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Honors Thesis

For

Parental Divorce Effects On Young Adults Romantic Relationships In College

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Abstract

With divorce rates at an all-time high, many young adults have gone through a parental divorce. Divorce has many negative effects on children like their development, the parent-child relationship, and overall health (mental and physical). There have been a variety of studies conducted about the effects of parental divorce on individuals, but a lack of research has been done on young adults' relationships in college. The purpose of this study is to explore more how parental divorce affects young adults in college romantic relationships, by investigating students raised in divorced families' relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction. This will be based on relationship status and the kind of household in which the individual was raised. In addition, we will investigate the correlation between the student's relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction. It is hoped that the results of this study can help explain the effects of parental divorce on college students' relationships and the difference between those who were raised in different households.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

Marriages are known to be lifetime commitments between two individuals who love and care for each other. Unfortunately, today, divorce rates are higher than ever.

In the past three decades, nearly 50% of marriages ended in divorce, with over one million children whose parents make up that annual rate (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Single-parent families are becoming known as a more ordinary family structure in today (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020), in 2019, the divorce rate was 2.7 for every 1,000 people. The most current divorce rate in 2020 was 2.3 for every 1,000 people. The number of marriages in the U.S. in 2020 was 1,676,911, with 630,505 divorces (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Many questions arise on the long and short-term effects of divorce with the high divorce rate. Divorce affects not only the couple but the children, friends, and family around them as well.

The literature review will go into more detail on what healthy romantic relationships are, the nature of divorce, negative separation effects on children, divorce effects on children's development, parent-child relationships, divorce effects on college students, divorce and romantic relationships, divorce on college students' romantic relationships, and the social learning theory. More research is needed to understand parental divorce's effects on young adults in college relationships.

Healthy Romantic Relationships

It is important to keep in mind what is considered a healthy relationship and how people stay satisfied. Healthy romantic relationships include qualities like intimacy, respect, positive regard, good communication, a sense of security, satisfaction, attraction, passion, and commitment (Davila et al., 2017; Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017; Kansky, 2018). Romantic partners play a significant role in the functioning of attachment, caregiving, and sexual behaviors (Furman et al., 1999). Relationships are considered critical social arrangements that provide social support, have substantial connections between romantic partners, and are motivated to maintain the quality of their relationship to be as successful as possible (Davis & Oathout, 1987).

In healthy relationships, it is important to notice the way in which higher quality interactions, relationship satisfaction, and well-being are linked to successful relationships. Better physical and mental health is known to be related to being married as well as having lower mortality rates (Braithwaite et al., 2010). Kansky 2018, did a study on how having a healthy romantic relationship benefits well-being. She includes in her research the importance of relationship quality and satisfaction in healthy romantic relationships.

Studies show that having good social relationships in your life is linked to your well-being, and there are strong links between physical and psychological health (Kansky, 2018). However, romantic relationships substantially impact well-being more than normal relationships due to heightened emotions and cognitions (Kansky, 2018). Kansky (2018) suggests that subjective well-being, relationship satisfaction, and relationship quality are highly correlated; this explains the vital link between well-being and relationships.

Kansky's (2018) studies show that having a higher relationship quality has been linked with higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, positive effects, and lower negative affect.

Relationship satisfaction is linked to higher levels of well-being regardless of relationship title or status; those who feel satisfied with their relationship status have higher life satisfaction (Kansky, 2018). Relationship satisfaction is associated with idealistic views of a romantic partner rather than realistic (Kansky, 2018). Sexual satisfaction has been linked to relationship quality, satisfaction, stability, and well-being (Kansky, 2018). It is not surprising that sexual satisfaction has an influence on relationship satisfaction due to the importance of intimacy in relationships (Kansky, 2018).

Relational competence is a term commonly used to describe the characteristics of the individual who maintains a mutually satisfying relationship (Davis & Oathout, 1987). Characteristics like empathy, insight, mutuality, and emotional regulations (Davis & Oathout, 1987; Davila et al., 2017). Individuals who are romantically competent use skills like insight, mutuality, and emotional regulation as a relationship approach to better their relationship (Davila et al., 2017). This results in the individuals experiencing greater security and satisfaction in their relationships (Davila et al., 2017).

All of these studies show how healthy relationships last longer. In relationships, individuals need to work hard to create higher relationship satisfaction and relationship quality to keep up with a successful relationship. Unfortunately, not all relationships are successful and do end in divorce. It is essential to understand the nature of divorce for this study.

Nature of Divorce

A divorce is a life-change event that affects both parents and children (Allen, 2005). A Kansky (2018), a romantic breakup is known to be “the worst type of traumatic experience.”

There have been multiple studies that have focused their research on the opposing long and short-term effects of divorce on offspring (Riggio, 2004, p 222). Divorce is known to affect children's development and cause physical and psychological problems.

Romantic dissolution is commonly linked with negative outcomes (Kansky, 2018). Results can include anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress, substance abuse, self-esteem, low physical health, and financial stress (Kansky, 2018).

There are multiple factors and contributors to why two people make the decision to get a divorce (Amato & Previti 2003; Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, Allen, & Markman, 2013; Hawkins, Willoughby, & Doherty, 2012). Numerous studies showed that reasons for divorce include a lack of commitment, infidelity, conflict/arguing, growing apart, abuse, loss of love, financial problems, lack of communication, satisfaction, and employment problems, but infidelity, conflicts/arguing, domestic violence, and substance use were the top reasons and the most common final straw (Amato & Previti 2003; Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, Allen, & Markman, 2013; Hawkins, Willoughby, & Doherty, 2012). International studies showed that their reasons for divorced included marrying too young, lack of communication, incompatibility, physical and verbal abuse, drug abuse, religious reasons, failure to get along, and lack of love and commitment (Scott et al., 2013). To understand this study further, it is critical to understand the top reasons for divorce.

Abuse is included in the top reasons people get divorced. (Amato & Previti, 2003; Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, Allen, & Markman, 2013; Hawkins, Willoughby, & Doherty, 2012). Intimate Partner Violence is considered abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship; it can include behaviors like physical violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression

(Center of Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). According to the CDC (2021), Intimate partner violence occurs in over 10 million people yearly.

Infidelity is one of the top reasons for divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, Allen, & Markman, 2013; Hawkins, Willoughby, & Doherty, 2012). One study found that 25% to 50% of divorces are caused by infidelity (Thorson, 2009). Amato & Previti (2003) stated that Infidelity is defined as “cheating on a spouse or leaving a spouse for another person.” Infidelity can occur anytime during a relationship, but the number one cause of infidelity is relationship disillusion (Thorson, 2009).

Interparental conflict is a common cause of divorce. (Amato & Previti, 2003; Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, Allen, & Markman, 2013; Hawkins, Willoughby, & Doherty, 2012) Interparental conflicts are described as disagreements between parents and include behaviors such as aggression, verbal, hostility, problem-solving, and support (Singh & Thomas, 2022). Some disagreements that cause Interparental conflict range from financial difficulties, children, and relationship challenges (Dennison & Koerner, 2006). It is crucial to understand how the reasons parents separate affect the child.

Negative Separation effects

As previously discussed, all of the cofounding reasons parents choose to get a divorce. It is critical to understand how the reasons parents get divorced have long and short-term effects on the child physically, mentally, behaviorally, and developmentally.

Abuse. Children living in abusive households have long-term effects on children. The DSM 5 noted that children in abusive households might react to intimate parental violence by

displaying intensifying behaviors and cognitive, affective, or psychological symptoms resulting from the exposure to parental relationship distress (Harold & Sellers, 2018). Evidence shows that children living in a physically or verbally abusive household has effects on the children's mental health, as well as the chronic environment they are living in places the children's mental health and future development at risk (Harold & Sellers, 2018).

Interparental conflict plays a significant role in maladjustment among children and young adults (Singh & Thomas, 2022). Interparental conflicts have negative effects on their children, such as poor mental and physical health, sleep problems externalizing (aggression, Conduct, antisocial behaviors), and internalizing (depression, withdrawal, anxiety) problems, academic problems, future development, and romantic relationship conflict (Harold & Sellers; 2018 Singh & Thomas, 2022). Unfortunately, these negative effects do not get better with age but manifest in various things like substance abuse, academic difficulties, and maladjustment (Singh & Thomas, 2022).

Infidelity is linked to causing negative effects on children. Infidelity has a significant negative impact on children. Whether it is an emotional, physical, or internet affair, they all cause substantial harm (Peluso, 2007). Peluso (2007) studied infidelity and its negative impact on children. When children find out about their parent's situation, they react in different ways; they are commonly upset, show signs of anxiety and depression, and show behavioral concerns. (Peluso, 2007).

Divorce Effects on Children's Development

A child who experiences parental divorce seems to have an increased risk of multiple problems going into adulthood (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). Amato conducted a meta-analysis on the long-term effects of parental divorce on adult well-being. Part of his study examined the negative impact of divorce on children. His study concluded that children with divorced parents are associated with having lower psychological well-being, academic success, conduct, family well-being, emotional attainment, physical health, and social relations (Amato & Keith 1991, and Amato 2001). Amato furthered this study and updated his findings on the consequences of divorce for adults and children in 2014. With all of the accumulated research, children with divorced parents are more likely to have more emotional problems, display conduct problems, have lower test scores and school grades, and have more problems with social relationships (Amato, 2014).

Kot & Shoemaker (1999) suggest that post-divorce adjustment can cause reactions like symptoms and anxiety and depression in the child; these children likely feel abandoned by the other parent, which can lead to separation anxiety. These studies show the adverse effects divorce has on children's well-being. Kot & Shoemaker (1999) conducted a meta-analysis on children of divorce and its effects on children from divorce development. It is essential to review her study to understand the developmental impact of divorce.

Children from divorce are more likely to have developmental challenges. Depending on the child's age, divorce will affect their development in different ways based on their developmental needs. From infancy to toddlerhood (ages 0-3), the developmental stage for infants focuses on attachment behaviors and parental contact, and for toddlers, the developmental stage focuses more on cognitive competence, mental health, and psychosomatic symptoms (Kot

& Shoemaker, 1999). During divorce, things such as the ability of the parents to put the child first, visitation disrupting attachment styles, and parental conflict can all disrupt the child's development at this young age (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999).

When it comes to young children, there is more research done around this age and how they are affected by divorce. Young children to be around ages 4-11 (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). They are affected by the divorce developmentally and act out behaviorally. There are long and short-term effects on children from divorced parents. Kot & Shoemaker (1999) suggest that some short-term effects include children becoming emotionally distressed around the time of parental separation and behavioral issues arising during school disrupting their achievements. Studies show that children with divorced parents aged 7-12 tend to be more likely to have lower self-esteem and more behavioral problems (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999).

Adolescents are said to be around the ages of 12-17 (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). Studies show that parents who go through a divorce when their children are in their adolescence are said to have a more harmful effect than having a divorce when they are younger. (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). This is due to adolescence being a time of significant developmental transitions (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). A divorce around this time of development can be disturbing to the child and is more likely to have adverse reactions, as well as maladjustment in the aftermath of the divorce (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999).

As previously discussed, development is affected by parental divorce. The type of relationship the child has with their parents plays a role in their development as well. Divorce is known to be a stressful event that can disrupt the parent-child relationship. It is important to study the effects divorce has on the parent-child relationship.

Parent-child relationship type

The type of relationship the parent has with their child plays a significant role in the child's development during their early adult years (Yu et al., 2010). It is crucial to notice how family origins play an essential role in socializing and setting up children for adulthood, with the ability to develop healthy interpersonal relationships (Haselschwerdt et al., 2021).

Stressful events can affect a child's developmental process; divorce and parental marital conflict are viewed as stressful events (Yu et al., 2010). The various stressful circumstances that follow divorce lead to the relationship between the parent and child becoming disrupted (Yu et al., 2010). Studies show that children's exposure to chronic parental conflict and parental divorce is associated with low-quality of parent-child relationships (Yu et al., 2010).

Children from high-conflict parents often have the feeling of being caught in between the two parents going through a divorce (Amato & Afifi, 2006). The children who feel caught in between are associated with lower subjective well-being, feel depressed and anxious, and have a poorer quality relationship with their parents (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). Children have a strong loyalty to their parents; they become distraught if they have to pick between the two (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). The thought that they might "lose" a parent causes the child to become ambivalent about forming a relationship with one parent over the other due to the fearfulness of losing another (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). This disrupts the relationship of one parent due to the divorce.

The relationship between the parent and child can also be disrupted based on who gets custody after the divorce (Bauserman, 2002). According to Bauserman (2002), Joint custody is

when both parents have legal and physical custody of the child, and both get to see the child equally. Joint custody is the preferred and most popular option after divorce (Bauserman, 2002). Sole custody is when one parent has primary custody of the child, and the other parents sometimes have limited visitation rights (Bauserman, 2002). The type of custody the parents have affects the child and disrupts their relationship.

Children who are now forced into a one-parent home experience decreased parental attention, help, and supervision, as well as a loss of social skills like cooperation and compromise (Amato & Keith, 1991). Joint custody, unfortunately, causes confusion in the child as to why they go back and forth and can cause ongoing parent-child conflict (Bauserman, 2002). It is most common that the mom receives primary custody distrusts the Child's relationship with their father (Bauserman, 2002). The lack of a father figure results in the children having less school achievement, unemployment for boys, and early childbearing for girls (Bauserman, 2002).

It is important to notice the type of relationship a child has with their parent to see the effect it has on the child and their relationships. There are many short and long-term negative effects to divorce on children. As adolescents transition into young adulthood, some young adults decide that college is the best option for them. It is crucial to understand how parental divorce affects college students.

Parental Divorce and College Students

As previously discussed, divorce has negative effects on parent-child relationships and their development. As children transition into young adulthood is essential to see the impact on

young adults in college. As studies show, parental divorce is also known to affect college students.

According to Nielsen (1999), only 40% of college students have parents who are married, and 25% have divorced parents. Lopez (1987) found that as young adults transition to college, they have to learn to manage separation from parents, form intimate relationships, meet new college academic requirements and make life balance between work, marriage, and family. Studies show that parental divorce creates a more stressful life transition into college, creating more problems like transitional problems, substance abuse, and academic performance (Lopez, 1987). College students with divorced parents tend to experience mental health issues in college, like anxiety and depression (Ross & Miller, 2009).

More studies show how divorce affects college students. Ross & Miller (2009), conducted a meta-analysis on parental divorce among college students. They hypothesized that college students from parental divorce would score lower on perceptions of divorce, family unpredictability, interpersonal trust, and assertiveness. Ross & Miller (2009), data concluded that there was no significant difference between divorced families versus married families; however, data showed that the negative perception of divorce was linked to external factors. Ross & Miller (2009), data also found that college students scored higher on unstable and unpredictable financial concerns and unstable meals. Even though their study showed there was not a significant difference, there were still negative effects of parental divorce that had an impact on the young adults in college.

Collin (2014), conducted a meta-analysis on the effects of parental divorce on college students' moral judgment. Collin (2014), states that the development of an assessment is highly

significant in college. Parents most often teach their kids right from wrong; Collin (2014) wanted to conduct this study to see how parental divorce affects the moral judgment of college students. Collin (2014), data concluded that parental divorce had a negative impact on college students' moral judgment. This study shows how parental divorce has a negative effect on college students.

College Relationships

As previously discussed, divorce has an effect on college students. As young adults transition to college, they tend to make friends and form romantic relationships. It is essential to review the types of romantic relationships college students have and their effects.

There are many types of relationships and dating college students get involved in. The first type of college dating is called casual dating. Casual dating is usually when two people are getting to know each other and go on dates (Delora, 1963). The following kind of dating is called going steady. Going steady is when a couple agrees to go exclusive and not date other people, this is also known as a committed relationship (Delora, 1963). Another type of typical relationship in college is known as a long-distance relationship. These are common when two people meet before college and form a relationship and then decide to go to separate schools. There are many noncommitment types of relationships college students are in as well, such as hookup culture and friends with benefits. College students also form social relationships like close friendships and interpersonal relationships. There are many types of relationships college students form, but studies show that being in a romantic relationship is known to have positive effects (Whitton, Weitbrecht, Kuryluk, & Bruner, 2013; Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010).

Whitton et al., (2013) conducted a meta-analysis on committed dating relationships in college and their positive association with mental health. Whitton et al., (2013) stated that there are psychological benefits to dating in college due to romantic relationships being a primary developmental task of young adulthood; romantic relationships give young adults emotional connections, a sense of accomplishment, and identity. Whitton and colleagues data concluded that college students involved in a romantic relationship tend to have higher mental health.

Braithwaite et al., (2010) conducted a meta-analysis on college romantic relationships and their effects on physical and mental health. They also studied the level of engagement of risky behaviors in students in committed relationships. Risky behaviors include substance abuse, high-risk sexual behavior, and dating violence. Braithwaite et al., (2010) hypothesized that college students in relationships would have better physical and mental health as well as engage in less risky behaviors than those college students who are single. Braithwaite et al., (2010), data concluded that college students in romantic relationships engaged less in risky behavior and were less likely to be overweight and less likely to experience mental health issues.

All of these studies show how college students in relationships have better mental and physical health. However, these studies do not include whether the young adult in the relationship had divorced parents or not which is why more research is needed on parental divorce and college students' romantic relationships.

It is essential to be aware of how parental divorce is going to affect the child's romantic relationships, specifically with college students. Therefore, More research is needed to see divorce's negative effects on young adults and their romantic relationships.

Parental Divorce and Romantic Relationships

With divorce rates as high as they are today, it is crucial to see how young adults from divorced families cope with the ability to develop their own romantic relationships (Cui et al., 2011). As adults transition into adulthood, the formation of healthy romantic relationships is a critical part of the developmental task during this time (Sommantico et al., 2019). Navigating successful romantic relationships is considered a primary developmental task for young adults (Kansky, 2018). Those who achieve this goal of having a healthy relationship are linked to having a short and long-term physical and mental health (Singh & Thomas, 2022). Young adulthood is a time when love, sexual intimacy, commitment, and marriage take place. Unfortunately, children from divorce suffer from the trauma of their parent's divorce and fear the same will happen to them (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004).

Young adulthood is a time of principal developmental changes and life choices regarding the development of sex identity and romantic relationships with others (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). According to Kot & Shoemaker (1999), the time the parental divorce takes place plays an essential part in the child's intimate relationship beliefs. The younger the child was when the divorce happened, the more time they developed more negative and unrealistic beliefs about relationships (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999).

Parental divorce can have effects on an offspring's romantic relationship skills and interpersonal skills. Amato (1996) found that parental divorce increases the chance that offspring will develop problematic interpersonal behaviors that interfere with romantic relationships. The dysfunction from parental divorce can cause the offspring not to learn interpersonal skills, including low communication and compromise (Amato, 1996). Amato's (1996) research even

found that the disrupted marital relationship can lead to offspring forming negative personality traits (including lack of trust, jealousy, or commitment issues) that can influence their romantic relationships.

Traditional romantic beliefs in relationships are characterized as high relationship satisfaction, passion, commitment, and falling in love fast (Vannier & O'Sullivan, 2017). Unfortunately, offspring of parental divorce have a higher chance of experiencing conflicts, domestic violence, and higher divorce rates.

The children and young adults who are exposed to and observe interparental domestic violence have an association with having a range of maladaptive outcomes throughout life; they are more likely to experience domestic violence or dating violence in future relationships (Haselschwerdt et al., 2021). Relationships experiencing dating violence can include things like physical and sexual violence and verbal and emotional abuse (Haselschwerdt et al., 2021).

Data shows that parents who experience interparental conflict are linked to conflict in their offspring's romantic relationship (Cui et al., 2008; Singh & Thomas, 2022). Cui & Fincham (2008) suggested that up to 50% of interparental conflict impacted the outcomes of the children's romantic relationships. Children with divorced parents who experience interparental conflict are associated with having negative conflict management, poor relationship quality, less functional behaviors during the conflict, increased conflict levels, and poor communication, in their own relationships (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Singh & Thomas, 2022).

Studies on Divorce and Romantic Relationships

Similar studies have been done about how divorce affects offspring and their romantic relationships. It is essential to review similar studies done to explain the topic more and see where the gaps in research are.

More studies show that parental divorce increases the risk that the offspring's marriages will also end in divorce (Amato, 1996). Children from divorced parents have different attitudes about divorce. Adult children of divorce have liberal attitudes toward marital dissolution, meaning they feel less obligated to stay in an unhappy marriage (Amato, 1996). Children from divorce are also more pessimistic about having a long-lasting marriage and tend to view divorce as less negative and an easy solution (Amato, 1996).

One longitudinal study on how parental divorce affects offspring's capacity to love and be loved in a committed relationship (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Children of divorce fear building personal relationships due to their parent marriage being disrupted as well as fear of abandonment (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). They studied the outcomes with children of divorce and how likely it was they would also get divorced. Wallerstein & Lewis (2004) overall data concluded a 40% divorce rate in children of divorce.

Cui & Fincham (2008) conducted a meta-analysis on the parent's role in young adult romantic relationships. The purpose of their study was to find the connection between marital conflict and young adult relationships. They studied parental divorce and conflict, relationship efficacy and quality, and young adult conflict with their parents to find their results. Cui & Fincham (2008) concluded that interparental conflict and offspring romantic relations are, in fact, strongly correlated with each other.

Lee (2017) conducted a longitudinal examination of parental divorce and how the parent-child relationship affects romantic relationships, and the overall adverse effects of divorce on young adults' romantic relationships. Lee (2017) found that having a father-child adult relationship led to young adults feeling a sense of security in their romantic relationships, and mother-child relationships led to connectedness in the young adults' romantic relationships. Lee (2017), the study concluded that the relationship the parent has with the child affects their relationship; the more positive the relationship with the parent, the more positive the relationship will be as adults, although data still liked that divorce has a negative effect on the adult's relationships.

Commitment

According to Whitton et al. (2008), Relationship commitment is defined as a person's ability to want and stay in a relationship long term. Commitment is known to be a core factor in romantic relationships. Young adults with divorced parents are known to struggle with commitment in their relationships. Whitton et al., (2008) conducted a study on the effects of parental divorce on their offspring's commitment to romantic relationships. Whitton et al. (2008), data found that children with divorced parents have more commitment issues. This could be due to children observing their parent's separation, and they develop the mindset that marriage doesn't last forever (Witton et al., 2008).

Parental Divorce and College Romantic Relationships

As previously discussed, numerous studies have been done on the negative effects of parental divorce on young adults and their romantic relationships. There is not as much research

that has been conducted on parental divorce in young adults in college romantic relationships.

The research that has been done is from this mid to late 20th century.

As young adults transition into college and start to form romantic relationships, they focus on sex development (Lopez, 1987). Gabardi & Rosen, (1993) conducted a meta-analysis on the intimate relationship of college students with divorced parents. Studies show that college students from divorced families view sex as a way to explore intimate relationships (Gabardi & Rosen, 1993). Gabardi & Rosen, (1993) data showed that college students with divorced parents have a significantly high number of sexual interactions and partners than college students with married parents. This could be due to college students of divorce using sex as a way to resolve intimate trauma issues. (Gabardi & Rosen, 1993). A lack of research was done on the young adults who are in college. Therefore more research is needed to study the effects divorce has on college students' romantic relationships.

Social Learning Theory

In order to gain a better understanding of how parental divorce has an effect on children's relationships, it would be beneficial to review which psychological theory impacts this study.

The social learning theory is the most significant theory that best explains the correlation of divorce parents and their effects on their young adults' relationships (Cui & Fincham, 2010).

Albert Bandura discovered the Social Learning Theory in 1976. The social learning theory puts an emphasis on modeling and observing (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura (1977), behavior is learned by modeling; In other words, we gain new knowledge of how new behaviors are performed by learning what we observe. Children learn most behaviors that are

modeled on significant people in their life, specifically their parents (Bandura, 1977). So it is safe to say children learn most of their behaviors and views from their parents.

By observing parental marital interaction, young adults start to form and develop romantic relationships, views, and behaviors of their parents. (Cui & Fincham, 2010). Therefore parental divorce has an impact on how young adults view marriage/divorce, as well as the type of marriage the parents had in perspective of their relationships. Children from divorced parents tend to develop conflict behaviors from observing interparental conflict; observing this results in conflict behaviors in young adults' romantic relationships (Cui & Fincham, 2010). According to the social learning theory, in families who display aggressive behaviors (domestic violence or child abuse), young adults tend to experience or model aggression in their romantic relationships (Haselschwerdt et al., 2021).

Children from divorced families have been shown to hold opposing views on marriage and think less negatively about divorce (Amato, 1996; Cui & Fincham, 2010). This is due to children observing their parent's marriage end giving them negative views on life-lasting marriages and observing parental divorce; children think it is an easy solution to a problematic marriage (Amato, 1996). Young adults also tend to develop commitment issues as a result of their parents using divorce as a solution. The social learning theory explains how the type of relationship the parents had will influence the kind of romantic relationship qualities and behaviors the child displays in their relationship.

The social learning theory plays a significant role in this study. The social learning theory explains the negative connection between parental divorce and young adults' romantic relationships. This theory also explains why young adults form and view relationships like their

parents, as well as exhibit similar behaviors in their own relationships (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Bandura, 1977)

Purpose of the study

Many studies have been done on the consequences of parental divorce on children, young adults, and young adults' relationships, although more work is needed to understand the consequences of parental divorce on young adults in college romantic relationships. The few studies done on college students from parental divorce are old and outdated. The goal of the proposed study is to fill in the gaps in research on parental divorce and its effects on young adults in college relationships. There will be additional variables that will also be examined. The following hypothesis will be tested:

- H1: Students raised in divorced families will have lower relationship satisfaction.
- H2: Students raised in divorced families will have low life satisfaction.
- H3: Relationship satisfaction is correlated with life satisfaction

Chapter 2: Methodology

Participants

One hundred sixty-three college students from the University of Central Florida participated in the current study. Thirty-six participants were excluded from the analysis due to not responding to questions important to the study or from not meeting the inclusion criteria. Eighty percent of the participants ($n = 131$) were female, and twelve percent ($n = 20$) were male. The average age of the participants was 23.4, and the maximum age was 50.

Measures

General Demographics Questionnaire. All participants were asked to complete a general demographic survey with seven questions about their age, race, gender, and other necessary demographics. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix A.

Additional Demographic Questionnaire. All participants completed an additional demographic survey with four additional questions about their relationship status if they were a student, and the type of household they were raised in. This survey was used to determine if the participant met the inclusion criteria and to see the kind of household the participant was raised in to compare with the following surveys. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

Relationship Assessment Scale. All Participants were asked to complete the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS), a 7-item scale designed to measure general relationship satisfaction (Hendrick, 1988). They were asked to rate their satisfaction with their current relationship in several domains on a 1-5 scale (1= *lowest* and 5= *highest*). If participants were not in a current relationship, they were asked to rate their previous relationship. The higher the

score, the more satisfied the student was in their relationship. The minimum score was one, the maximum was five, and the mean score was 3.8. The alpha reliability was .881. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

Satisfaction with Life Scale. All Participants were asked to complete the Satisfaction with Life scale; the 5-item scale was used to measure the cognitive judgment of one's life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1985). Participants were given five statements, and they used the 1-7 scale (7= *strongly agree*, 1= *strongly disagree*) to indicate how well they agreed with the statement. The higher the score, the more satisfied the student was in life. The minimum score was one, the maximum score was 6.3, and the mean score was 3.43. The alpha reliability was .905. This questionnaire can be found in Appendix D.

Procedures

This study underwent review by the Institutional review board (IRB), which approved the study and granted an exemption. An approval letter can be found in Appendix E. The questionnaires were imputed into the online data collection platform Qualtrics, facilitating the data collection process for the current study.

The questionnaires were sent to the students who volunteered in class to take them. The students who completed the surveys received extra credit for their participation. Before filling out the online questionnaires, all participants were provided with an explanation of the research to read. Students must meet the inclusion criteria to participate. Inclusion criteria included being a UCF college student as well as being in a romantic relationship or having been in a prior relationship. They were presented first with a General Demographics survey followed by an

additional Demographics Questionnaire, a Relationship Assessment Scale, and a Satisfaction with Life Scale.

Chapter 3 Results

Additional Demographics

The study found that 51.5% of participants were in a current relationship and that 87% had been in a past relationship. Those participants were able to be included in the study. Results indicated that the most common household type in which participants were raised in was a married family accounting for 44.1% of the sample ($n = 72$). Divorced families represented the second most prevalent category, comprising 37% of the sample ($n = 54$). Lastly, 18.9% from other household types were indicated. The results from household types were used to analyze relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction. The descriptive statistics can be found in Appendix F Table 1.

Relationship Satisfaction

Descriptive statistics were conducted to see the relationship satisfaction among participants. The majority of participants (46%) indicated that they love their partner a great deal. However, results for relationship satisfaction varied. A considerable proportion expressed satisfaction, 34.4% (somewhat satisfied). Others reported neutral or dissatisfied views. When evaluating happiness levels attributed to participants' partners, 30.7% of participants were somewhat happy. Among the participants, 30.7% do not regret their relationship. While a substantial proportion reported never having regrets, a smaller but notable portion expressed occasional or frequent feelings of regret. In terms of participants' original expectations for their relationship, 27% feel their relationship has met their original expectations by a moderate amount. When evaluating relationship comparison, 29% felt their relationship was extremely good compared to others.

Many of the results for relationship satisfaction varied while a considerable proportion was satisfied; others still reported neutral or dissatisfied views.

Life Satisfaction

Descriptive statistics were conducted to see the life satisfaction of participants. The majority of participants (28.8%) indicated that they had achieved important life goals. Additionally, 23.3% of participants indicated that they were satisfied with their lives. Roughly 26% of participants reported their life conditions as excelling in two direct survey rounds, indicating a substantial level of satisfaction and contentment. When evaluating idealistic viewpoints of life, results showed a wide range of viewpoints. Among the participants, 28.6% indicated that their life closely aligned with their ideals. Out of those participants, they expressed a higher rate of disagreement at 19.6%. Additionally, 16.6% of participants would not change anything about their life. These findings indicate the participant's perspective of making changes if they could. Many of the results for life satisfaction varied while a considerable proportion was satisfied; others still reported neutral or dissatisfied views.

Does Household Type Affect Life Satisfaction and Relationship Satisfaction?

Analyses of variances (ANOVA) were conducted to determine if relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction differed based on participants' household type. There were no significant differences based on household type for relationship satisfaction ($F(2, 124) = 1.26, p = .29$). Additionally, no significant differences were found for life satisfaction ($F(2, 124) = 1.24, p = .30$). The obtained p-values in the ANOVA results exceed the conventional level of statistical significance of ($p > .05$). This indicates that the observed differences in mean scores between the

groups may have arisen due to random chance. Additionally, the effect sizes observed were small, suggesting that the difference in groups explains only a limited amount of variability in the outcomes. Results can be found in Appendix F Table 2.

Relationship Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction Correlation

The correlational analysis revealed a statistically significant negative correlation between relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction ($r = -0.22, p = 0.01$). The effect size of the correlation can be interpreted as small, indicating the relationship was not extremely strong but still noteworthy. A weak negative relationship was observed between psychological well-being and satisfaction among all participants. However, it is worth noting that a weak but statistically significant negative correlation existed between life satisfaction and psychological well-being within the entire study population. Specifically, as relationship satisfaction increased, the life satisfaction scores tended to decrease and vice versa. The correlation table can be found in Appendix F Table 3.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The current study hypothesized that students raised in divorced families would have lower relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction compared to students raised with married parents. The study's results found that there was no significant difference existed in relationship satisfaction or life satisfaction depending on the household in which individuals were raised in. Even if if statistical analysis do not reveal any significant differences between individuals from divorced and intact families, the influences of parental divorce may still be present but hidden by various confounding variables. There were several factors that may have contributed to these results. One reason that could contribute to varying results is the changing landscape of marriage, which may influence how students from divorce perceive relationship satisfaction and divorce. Previous research has found that children from divorce are also more pessimistic about having a long-lasting marriage and tend to view divorce as less negative and an easy solution (Amato, 1996). This mindset can impact their expectations, attitudes, and behaviors within their own relationships (Amato, 1996). This indicates that a lack of stable marital roles during their formative years can lead to uncertainty about what constitutes a healthy and lasting relationship. Therefore, the influence of these factors should be considered when interpreting the nonsignificant results.

It is possible that unaccounted factors may have had an influence on the results. One unaccounted factor could be a commitment in the student's relationships. Previous research, such as the study conducted by Whitton et al., 2008, has demonstrated that children with divorced parents may experience more commitment issues in their current adult romantic relationships. Students who face commitment challenges may exhibit less investment in their

current relationships. The lack of commitment in the relationships could potentially explain why the results did not reach statistical significance.

Additionally, another unaccounted factor that could have impacted the results could have been the participant's interpersonal skills. Previous studies found that parental divorce can have effects on an offspring's romantic relationship and interpersonal skills. Amato (1996) found that the dysfunction from parental divorce can cause the offspring to develop problematic interpersonal behaviors in their relationships, as well as cause the offspring not to learn interpersonal skills. This could have affected the way the participants responded due to the lack of interpersonal skills, such as communication, empathy, conflict resolution, and listening, resulting in response bias or social desirability bias.

The current study also hypothesized that relationship satisfaction is correlated with life satisfaction. The study found that relationship satisfaction correlated with life satisfaction and vice versa. There are several factors that may have contributed to these results. Factors such as positive emotions, self-acceptance, and personal growth, which are components of psychological well-being, may also contribute to overall life satisfaction. Previous studies showed that having a higher relationship quality has been linked with higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, positive effects, and lower negative affect, as well as linked to higher levels of well-being (Kansky, 2018). Another study by Amato and Keith (1991) and Amato (2001) Revealed a correlation between parental divorce and lower levels of psychological well-being, academic achievement, conduct, family dynamics, emotional development, physical health, and social relations. The finding of this study revealed a slight correlation between life and relationship satisfaction among college students. These results are in line with and supported by the previous

research, which is why it is essential to take into account the findings of the previous research when interpreting results.

In conclusion, students raised in divorced families had no significant impact on their relationship or life satisfaction. Although, the study found that life satisfaction and relationship satisfaction have a slight correlation. It is essential to recognize that more research is needed to explore the complexities of relationships and life satisfaction and its overall effect on college students.

Limitations

This study has provided valuable insights into the correlation between relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction. It is essential to recognize that no study is immune to limitations. Understanding and acknowledging these limitations is essential for accurately interpreting study results. Firstly, both the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RAS) and the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SAT) studies relied heavily on self-report measures. Self-report measures rely on individuals to be capable of providing information about their own thoughts, feelings, behaviors, or experiences. This indicates that self-report measures can be subjective and biased. Hence, it is plausible that the obtained scores may not reflect the accurate levels of psychological well-being and life satisfaction as they can be somewhat influenced or biased by these factors.

Secondly, it is essential to note that the sample size in this study was relatively small. This could be due to having to exclude participants for not meeting inclusion criteria or excluding participants due to not responding to questions or finishing the surveys. This could

also have been due to the fact that participants were only students from one university, the University of Central Florida. With a limited number of participants, drawing broad conclusions and conducting a more detailed analysis becomes more challenging to detect the significant differences in relationships and life satisfaction.

The last limitation of the study is missing age data for a subset of participants. During the data collection process, it was discovered that the question pertaining to age did not function properly, leading to missing responses for some participants. This missing data introduces a potential limitation in the ability to fully analyze and interpret the findings. Due to the nature of surveying college students, one can only assume the population was young adults. However, the data that was collected concluded that the max-age was 50. Despite these limitations, this study provides a valuable foundation for research in this area.

Implications For Future Research

Future research can explore the underlying causes of divorce and the age at which individuals experience parental divorce better to understand their impact on relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction. Investigating the specific reasons for divorce can provide insights into how these factors may influence relationship dynamics. Additionally, future research can explore additional factors such as the length of the relationship and the specific type of relationship in college students from divorced parents. Investigating this can provide valuable insight into how these factors relate to relationship and life satisfaction. Moreover, considering other variables such as communication patterns and attachment styles may give a clearer understanding of the influences of relationship outcomes. Future research can also benefit from

employing a larger sample size to enhance the statistical power and generalizability of the findings. This could be done by sampling participants from additional colleges.

Appendices

Appendix A

General Demographics Questionnaire

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other (please specify) _____
- Prefer not to say

What is your age?

- _____

How many children do you have

- Please specify number: _____

What is your racial or ethnic origin?

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian or Pacific Islander
- African American
- Caucasian/ White
- Mexican-American/Hispanic
- Biracial
- Other (specify) _____

What is your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual
- Gay/Lesbian

- Bisexual
- Other (Please specify) _____
- Prefer not to say

What is your current relationship status?

- Single
- In a relationship
- Not in a Serious Relationship- Casual Dating Only
- Engaged to be married
- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed

What is your level of education?

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

What is your employment status?

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Student

Appendix B

Additional Demographic Questionnaire

Are you currently a college student

- Yes
- No

Are you currently in a relationship

- Yes
- No

Have you ever been in a relationship?

- Yes
- No

What kind of household were you raised in?

- Divorced family
- Married
- Two person family
- Single person family
- Foster care
- Adopted
- Other: _____

Appendix C

Relationship Assessment Scale

Instructions: Below are 7 questions about relationship satisfaction. Grading is on a scale of 1-5, number one being the lowest satisfaction and five being the highest satisfaction. Please answer accordingly.

How well does your partner make you happy?

- 1 Extremely unhappy
- 2 Somewhat unhappy
- 3 Neither happy nor unhappy
- 4 Somewhat happy
- 5 Extremely happy

In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

- 1 Extremely dissatisfied
- 2 Somewhat dissatisfied
- 3 Neither satisfied no dissatisfied
- 4 Somewhat satisfied
- 5 Extremely satisfied

How good is your relationship compared to most?

- 1 Extremely bad
- 2 Somewhat bad
- 3 neither good nor bad
- 4 Somewhat good

- 5 Extremely good

How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?

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

To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

- 1 Not at all
- 2 A little
- 3 A moderate amount
- 4 A lot
- 5 A great deal

How much do you love your partner?

- 1 None at all
- 2 A little
- 3 A moderate amount
- 4 A lot
- 5 A great deal

How many problems are there in your relationship?

- 1 A great deal
- 2 A lot

- 3 A moderate amount
- 4 Very few
- 5 None at all

Appendix D

Satisfaction with Life Scale

Instructions: Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by checking the correct box with that statement. Please be open and honest in your responding

In most ways, my life is close to my ideal

- 7- Strongly agree
- 6- Agree
- 5- Slightly agree
- 4- Neither agree nor disagree
- 3- Slightly agree
- 2- Disagree
- 1- Strongly disagree

The conditions of my life are excellent

- 7- Strongly agree
- 6- Agree
- 5- Slightly agree
- 4- Neither agree nor disagree
- 3- Slightly agree
- 2- Disagree
- 1- Strongly disagree

I am satisfied with my life

- 7- Strongly agree
- 6- Agree
- 5- Slightly agree
- 4- Neither agree nor disagree
- 3- Slightly agree
- 2- Disagree
- 1- Strongly disagree

So far I have gotten the important things I want in life

- 7- Strongly agree
- 6- Agree

- 5- Slightly agree
- 4- Neither agree nor disagree
- 3- Slightly agree
- 2- Disagree
- 1- Strongly disagree

If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing

- 7- Strongly agree
- 6- Agree
- 5- Slightly agree
- 4- Neither agree nor disagree
- 3- Slightly agree
- 2- Disagree
- 1- Strongly disagree

Appendix E

IRB APPROVAL OF EXEMPTION



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board
FWA00000351
IRB00001138, IRB00012110
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

April 12, 2023

Dear W. Steven Saunders:

On 4/12/2023, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title:	Parental Divorce Effects on Young Adult's Romantic Relationships in College
Investigator:	W. Steven Saunders
IRB ID:	STUDY00005121
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study 5121 HRP-254-FORM-Explanation_of_Research_v 1.21.19 (1)_TF edits (4).pdf, Category: Consent Form; • Study 5121 HRP-255-FORM - Request for Exemption - 2022 (1) (2)_TF edits (5).docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • THESIS SURVEYS.docx, Category: Survey / Questionnaire;

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Tamiko Fukuda
UCF IRB

Appendix F: Tables

Table 1. *Household Total*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Divorced	47	37.0	37.0	37.0
Married	57	44.1	44.1	88.1
Other	24	18.9	18.9	100.0
Total	127	100.0	100.0	

Table 2*Relationship Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction Within Household Structures ANOVA*

		Sum of Squares	<i>Df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	Sig
Relationship Satisfaction Total	Between Groups	1.877	2	.939	1.260	.287
	Within groups	92.394	124	.745		
	Total	94.272	126			
Life Satisfaction Total	Between Groups	4.863	2	2.432	1.236	.294
	Within groups	243.995	124	1.968		
	Total	248.858	126			

Table 3*Correlation Between Relationship and Life Satisfaction*

		Relationship Satisfaction Total	Life Satisfaction Total
Relationship	Pearson Correlation	1	-.221*
Satisfaction Total	Sig. (2-tailed)		.013
	<i>N</i>	127	127
Life Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	-.221*	1
Total	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	
	<i>N</i>	127	127

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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