences of conflict are/were:

**Very infrequent 1 2 3 4 5 Very frequent**

- \_\_\_ 3. Overall, would you say that in your parent's marriage, occurrences of conflict are/were:

**Very calm 1 2 3 4 5 Very intense**

Appendix F:  
Romantic Beliefs Scale

Most people enter relationships with ideas about what romantic relationships should be like and what features make them satisfying and rewarding. Keeping in mind your own ideas and beliefs about romantic relationships, please rate the following statements using this scale:

Strongly Disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly Agree

- \_\_\_ 1. I need to know someone for a period of time before I fall in love with him or her.
- \_\_\_ 2. If I were in love with someone, I would commit myself to him or her even if my parents and friends disapproved of the relationship.
- \_\_\_ 3. One I experience 'true love,' I could never experience it again, to the same degree, with another person.
- \_\_\_ 4. I believe that to be truly in love is to be in love forever.
- \_\_\_ 5. If I love someone, I know I can make the relationship work, despite any obstacles.
- \_\_\_ 6. When I find my 'true love' I will probably know it soon after we meet.
- \_\_\_ 7. I'm sure that every new thing I learn about the person I choose for a long-term commitment will please me.
- \_\_\_ 8. The relationship I have with my 'true love' will be nearly perfect.
- \_\_\_ 9. If I love someone, I will find a way for us to be together regardless of opposition to the relationship, physical distance between us, or any other barrier.
- \_\_\_ 10. There will be only one real love for me.
- \_\_\_ 11. If a relationship I have was meant to be, any obstacle (e.g. lack of money, physical distance, career conflicts) can be overcome.
- \_\_\_ 12. I am likely to fall in love almost immediately if I meet the right person.
- \_\_\_ 13. I expect that in my relationship, romantic love will really last; it won't fade with time.
- \_\_\_ 14. The person I love will make a perfect romantic partner; for example, he/she will be completely accepting, loving, and understanding.
- \_\_\_ 15. I believe if another person and I love each other we can overcome any differences and problems that may arise.

Appendix G:  
Dyadic Trust Scale

If you are not currently in an intimate relationship, please skip the next 8 questions. If you are currently in an intimate relationship, please answer the following 8 questions using this scale:

**Very much disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much agree**

- \_\_\_ 1. My partner is primarily interested in his/her own welfare
- \_\_\_ 2. There are times when my partner cannot be trusted
- \_\_\_ 3. My partner is perfectly honest and truthful with me
- \_\_\_ 4. I feel that I can trust my partner completely
- \_\_\_ 5. My partner is truly sincere in his/her promises
- \_\_\_ 6. I feel that my partner does not show me enough consideration
- \_\_\_ 7. My partner treats me fairly and justly
- \_\_\_ 8. I feel that my partner can be counted on to help me

Appendix H:  
Family Attitudes Scale

Please use this scale for all the following: Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree

Family Attitudes

- \_\_\_\_1. It is/was pleasant living with my parents and family.
- \_\_\_\_2. I can/could always discuss things that are/were important to me.
- \_\_\_\_3. I feel/felt accepted at home.
- \_\_\_\_4. I feel/felt uncomfortable at home.
- \_\_\_\_5. There are/were too many arguments when living at home.
- \_\_\_\_6. Generally, there is/was nothing good about living at home.

Advantages of Marriage. Marriage gives you:

- \_\_\_\_1. economic security
- \_\_\_\_2. love, warmth, and happiness
- \_\_\_\_3. a regular sex life
- \_\_\_\_4. a sense of responsibility in you that you wouldn't have otherwise
- \_\_\_\_5. children

Disadvantages of Marriage

- \_\_\_\_1. You don't have much independence or personal freedom when you marry
- \_\_\_\_2. People take one another for granted after they marry
- \_\_\_\_3. There are no advantages to being married

Advantages of Singlehood. Being single

- \_\_\_\_1. allows you freedom to come and go as you please
- \_\_\_\_2. allows you freedom to mix with the opposite sex
- \_\_\_\_3. provides fewer worries or responsibilities
- \_\_\_\_4. provides more time to experience life and find out about yourself
- \_\_\_\_5. allows you to save more money
- \_\_\_\_6. means you can spend more time at work to get ahead

Disadvantages of Singlehood

- \_\_\_\_1. It is lonely being single
- \_\_\_\_2. You miss having close relationships when single
- \_\_\_\_3. You miss having children when single

Advantages of Living Together

- \_\_\_\_1. There are no legal responsibilities when you are living together
- \_\_\_\_2. While living together you can have a regular sex life without the legal ties
- \_\_\_\_3. If you live together it is easier to get out of than marriage

Disadvantages of Living Together

- \_\_\_\_1. There is a lack of personal trust and security when you live together
- \_\_\_\_2. You have problems if there are children when you live together
- \_\_\_\_3. If you live together there is a lot of social disapproval
- \_\_\_\_4. There aren't any advantages in living together over marriage\*

\*Due to printing error, the fourth question of the Disadvantages of Living Together section was not included.

Appendix I:  
Open-ended Questions

This study is trying to help understand the ways in which the dynamics and quality of parents' marriage influences the expectations, views, and attitudes of young adults toward marriage and intimate relationships. Please take a moment to answer the following three questions:

1. In your own words, how would you describe your biological parents' marriage (currently, or when they were last together)? Feel free to give examples where appropriate.
2. How has your parents' marital relationship influenced your own views of marriage and behavior in intimate relationships?
3. Describe how other factors or experiences have been influential or transformational in shaping your views and expectations of marriage, and behavior in intimate relationships.

Please answer the following questions, if your biological parents divorced, and then later remarried to someone else who is now your step-parent.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. In whose home did you spend the majority of your time growing up?
  - A. Mom
  - B. Dad
  - C. Same
  - D. Other \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Your age when mother remarried (if she did)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Your age when father remarried (if he did)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Is your mother still married to the same man she married after divorcing your biological father? (yes/no)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Is your father still married to the same woman he married after divorcing your biological mother? (yes/no)

In your own words, how would you describe your biological parents' remarriage(s)? Feel free to give examples where appropriate.

Mother's remarriage:

Father's remarriage:

How has your parents' remarried relationship(s) influenced your own views of marriage and behavior in intimate relationships?

Mother's remarriage:

Father's remarriage: