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Positive Outcomes of Divorce: A Multi-Method Study on the Effects of Parental Divorce on Children

Grant Mohi
University of Central Florida



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POSITIVE OUTCOMES OF DIVORCE: A MULTI-METHOD STUDY ON THE
EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON CHILDREN

by

GRANT W. MOHI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Sociology
in the College of Sciences
and the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
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Thesis Chair: Elizabeth Grauerholz, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

A great deal of the existing literature on parental divorce focuses on the negative influences it has on children and young adults in regards to such areas as their relationships (romantic and familial) and their academic standing. The implications of such research are that parental divorce will always bring harm to families and, consequentially, should be avoided for the sake of the children's wellbeing. What is often missing from this research is a focus on the potential positive outcomes of parental divorce. The intent of this thesis is to explore the effects of parental divorce on young adults' ability to form and maintain romantic relationships, focusing on the positive outcomes of parental divorce on young adults and seeking to answer the question of whether or not young adults can actually benefit from their parents' divorce. By surveying a sample of 233 students from divorced and intact families from a large university on their experiences with parental divorce and/or romantic relationships, in conjunction with face to face interviews, the current study provides a deeper insight into the social factors that help define divorce as positive and explores the effects of family structure, gender of child, economic situation, and pre-existing parental conflict on young adults of divorced parents. Findings suggest that these young adults do experience positive outcomes after the divorce and that these outcomes are dependent on a variety of familial and social factors that shape the divorce experience.

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INTRODUCTION

Divorce rates in the United States have experienced highs and lows, slowly rising during the Great Depression and World War II then spiking following the end of the war in 1946 (Pavalko and Elder, 1990), peaking in the 1970s and declining throughout the 1980s (National Center for Health Statistics, 1991). They have since maintained an average rate of 3.7 per 1,000 total population over the past decade (in which the average rate of marriage was 7.5 per 1,000 total population) (National Center for Health Statistics, 2000-2011). Throughout the periods of rising divorce rates scholars have attempted to decipher not only the underlying causes of divorce but also what implications and effects it holds for children, given the fact that the significant increase in divorce rates leads to an equally significant increase in effected children.

Wallerstein (1991) believed in the absolutist notion that all cases of divorce affected children negatively, primarily in regards to such factors as post-divorce parent-child relationships, children's living arrangements, and parental relocation, and that there were no instances in which children or adolescents could benefit from their parents' divorce. Rather the situation provided continual stresses that would form into long-term psychological and social difficulties for the children. This absolutist notion was widely accepted, but it was not without speculation. Some scholars believed that it failed to take into account the nature of the relationships before and after the divorce, stating that conflict between family members was more important than the occurrence of the divorce in determining the children's wellbeing (Fabricius, 2003; Amato et al, 2011). In recent years, scholars have delved further into the concept of a beneficial parental divorce. By removing children from high-conflict households, Amato and colleagues (2011) believed that divorce provides children with the opportunity to

develop in an environment with fewer stressors, stating that children from high-conflict households were more likely to demonstrate poor academic performance and develop behavioral and psychological problems. Studies on children of divorce have been conducted over the past decade, testing to see whether or not any positive outcomes of divorce exist, how often and under what circumstances they occur, and how children of divorce as well as parents can make the most of their situation (Fabricius, 2003; Sever et al, 2008).

The purpose of this multi-method study is to distinguish whether the effects of parental divorce can positively influence the relationship formation and maintenance skills of young adults. Previous research has shown that children of divorce often experience a change in their views towards intimate relationships (boyfriend, girlfriend, romantic partner, etc.), which in turn may cause them to become either more nervous and/or wary of these relationships and unsure of their ability to successfully manage one (Cartwright, 2008) or more appreciative and knowledgeable of them, thus increasing their confidence in their ability to start and sustain one (Sever, 2008). Recent research shows that there is reason to believe that young adult children of divorce learn and grow from their parents' divorce, gaining an appreciation for the responsibilities a relationship entails while recognizing and avoiding the mistakes their parents made in their own relationships rather than hopelessly accepting the fragility of their parents' relationships as an inevitable reality that awaits them, and this study will attempt to add to the research that supports this claim. Since the majority of previous research findings consist of negative outcomes, this study's main contribution will be to add to the growing body of research on positive outcomes by attempting to uncover new ways in which young adults benefit from

their parents' divorce in regards to the factors addressed above while testing to see if previously observed positive outcomes can be found in the current sample.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Effects of Divorce on Children

Studies have been performed in order to examine internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in children and young adults from divorced families. Scabini and Cigoli (2008), in their interviews with 30 Italian young adult children of divorce, found that young adults may experience and internalize their parents' divorce differently depending on their gender. Based on the sample, males tended to view an absent father as an absent role model while females perceived him more as the absent partner of their mother. This, in turn, developed in the male mind as a fear of turning into their father, which could mean becoming abusive and/or negligent towards their spouses and children. Males identified with the parent of the same gender and, without a proper role model, became fearful that such undesirable traits were innate. Females, on the other hand, were more likely to focus on the importance of finding a reliable partner. For them, the excessive maternal presence reinforced the need for stability and unity in a familial setting (Scabini and Cigoli, 2008).

More recent studies have delved further into the relationships between children of divorced parents and their nonresidential parent in order to determine the impact of nonresidential parental involvement on the child's wellbeing. Amato et al. (2011) found, in their cluster analysis of parenting styles, that young adults and children displayed the fewest behavioral problems as well as the closest relationship with their fathers, who usually are the nonresidential parent, when their parents maintained a cooperative relationship following the divorce. Using data on the relationship between children and their biological fathers from the

1979 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Carlson (2006) revealed several findings pertaining to paternal involvement. First, father involvement, independent of other examined mediating factors (maternal involvement and mental health, number of siblings, and economic status), reduced the size and significance of family structure effects (i.e. single parents, children born outside the marriage) on adolescent behavioral outcomes. Second, despite the implications of gender socialization theory which suggest that a father's involvement would have a greater impact on the son's life than the daughter's, the benefits of high-quality father involvement mentioned above apply equally to both boys and girls. Third, while continual nonresidential father involvement is important and beneficial, it is more important that the residential father (in the event that the mother remarries, cohabits, etc.) be actively involved in the children's lives as it promotes the social capital of the family necessary to maintaining a safe and nurturing environment. Granted, this last point only applies to a select group of divorced families, as does the success of nonresidential father involvement, since only about 10-18% of nonresident fathers devote a significant amount of time to their children (Carlson, 2006).

In order to shed light on the full range of parental divorce outcomes, however, further research has been conducted on examining the positive effects of parental divorce on children. Despite the beliefs surrounding the topic, researchers believe that the studies of parental divorce and its effects on children ought to be reevaluated in order to examine it from different angles (Sever et al, 2008), thus inciting a need for a more recent analysis. Amato and colleagues (2011) believed that a reevaluation of divorce studies using more current data would provide more evidence in favor of the positive outcomes on children. While their study, for example, took place in 2011 and only provided modest support for the good divorce scenario, the data used

came from the 1990s; ergo a similar study using data from the past decade could very well yield a higher frequency of outcomes in favor of the good divorce hypothesis. In 2003 Leon compiled an extensive review of the existing literature on parental divorce and early childhood development, using the developmental psychopathology organizational framework, in order to determine how parental divorce affects young children's developmental outcomes, the risk and protective factors influencing adaptation, and how early parental divorce affects later adjustment. Upon examining the methods and results of several articles, Leon concluded that these findings were not grounded in adequate interpretations:

Although several studies report negative long-term effects of parental divorce on children, the results should be interpreted cautiously for several reasons. First, the role of other family factors such as parenting quality has not been examined in much of the research on the long-term effects of parental divorce. Second, it is possible that the children whose parents divorced would have experienced the same negative outcomes, or more problems, had their parents remained married. Although many of the studies reviewed here are longitudinal studies, they rely on correlational methods rather than experimental methods, so it is not possible to infer a causal relationship between early parental divorce and later outcomes (Leon, 2003: 267).

Effects on Relationship Formation and Maintenance

The majority of research to date has focused on the negative effects of parental divorce on children, teenagers, and young adults. Though more recent studies have tested to see if and what positive effects exist, many still demonstrate the more commonly recorded phenomena of

previous research, including pessimistic outlooks/feelings (towards themselves and future intimate relationships) and low reports of self-esteem as well as outcomes on areas such as academic performance, familial relationships, and performance in everyday functioning (Carlson, 2006; Cartwright, 2008; Scabini and Cigoli, 2008; Sever et al., 2008). Qualitative studies have depicted children of divorce as experiencing painful emotional states (i.e. anger, suspicion, jealousy, etc.) as well as observing significant decreases in their levels of self-worth, trust, and communication with their peers. Scabini and Cigoli (2008) found that males from divorced families would often develop a fear of being unable to maintain a healthy relationship with their spouse and possible children. In Cartwright's (2008) study, the majority of her 40 participants, young adults from New Zealand aged 19-29, reported having negative beliefs about themselves and their outlook on life:

Some of the potentially negative beliefs they expressed were: no one stays around forever; you are on your own in life; relationships are short-lived; everyone goes their own way sooner or later; no one is going to be there for you; relationships are a struggle; men only want sex; no one loves me; I'm going to end up divorced; I am not up to scratch; I've got problems; I am too emotional; I get sick of guys easily; I don't want to start something if it's going to be a waste of time; I'm like my father (who was abusive); I wouldn't be able to sustain being nice (Cartwright, 2008: 140).

Despite these findings, however, it must be acknowledged that studies have yielded some positive outcomes. Sever et al. (2008), in their study of 158 Israeli young adults whose parents divorced while they were adolescents, attempted to examine the processes that allow for post-divorce growth by examining separate aspects of the divorce (family atmosphere before the

divorce, the divorce process) via interviews and questionnaires in order to search for possible positive outcomes of parental divorce among Israeli young adults and organize them based on the type and strength of their relationships amongst each other. Their findings indicated that while many of the participants did experience negative outcomes, nearly half reported that their method of coping with their parents' divorce resulted in more positive than negative outcomes. Of the coping styles used by the participants, reciprocal support, or the act of establishing a two-way support system between offspring and parents, yielded the best results in terms of positive long-term outcomes. By implementing a give-and-take structure, the participants were able to communicate their needs and insecurities properly, as well as effectively determine reliable sources of support while at the same time becoming more aware of the needs of others (not just including their parents) and obtain the skills necessary to provide support. The support coping style was found to be strongly correlated to three factors, each representing a central theme of positive outcomes: empowerment (defined as a subjective sense of growth, strength, and maturity), empathy (an increased feeling of compassion for the pain of others), and relationship-savvy (acknowledging the complexity of intimate relationships and having realistic expectations of them). Participants who reported primarily using the support coping style experienced a greater sense of responsibility, maturity, self-confidence, and inner strength, as well as a higher acceptance of their parents' choices, weaknesses, and strengths. These ultimately contributed to the participants' understanding of intimate relationships, helping them to make peace with their parents' divorce as well as giving them an increased sense of commitment for their own relationships. (Sever et al, 2008).

Many instances of previous parental divorce research based their findings of negative effects on correlations between the parents' marital status (divorced versus married) and how well children measured against certain indicators of wellbeing (i.e. self-esteem, academic performance, etc.). However, researchers have examined these correlations since then and have found that such indicators exist independent of the parents' marital status (Bernstein, 2012). In Bernstein's survey of 45 university students, the findings show that there is no causal relationship between parental divorce and attachment insecurity, depression, or low self-esteem; rather, the problematic beliefs surrounding parental divorce, particularly fear of abandonment, had a higher likelihood of increasing risk for insecure romantic attachment in children of divorce. This suggests that it is the individual's experience and interpretation of the divorce, rather than the divorce itself, that influences the nature of their outcome with regards to romantic attachment. Additionally, Bernstein (2012) also found that young adults of divorce possessed more sympathy (possibly as part of a supportive coping mechanism), enthusiasm (believed to be a result of motivation encouraged by the stressful experience of the divorce), awe (experiencing a greater sense of gratitude and appreciation towards relationships), and perspective taking than did young adults with continuously married parents.

METHOD

The purpose of this study is to explore the effects of parental divorce on young adults' ability to form and maintain romantic relationships using surveys and face-to-face interviews. Surveys were distributed via social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, Reddit, and UCF Webcourses) and emailed to hundreds of students currently attending the University of Central Florida, as well as to their professors with the request that they distribute the surveys to their students. Upon collecting the surveys I analyzed the data using SPSS. Quantitative analyses were used to reveal frequencies and correlations between different factors of relationship maintenance, parental conflict, and post-divorce emotional adjustment. Included in these surveys was a section for students whose parents divorced to leave their contact information if they were willing to meet on the main campus for a face-to-face interview to discuss the specifics of their personal experience with parental divorce.

Sample

Since this research focused on gauging the emotional aptitude and adjustment of young adults, I decided to use the population immediately at my disposal and distribute my surveys to UCF students. Convenience and snowball sampling seemed the most appropriate measures as I was studying an arguably hidden population, so I first directed my surveys towards members of my social networks whom I had known had experienced parental divorce and requested that they forward the surveys to any other students they knew of who matched the criteria. I then distributed the survey to random UCF students in order to accumulate a sample of respondents

whose parents had never divorced in order to control for any results that were specific to members of the Divorced sample.

The University of Central Florida is primarily populated with students who fall within the young adult age range and hail from a variety of cultural backgrounds. However, there are also many students who did not enter college immediately after graduating from high school and therefore do not fit the age parameters of this study. Due to the subjective nature of the 'young adult' classification and taking into account non-traditional students, I set the parameters for the respondents' age at the time they took the survey to the age range of 18-29 years old. The average respondent's current age was 22 years old, with a mode of 21 years old (n=41). Further, respondents who answered that they were not UCF students were sent to the end of the survey and their responses were removed from the final sample size.

My original goal was to reach a sample size of 300 students. Given the size of UCF's student body population (N=60,000+) I assumed that this would be a manageable goal. Unfortunately, this assumption proved to be false. Despite the relatively brief amount of time required to complete my survey (10-15 minutes), it would seem that some form of incentive would be required to obtain an adequate sampling size. In the end I was able to procure 233 respondents. Similarly, the vast majority of respondents had no desire to be interviewed, and many who did were unable to keep appointments. One of my main reasons for restricting the survey to UCF students was to ensure that I would be able to commute to them to conduct the face-to-face interviews, yet only ten students were willing and able to follow through.

Sixty-seven males and one hundred sixty-six females responded to the survey. Of these respondents, thirty-three males and seventy-three females (45.5% of the total sample) reported having experienced at least one parental divorce. Sixty-four percent of the respondents were White/Caucasian. Twenty-one percent identified as Latin/Hispanic. African-Americans made up the next largest demographic with fourteen percent, followed by Asian/Pacific Islanders with an eight percent response rate. An overlap of roughly seven percent is due to a small representative (19) of multiracial respondents (see figure 1.)

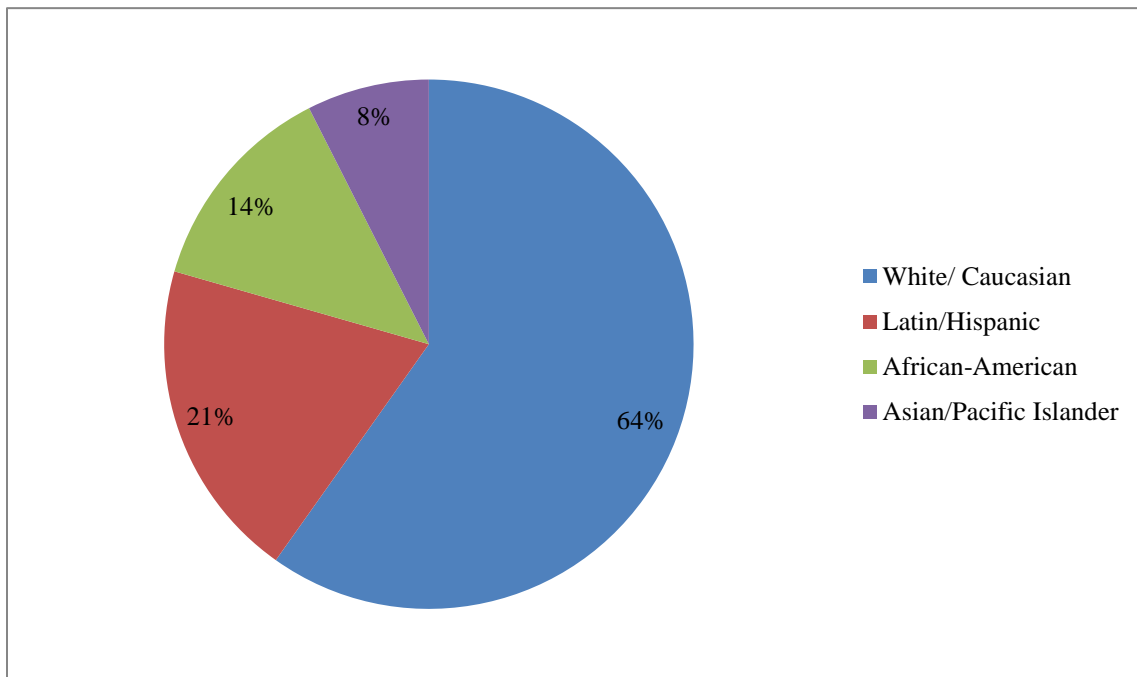


Figure 1: Race/ Ethnicity of Respondents

Variables and Coding

Quantitative

Several aspects of romantic relationship formation and maintenance, including attitudes towards relationships, number of relationships and average duration were analyzed in this study. Quantifying the data allowed for an efficient and objective means of gathering and analyzing the survey responses.

Dependent Variables

In order to accurately measure a respondent's attitude towards romantic relationships, a numerical scale was developed and coded from the ten five-point Likert scale statements (questions 8-17 in the survey: I am wary of getting involved with people romantically; At times I think I am not a good partner; I am confident in my ability to maintain a relationship; I am able to communicate effectively with my partner; I feel that relationships are short-lived; I am motivated to make my relationship work; I am better at being in a relationship than most other people; I am sometimes afraid I will cause my relationship to end; All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am not fit for being in a relationship; I take a positive attitude toward relationships). Depending on how the statement was phrased, answer choices would be coded to ensure that the overall direction of the score was uniform; positive statements (survey questions 10, 11, 13, 14, and 17) were coded so that answers that agree had higher values (4-5) while negative statements (questions 8, 9, 12, 15, and 16) were coded so that answers that agree had lower values (1-2). The final scale ranges from 10-50 points, with a higher score denoting a more positive overall attitude towards relationships. In order to measure the amount of difficulty respondents from the

Divorced sample experienced in maintaining a romantic relationship, the survey included two questions on the number of relationships the respondent had had following the divorce and how long on average these relationships had lasted.

Independent Variables

I accounted for the presence of parental divorce, as opposed to the number experienced, by recoding the first survey question (During your childhood and adolescence, how many times did your parents divorce (if at all)?) into a new variable, with the value 0 representing respondents whose parents never divorced and the value 1 representing those respondents who had experienced at least one parental divorce. Question 22 (What is your gender?) was coded with the value 0 representing the response 'Male' and the value 1 representing the response 'Female'. Respondents' age at the time of their parent's divorce was coded with the following values: 1 representing the '0-2 years old' response, 2 representing the '3-5 years old' response, 3 representing the '6-8 years old' response, 4 representing the '9-11 years old' response, 5 representing the '12-14 years old' response, 6 representing the '15-17 years old' response, 7 representing the '18 years or older' response, and 9 representing the missing data. In order to account for how many parental divorces respondents experienced I coded the first survey question with the values 0-4, with 0 representing respondents whose parents never divorced and values 1-4 for the number of parental divorces (1-4) respondents experienced respectively.

Qualitative

The use of qualitative methodology is necessary to understand the lived experiences of children of divorce as well as to uncover possible new outcomes that cannot be measured by

fixed quantitative processes. The interviews were semi-structured, consisting of 7 core questions and allowing the respondent to delve into the aspect(s) of their experience that they were most comfortable with. Respondents were informed prior to the beginning of the session that their contact information will remain confidential and that the interview would be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for quality data analysis purposes. Due to availability and scheduling issues, only ten respondents from the Divorced sample were able to participate in face-to-face interviews. For purposes of confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used when referring to these respondents. Further, gender orientation of these pseudonyms will not necessarily denote the sex of the respondent.

The majority of these participants experienced one parental divorce; only one experienced a second. Three participants reported that their parents had gone through multiple divorces (one in particular, Britney, reported that her mother had been divorced twice and her father five times), the rest only reporting one parental divorce. The majority (n=6) of these participants reported that their fathers remarried following their most recent divorce while only one reported the mother remarrying. Eight participants reported conflict between their parents during and/or after the divorce and the remaining two reported that there was no conflict.

Analytic Strategies

In order to test my first hypothesis (Respondents from intact families will have more positive outcomes with relationship formation than those from divorced families) I ran an independent samples t-test, using question 1 (During your childhood and adolescence, how many times did your parents divorce (if at all)?) to measure the independent variable (types of

respondent: divorced vs. non-divorced parents) and the 10 Likert scale questions to measure the dependent variable (romantic relationship formation difficulty). To test my second hypothesis (Male adult children of divorce will experience more difficulty in maintaining successful romantic relationships than females) I ran a second independent samples t-test, using question 22 (What is your gender?) to measure the independent variable (gender: male vs. female) and questions 5 (How many intimate relationships (i.e. boyfriends/girlfriends) have you been in?) and 6 (On average, how long have your intimate relationships lasted?) to measure the dependent variable (romantic relationship maintenance difficulty), using only the respondents who answered to having experienced at least one parental divorce. To test my third hypothesis (Young adults who experienced parental divorce as teenagers will experience more difficulty in maintaining successful romantic relationships than those who experienced it as younger children)I ran an analysis of variance, using question 2 (How old were you when your parents divorced?) to measure the independent variable (age at parental divorce) and questions 5 (How many intimate relationships (i.e. boyfriends/girlfriends) have you been in?) and 6 (On average, how long have your intimate relationships lasted?) to measure the dependent variable (romantic relationship maintenance), using only the respondents who answered to having experienced at least one parental divorce. Finally, to test my fourth hypothesis (Higher frequencies of parental divorces will have a more negative effect on relationship formation than lower frequencies) I ran another analysis of variance, using question 1 (During your childhood and adolescence, how many times did your parents divorce (if at all)?) to measure the independent variable (frequency of parental divorce) and the 10 Likert scale questions to measure the dependent variable (attitude

towards relationships), using only the respondents who answered to having experienced at least one parental divorce.

After transcribing the interviews I searched for common themes in the responses, such as family structure and duration of relationships. Participants were then sorted by these categories and compared to reveal trends and similarities between individual cases. Responses shared by a majority of the participants were noted as representative of significance.

FINDINGS

Quantitative

General Effects of Divorce

Forty-six percent of the total sample population reported having experienced at least one parental divorce. Of those respondents, twenty-eight were between the ages of 3-5 years old at the time their parents divorced, followed by twenty-one between the ages of 6-8 years old and fifteen between the ages of 0-2 years old. Fourteen respondents fell within the 15-17 age range, along with ten in the 9-11 years category and eight each in the 12-14 years and 18 years or older categories (see figure 2).

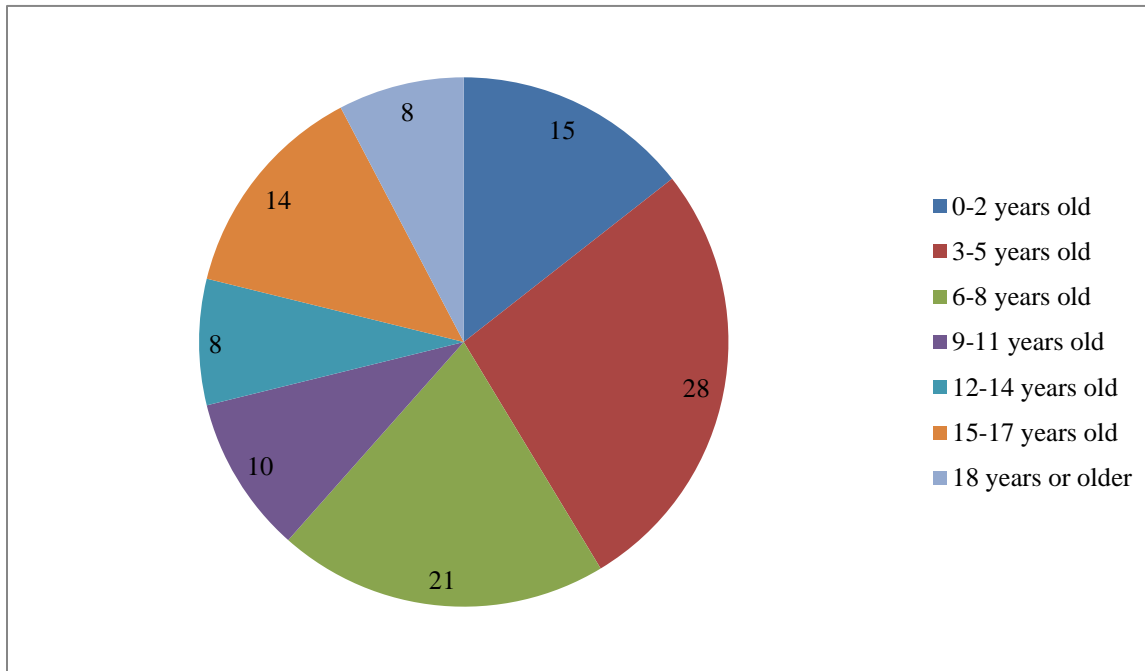


Figure 2: Frequencies of Age at Time of Parental Divorce

When relaying their feelings at the time of their parents' divorce, an overwhelming majority of the respondents reported having experienced negative emotions. Seventy-five percent of respondents reported feeling sad, stressed, worried and/or anxious (see figure 3). A small percentage (roughly 5%) reported feeling either scared, confused, hatred, indifference, or apathetic, the latter being due to the fact that they were too young at the time to remember or form any lasting attachment to both parents.

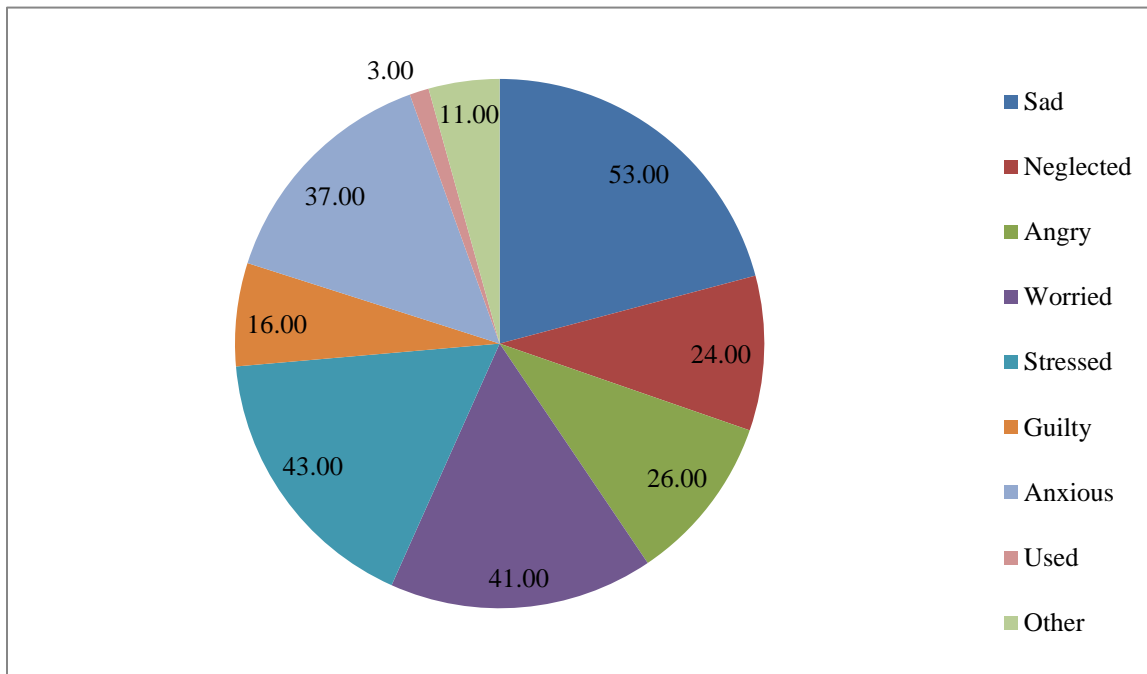


Figure 3: Frequencies of negative feelings at the time of parental divorce

The remaining fourteen percent of the respondents reported feeling relieved, relaxed, and/or happy at the time of their parents divorce. While it is a minority, it is worth mentioning that these respondents all reported that they were either in the 6-8 years old category or higher at the time of their parents divorce with a majority (n=7) in the 18 years or older category.

Effects of Parental Divorce on Relationships

This study was designed to examine the effects of parental divorce on relationship formation and attitudes towards relationships by testing four hypotheses. My first hypothesis was that respondents from intact families would have more positive outcomes with relationship formation than those from divorced families. Thirty-six percent of the respondents from intact families reported having romantic relationships that lasted for at least a year, while thirty-five percent reported having relationships that lasted only 0-3 months. Fifteen percent reported relationships lasting 4-7 months and fourteen percent had relationships lasting 8-11 months. Interestingly, the respondents from the Divorce sample performed marginally better in relationship longevity than those from the Never Divorced sample.

Statistical analyses show that respondents whose parents never divorced reported fairly positive attitudes towards relationships ($\bar{Y}=32.4836$), once again keeping fairly similar results to respondents from the Divorced sample ($\bar{Y}=32.6923$). An interesting note is that, while more members of the Never Divorced sample scored a total of 40 points, the maximum in their category, than those in the Divorced sample (4 vs. 3), one member of the Divorced sample scored 41 points, their respected maximum.

In order to analyze the impact of parental divorce on a respondent's attitudes towards relationships I then ran an independent samples t-test to determine the significance of the relationship between the presence of parental divorce in the respondent's life (whether or not they'd experienced it, as opposed to how many they'd experienced) and their overall attitude

towards relationships. The test revealed no significant relationship between the two variables (see table 1).

Table 1: Independent Samples T-test- Young Adults from Divorced vs. Intact Parents Attitudes towards Romantic Relationships

Measure*	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig.
Respondents whose parents never divorced	32.4836	2.96044	-.480	224	.632
Respondents who experienced at least one parental divorce	32.6923	3.58009			

*Note: Measured on a scale of 10-50, with a higher score denoting a more positive overall attitude towards relationships.

Through the lack of significance in the relationship between these variables, these findings demonstrate that parental divorce has no impact on young adults' attitudes towards relationships; respondents formed their own opinions on romantic relationships and their ability to form/maintain them independent of their parents' marital status.

My second hypothesis was that male adult children of divorce would experience more difficulty in maintaining successful romantic relationships than females. An independent samples t-test revealed that, while the difference between male and female respondents' average number of intimate relationships is not significant, there is a significant difference in the duration of these relationships between males and females ($t=-2.168$; $p<.05$). According to the data, male adult children of divorce tend to have relationships that last 4-7 months whereas females reported having intimate relationships that lasted, on average, 8-11 months. Further, there were more

female respondents that reported having intimate relationships lasting 12 months or more (35 vs. 6) than males. Figure 4 illustrates the difference.

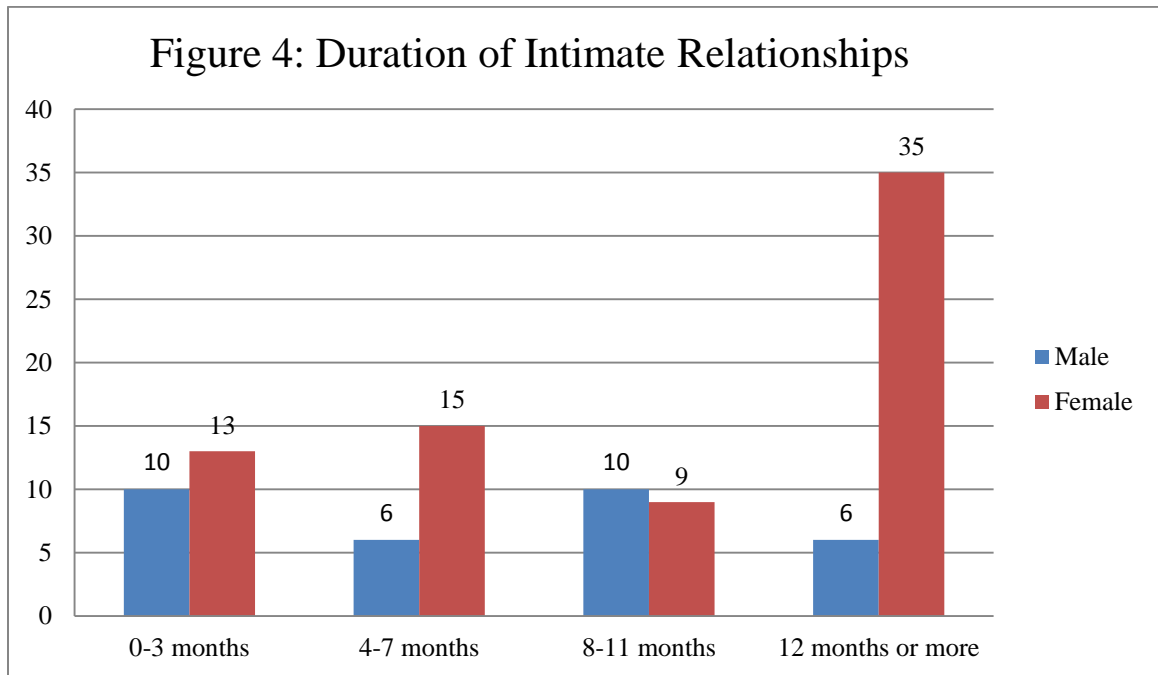


Figure 4: Duration of Intimate Relationships

My third hypothesis was that young adults who experienced parental divorce as teenagers would experience more difficulty in maintaining successful romantic relationships than those who experienced it as younger children. A one-way analysis of variance revealed that there were no significant relationships between the age at which respondents were at the time of their parents' divorce and the number/duration of their romantic relationships (see table 2). It is still worth mentioning, though, that respondents that fell in the 12-14 age range when their parents divorced reported the highest average duration of intimate relationships ($\bar{Y}=3.2500$) of roughly 8-11 months.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance for Age at Divorce, Number of Romantic Relationships, and Average Duration of Relationships

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Number of Relationships					
Between	26.271	6	4.378	1.389	.227
Within	302.506	96	3.151		
Total	328.777	102			
Duration of Relationships					
Between	9.827	6	1.638	1.144	.343
Within	136.026	95	1.432		
Total	145.853	101			

My final hypothesis was that higher frequencies of parental divorces would have a more negative effect on relationship formation than lower frequencies. Of the respondents whose parents divorced, only nineteen reported experiencing multiple parental divorces. Perhaps due to this constraint, the data showed no significant relationships between the number of divorces experienced and respondents' overall attitudes towards relationships (see table 3). In light of this, I ran a bivariate correlation using the data on the entire sample's responses to question one (how many parental divorces experienced, ranging from 0-4) and the sum of their attitude scores. Despite this, the relationship still proved to be insignificant, as illustrated by table 4.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance for Number of Divorces Experienced and Attitudes towards Romantic Relationships

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig
Between	24.308	3	8.103	.625	.600
Within	1295.846	100	12.958		
Total	1320.154	103			

Table 4: Bivariate Correlation of Number of Parental Divorces Experienced and Attitudes towards Romantic Relationships

	Number of Parental Divorces Experienced	Respondent's Attitudes towards Relationships
Pearson Correlation	1	.041
Sig. (2-tailed)	--	.544
N	233	226

Qualitative

Learning from Divorce

An analysis of qualitative data reveals common themes in the participants' responses that complement the survey data. Half the participants reported that they felt their parents' divorce had had a positive impact on their ability to maintain a relationship in some way, while three felt it had neither a positive nor negative impact.

The most common response to the question of impact was that the participant would strive to perform better than their parents in their own relationships by learning from their parents' mistakes rather than repeat them. Allison illustrates this point:

I think when I was younger it did [have an impact on me], but growing up and getting into my second and third relationships it was more of, um, I guess like I saw what they had and what they did wrong and I didn't wanna do that. So then, you know, I looked at it more as like a positive effect, I would guess, on my relationship and I wanted it to last longer so I kept communicating.

Similar instances occurred with other participants; Dillon, whose parents divorced because they married too early in their relationship, uses the divorce as a reminder to take intimate relationships slow and to really get to know his partner:

If anything I can use my parents' divorce as a way to not jump into a truly committed, like married, relationship too soon, because that's what my parents always told me, it was like "Don't get married too soon, wait as long as you can, make sure you know the other person because a divorce sucks for everybody."

Alex, whose parents failed to communicate properly, reported that open communication and making time for one another is important in maintaining a relationship:

A lot of open communication [is important], try to want the same things in life because my parents didn't want the same things in life... I try to make more time, we do activities together, because when my parents were married, like I remember to the point when they got divorced, when the whole divorce situation and everything went on, but when they got divorced my dad never did anything with us. My mom was always taking us out to the beach and trips and stuff like that. My father was never around, he was like "I'm too busy working, I'm too busy working."

In some cases, experiencing parental divorce provided insight to what the participant was looking for in their own relationship. Jennifer, whose parents divorced when she was 13, was one such case:

At a young age it made me notice what I wanted. Not things like “Oh, boys!” you know? Things like that that kids think? Like “Oh my gosh, a boyfriend is so important!” I wanted someone I could count on, I wanted someone who would be there when no one else would, I wanted to feel like I had a voice and to feel loved and appreciated, you know? I wanted someone that I could talk to that would understand, and it helped me realize what I wanted at a young age so then when I went out...it helped me narrow down what I was looking for.

Another common finding was the duration of romantic relationships. Seven participants reported having at least one serious relationship since their parents divorced that lasted over 12 months, four of which reporting relationships that lasted for over 2 years. Allison in particular, who emphasized the importance of communication in her interview, reported being currently in a relationship that has lasted for seven and a half years: “Communication is key, and that’s why Brian and I have lasted this long. We talk all the time.”

Family Structure

A prevalent theme amongst the interviews was the type of family structure participants grew up with following their parents’ divorce. Seven participants reported living primarily with their mother, usually due to custody stipulations (or lack thereof), or at least preferring not to

stay with their biological father. This may have inadvertently led to the overall bias against men for female participants:

I'm very against marriage... Not so much men anymore, because not all men or women cheat and there are good men and women out there, but I think my only relationship that was serious did fail because I had trust issues. That's a fact. (Sarah)

The reason my parents divorced was because, even though they loved each other so much my dad was not there for my mother, like she was in a really bad car accident and she had to like go to rehab... and my father was just like "You're useless to me, I don't want nothing to do with you" and I had so much hatred toward my father after the divorce, because he never bothered to communicate with us, so, like I figured and I thought about it as if like, I never wanted to put myself out there and to bother with a relationship because I was like "If my own father can't even call me and spend time with me or even love me how can I expect somebody else to love me?" (Alex)

My father at one point had called me and my brother downstairs and asked which parent that we wanted to stay with, which, obviously, we would have chosen our mother, but with my father's temper, how it was, we knew better than to say anything. (Jennifer)

I would stay in a relationship with a guy for years but I don't think I would ever get married, so technically my parents' divorce has affected me towards lasting relationships, just in the marriage sense. I could have a long-lasting relationship, just never marry them- unless they were very persistent...I could be perfectly fine being a girlfriend to someone for 10 years and have 3 kids, I just never wanna get married. (Chelsea)

Further, due to the relatively young age of many of the participants, some participants had not left home long enough to create their own impressions of how a relationship ought to be. Alex, for example, claimed that her views towards relationships had been biased by her family, yet they were her primary influence because she had spent the majority of her life surrounded by her mother, siblings, and cousins:

I never wanted to get in, like, a committed relationship, I just wanted to, like, have fun, do my own thing. Because my sister is like my mom, she was always in a relationship, always in a relationship, and like I saw all the drama and the B.S. that came from them, and I didn't want it, like I was younger when my sister got married, she was like 27, and I was like probably, what, like 19-20, and they had like so much issues and so many problems and I was like "I'm not dealing with that, I don't want to even bother to be like told how to live my life" and I didn't want anything to hold me down... And growing up everybody was like "Why bother with a relationship? Have fun, do your thing." And I kinda saw that too because a lot of my cousins that I hung out with would always cheat on their significant others and so I was like "I'm not gonna be with somebody, if that's the way it is out there then I'm not gonna do it."

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that in many ways parental divorce does not have an impact on young adults' ability to form and maintain romantic relationships. While the divorce may not necessarily influence their attitudes towards relationships in general, it can cause the child to be more cautious and unsure of their own ability to perform. However, there are still cases in which

children of divorce may have positive outcomes. The data have shown that the age of the child at the time of the divorce does not determine the amount of difficulty they will have maintaining relationships. They also showed that the presence of parental divorce is not a significant predictor of how positive or negative the respondents' romantic relationships would turn out, as respondents from both samples reported fairly similar outcomes in the frequency and duration of their relationships as well as similar attitudes.

Interview findings were similar to those in Scabini and Cigoli's (2008) study, where females were more likely to interpret the absence of a father figure (not necessarily the biological father) as men being unreliable, which would either deter them from participating in long-term romantic relationships or at the very least emphasize the importance of finding a partner who would be stable enough to meet their standards. Further, the results of this study aligned with the notion that males from divorced families had a higher chance of becoming unsure of their ability to have a healthy relationship with their partners, primarily because they weren't sure how a healthy relationship was supposed to turn out.

While the majority of participants reported conflict between their parents, those who reported a post-divorce relationship that was amicable (or at the very least lacked conflict) were among those who displayed longer-lasting relationships. Consequently, these participants' relationships with their biological fathers were not as affected as participants whose parents had a conflicting post-divorce relationship. This finding ties in with the work of Amato et al. (2011) who linked close father child relationships with lower adolescent behavioral problems, a factor

that plays a role in the quality of adolescent interaction and therefore affects the quality of their relationships.

Limitations

Due to time constraints and lack of incentive, only 233 people out of my anticipated sample size of 300 UCF students were able to respond to my survey. Of those respondents, only forty-seven percent reported having experienced at least one parental divorce. Further, only ten of those respondents participated in face-to-face interviews. A larger sample size would have yielded more significant results in regards to my first and fourth hypotheses.

Respondent age may have also contributed to the lack of significance in the data set. Due to the respondents' relatively young age ($\bar{Y}=21.5505$), it could be argued that many of them were not old enough to have experienced a serious relationship or to have had enough life experiences to shape their opinions and attitudes towards romantic relationships.

The methods used to measure the amount of difficulty experienced with romantic relationships may not have been sufficient. Perhaps attitudes towards relationships, frequency of relationships and average duration were not enough to gauge a respondent's proficiency with romantic relationship formation and maintenance, as illustrated by the interview data. Other factors, such as how serious the relationships were, reasons for the relationship ending, whether the respondent was responsible for the termination of the relationship, and level of communication would have provided a more accurate depiction of how well respondents were able to manage their relationships.

Ideas for Future Research

If this research were to be repeated, a broader age spectrum would allow for a more accurate representation of how parental divorce affects young adults. Likewise, a more racially diverse sample would provide a better idea of how parental divorce and romantic relationships differ (or liken) across cultures, as the majority of respondents fell into the White/Caucasian category. Given the personal nature of the topic, some form of incentive may be useful in obtaining respondents for a more adequate sample size.

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

- 1) During your childhood and adolescence, how many parental divorces did you experience? (dropdown)

- 2) How old were you when your parents divorced? (dropdown)

- 3) How did you feel during the divorce? Pick all that apply
 - a) Relieved
 - b) Relaxed
 - c) Sad
 - d) Neglected
 - e) Happy
 - f) Angry
 - g) Worried
 - h) Stressed
 - i) Guilty
 - j) Anxious
 - k) Used
 - l) Other_____
- 4) Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: There was high conflict between my parents leading up to the divorce
 - a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly Agree
- 5) How many intimate relationships (i.e. boyfriends/girlfriends) have you been in?
 - a) 0
 - b) 1
 - c) 2
 - d) 3
 - e) 4
 - f) 5 or more
- 6) On average, how long have your intimate relationships lasted?
 - a) 0-3 months
 - b) 4-7 months
 - c) 8-11 months
 - d) 12 months or more

- 7) Would you say your parents' divorce had a positive or negative impact on the longevity of your intimate relationships?
- a) Positive
 - b) Negative
 - c) Neither

The following 10 questions deal with your attitudes about your own intimate relationship(s). Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement. If you reported having zero intimate relationships, choose the answer you feel would best apply to you.

- 8) I am wary of getting involved with people romantically
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly Agree
- 9) At times I think I am not a good partner
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly Agree
- 10) I am confident in my ability to maintain a relationship
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly Agree
- 11) I am able to communicate effectively with my partner
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly Agree
- 12) I feel that relationships are short-lived
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree

- e) Strongly Agree
- 13) I am motivated to make my relationship work
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly Agree
- 14) I am better at being in a relationship than most other people
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly Agree
- 15) I am sometimes afraid I will cause my relationship to end
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly Agree
- 16) All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am not fit for being in a relationship
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly Agree
- 17) I take a positive attitude toward relationships
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Agree
 - e) Strongly Agree
- 18) Would you say your parents' divorce had a positive or negative effect on your life?
- a) Positive
 - b) Negative
 - c) Neither
- 19) Do you rely on federal student loans to pay for college?
- a) Yes
 - b) No

- 20) Do you receive financial assistance to pay for college from either of your parents?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
- 21) Thinking about your own financial status (i.e. financial assistance from parents, federal financial aid), which of the following statements best describes your current situation?
- a) I struggle to buy even the basics (food, housing, medicine, tuition)
 - b) I can afford the basics but struggle to buy any little “extras” or non-essentials (i.e. movies, drinks, eat out)
 - c) I can afford to buy little “extras” but struggle to afford the big “extras” such as travel and nice clothing
 - d) I can afford to buy most things but still have to watch where my money goes
 - e) I can afford to buy anything and never have to think about it
- 22) What is your gender?
- a) Male
 - b) Female
- 23) What is your class standing?
- a) Freshman
 - b) Sophomore
 - c) Junior
 - d) Senior
 - e) Graduate Student
- 24) How old are you currently? (dropdown)
- _____
- 25) What is your race? Select all that apply
- a) Latin/Hispanic
 - b) White/Caucasian
 - c) Black/African American
 - d) Asian/Pacific Islander
 - e) Native American
 - f) Other_____
- 26) I am interested in exploring in more depth the outcomes of parental divorce. If you are willing to meet for a face-to-face interview (lasting 30-90 minutes), please provide your name, phone number, and best time to reach you here.

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements about the survey

- 27) I felt the survey questions were clear and concise
- a) Strongly Disagree
 - b) Disagree

- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

28) I understood what the questions were asking me

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- 1) How old were you at the time your parents divorced?
- 2) Have either of your parents gone through multiple divorces? If so, how many did you experience?
- 3) After the divorce, what type of family structure did you grow up in?
- 4) Did your parents have an amicable divorce? Was it conflict ridden?
- 5) Can you tell me about your romantic relationships?
- 6) Do you feel that your parents' divorce affected your ability to maintain a romantic relationship?
- 7) How would you describe your ability to maintain a romantic relationship?

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