Perceptions of Young Adults Who Have Experienced Divorce and Those Who Have Not with Regard to Parent-Child Relationships and Romantic Relationships

Jennifer Lee Brooks
FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES

PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG ADULTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DIVORCE AND THOSE WHO HAVE NOT WITH REGARD TO PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

By

Jennifer Lee Brooks

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The members of the Committee approve the thesis of Jennifer Brooks defended on April 9, 2008.

___________________________________________
Ronald L. Mullis
Major Professor

___________________________________________
Lenore McWey
Committee Member

___________________________________________
Doris A. Abood
Committee Member

Received:

___________________________________________
Kay Pasley, Chair, Department of Family and Child Sciences

___________________________________________
Billie Collier, Dean, College of Human Sciences

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce and those who have not with regard to parent-child relationships and romantic relationships. Of the sixty three participants, 45 were women and 18 were men. Twenty two of the students were from divorced homes and forty one of the students were from intact homes. Participants completed three measures including the Personal Information Questionnaire, the Parent-Child Relations Scale, and the Fear of Intimacy Scale.

The young adults who had experienced their parents’ divorce reported having more negative relationships with their parents as compared to young adults who had not experienced their parents’ divorce. There were no significant differences between students who had experienced divorce and those who had not on the Fear of Intimacy Scale. In addition, there were no differences between men and women participants and between those experiencing divorce before the age of six and those experiencing divorce after the age of six on dependent measures. Implications of these findings are discussed for future research and practice.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Every year, approximately one and one-half million children experience their parents’ divorce. Unfortunately, even though divorce is such a common problem in our country, little is known about the long-term effects divorce has on the children involved (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Examining the effects of divorce on young adults is becoming even more important due to the fact that what little research that has been done on this escalating problem suggests parental divorce can be related to difficulties in family formation during the young adulthood years. Children can suffer for several years from psychological and social difficulties caused by the stress within the family after the divorce (Taylor, 2001). Research is imperative on this topic, not only to elucidate the effects divorce has on young adults’ well-being, but also to identify the potential negative effects. The purpose of the study is to compare the perceptions of young adults who have experienced divorce and those who have not with regard to parent-child relationships and romantic relationships.

Theoretical Perspective

Social learning theory can be utilized to further our understanding of the effects of divorce on children in the short-term as well as help researchers gain a better understanding of how divorce affects children in the long-term. Bandura (1989) believed that human behavior was learned as a function of modeling. The parents of a child are usually one of the child’s first models of behavior (Bandura, 1989). Westervelt and Vandenberg (1997) suggested that the marital relationship is the first intimate relationship that children are exposed to, and children from divorced families are more likely exposed to less intimacy between their parents (and perhaps more intimacy with other adults), distance, and conflict when compared to intact families. In a similar study, Amato (1996) found that when the parent’s relationship is poor or no longer existent, the model for male-female interactions is misconstrued. Amato (1996) proposed that children from divorced families have been exposed to poor models of behavior and may not learn the skills and attitudes that facilitate successful functioning within marital roles. Amato also argued that these children may have developed traits such as difficulties with trust and commitment that add to relationship stress (Amato, 1996).

Hetherington (1972) found that parents who are divorced and beginning to date again may exhibit different intimacy patterns, unlike parents from intact homes. These different
intimacy patterns may be witnessed by their children, and as a result, may lead the children to feel it is acceptable to date more often and to be more sexually active (Hetherington, 1972). Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) supported the idea that teenage females and young adult women from divorced families often display an eagerness to become sexually active. Similarly, Gabardi and Rosen (1992) found that young adults from divorced families have a greater desire for sexual involvement in their intimate relationships. These researchers hypothesized that children may observe their parents engaging in sexual relationships as a way to establish intimate relationships following divorce, and as a result, the young adults view sex as a way to create a better intimate relationship for themselves (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992).

Some researchers have reported that children from divorced families may be neglected during or after divorce, and as a result, sometimes fear intimacy and abandonment (Evans, 1987; Darlington, 2001). These children learn to be independent of others for their emotional needs because their needs are often not met (Evans, 1987). Evans (1987) found that when relationships do occur for these individuals they are more likely to stay with their partner even if the relationship is emotionally damaging just to avoid being alone. Glenn and Kramer (1987) proposed that these findings may be due to an “emotional neediness” which is created by a hostile environment or perhaps the modeling of the parents. Other researchers have discovered that children who come from a background of parental divorce often develop cautious expectations towards future relations (Franklin, et al., 1990; Cartwright, 2005). Galanes (2003) suggested that if a child experiences betrayal of trust either in a direct relationship or between people close to the child (such as the parent’s marriage), the child could possibly transfer their feelings about that experience into their own relationship without even attempting to do so. Some participants in Cartwright’s (2005) study mentioned the lack of a role model for a good adult relationship and related this with a lack of confidence in being able to maintain a stable relationship. For some, this lack of confidence about commitment extended to doubts about marriage as well as a fear of divorce in their own future (Cartwright, 2005).

**Parent-Child Relationships**

Researchers have found that parent-young adult relationships are affected by childhood parental divorce. For example, Zill et al. (1993) studied longitudinal data from the National Survey of Children to better understand whether effects of parental divorce are distinct in young adults. Among 18 to 22-year-olds from divorced homes, 65% had poor relationships with their fathers, 30% had poor relationships with their mothers, 25% had dropped out of high school, and
40% sought out psychological help. They found that divorce affected mother-child relationships in young adulthood. In a similar study, Dunlop (1996) examined young adults between the ages of 23-27 who had experienced divorce of their parents. He found that whereas all participants were positive about their relationship with their mothers, only half were positive in reporting their relationships with their fathers.

Zill et al. (1993) found that younger children are more often vulnerable to the effects of parental divorce because they are less able to comprehend the problems occurring in their household as compared to older children. Younger children are also more likely to be more dependent on their parents whereas older children are able to use school activities, peer relations, and social events as an escape from the disruption caused by the parental divorce. Additionally, children whose parents divorce early are more likely to spend more time dealing with single-parent situations than children whose parents divorce later in childhood or adolescence. Zill et al. (1993) also reported that if parental divorce occurs before the age of 6, it poses more of a risk to young adults’ development than parental divorce later in childhood. In addition, they found that 18 to 22-year-old subjects whose parents separated or divorced before they were 6 years-old had significantly poorer relationships with both parents than young adults whose parents had not separated or divorced.

**Romantic Relationships**

Many young adults who have experienced their parents’ divorce confront issues of love, commitment, and marriage with anxiety, sometimes with great concern about betrayal, abandonment, and not being loved (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Mullett and Stolberg (2002) noted that children may learn many of their intimate communication skills in their family of origin. Unfortunately, parental divorce often exposes children to models of maladaptive communication and conflict management tactics (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Therefore, children who have experienced their parent’s divorce may not have had good role models for proper conflict resolution and problem solving (Amato, 1996). As a result, young adults from divorced families often display more behavioral and emotional problems than do young adults from intact families (Toomey & Nelson, 2001).

**Gender Differences**

Mullett and Stolberg (2002) found that young men and women from divorced homes are affected by the experience in different ways, and may handle relationships in diverse manners. Gender differences have been found in intimacy, conflict, and communication styles of men and
women from divorced homes (Gottman, 1994). Women are more likely to experience an increase in insecure attachments in young adult relationships, whereas, men are less likely to become involved in emotional intimacy, and are actually more likely to distance themselves (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). In other words, men from divorced families are more likely to be avoidant in their conflict management styles than women. Mullett and Stolberg (2002) found that couples in which the woman had experienced parental divorce in childhood reported significantly lower levels of intimacy and constructive communication and higher levels of demand-withdrawal patterns and avoidance of conflict. Women who experienced childhood parental divorce may be at particular risk for divorce in the future because these females may not have learned the proper communication skills as a child. Couples in which both partners are from intact homes are more likely to have been exposed to more successful models of problem solving and more positive relationships with their parents, which would increase their level of intimacy and result in a decreased risk of divorce (Gottman, 1994).

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to compare the perceptions of young adults who have experienced divorce and those who have not with regard to parent-child relationships and romantic relationships. In addition, gender differences and age at time of divorce will be examined.

**Research Questions**

The following study will examine the following research questions:

1. Do young adults who have experienced their parent’s divorce report different parent-child relationships than young adults who have not experienced their parent’s divorce?
   a. Are there differences due to gender?
   b. Are there differences due to age at time of divorce?
2. Do young adults who have experienced their parent’s divorce report different romantic relationships than young adults who have not experienced their parent’s divorce?
   a. Are there differences due to gender?
   b. Are there differences due to age at time of divorce?
Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were developed for this study:

**Hypothesis 1.** Young adults from divorced families will report more negative relationships with their parents (as measured by the Parent-Child Relations Scale) than young adults from intact families.

**Hypothesis 2.** Young adults from divorced families will have more problems with intimacy (as measured by the Fear of Intimacy Scale) than young adults from intact families.

**Hypothesis 3a.** Young adult women who have experienced divorce in their families will report more negative parent-child relationships than young adult men who have experienced divorce in their families.

**Hypothesis 3b.** Young adult women who have experienced divorce in their families will report more problems with intimacy than young adult men who have experienced divorce in their families.

**Hypothesis 4a.** Young adults who have experienced divorce in their families before the age of 6 will report more negative parent-child relationships than young adults who have experienced divorce in their families after the age of 6.

**Hypothesis 4b.** Young adults who have experienced divorce in their families before the age of 6 will report more problems with intimacy than young adults who have experienced divorce in their families after the age of 6.

Definitions

1. **Divorce**- the legal dissolution of marriage; the ending of a committed, intimate bond between two people who serve as a child’s first models of an intimate relationship.
2. **Fear of intimacy**- the inhibited capacity of an individual, because of anxiety, to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued (Descutner & Thelen, 1991).
3. **Intimacy**- the ability to trust and fully self-disclose to another individual; sustained love between partners, mutual trust, and partner cohesiveness (Sinclair & Nelson, 1998); to exchange thoughts and feelings of personal significance with another individual who is highly valued (Descutner & Thelen, 1991).
4. **Young adult**- a person in the stage between adolescence and mature adulthood, roughly ages 18 to 40.
Limitations

Limitations of this study include:

1. This particular study gathered information from only one university setting - Florida State University. Focusing in on only one university limits the quality of the sample. In the future, researchers should gather data from a wide variety of colleges and universities all over the country.

2. This study did not gather information from non-college young adults, which also limits the quality of the sample. In future research, a representative sample should be used that includes young adults attending college as well as non-college young adults.

3. The parents of the adult children in the study were not involved in this research experiment. The parents’ thoughts and experiences could have been quite interesting, particularly in helping to clarify differences in information reported by the children and the parents during the divorce period.

Delimitations

The study will be limited to Florida State University students between the ages of 18 and 24.

The study will not evaluate the parents of the adult children from the divorced families or intact families.

Assumptions

The first assumption. There is a relationship between parental divorce and long-term child adjustment from the adult child’s perspective.

The second assumption. The adult children from divorced families in this study were able to successfully recall their parents’ divorces.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Divorce Rate

The divorce rate in the United States had been steadily increasing throughout the 20th century until its peak in the late 1970’s. The rate of divorce has been slowly declining since the peak in the late 1970’s. In 1978, there were about 23 divorces per 1,000 women. The most recent data have shown that there are about 20 divorces for every 1,000 women over the age of 15. There are two significant factors that contribute to keeping the divorce rate steady in the United States today. First, men and women are in less need of each other for economic support due to equal opportunities made available in the work place. Second, gains made in birth control over the years have made it possible for men and women to separate sexual activity from having children (Patten, 1999).

Since the 1970’s, approximately one and one-half million children experience the divorce of their parents every year (Morris & West, 2001). This results in more than one-third of children experiencing the divorce of their parents before the age of 16 (Walsh, 1993). Unfortunately, normal or traditional family structures from the past do not apply to the realities of the modern families of today (Mahl, 2001). Although the divorce rate has steadily declined since its peak in the late 1970’s, the popularity of researching divorce and its effects on children has steadily increased since that time (Patten, 1999). Interest in the effects of divorce on children (short-term and long-term) remains strong among researchers, practitioners, policy makers, and the general public. This strong interest is a consequence of the continuing high divorce rate throughout the past decades. Although in the 1980’s the divorce rate slightly decreased, recent projections imply that between 40% and 50% of first marriages that occurred in the 1990’s will end in divorce (Amato, 2001).

Theoretical Perspectives

Social learning theory can be used to help researchers gain a better understanding of how divorce affects children in the short-term as well as in the long-term. The behaviors of children develop from their experiences with their parents before, during, and after divorce. Social learning theorists emphasize the importance of observing and modeling the attitudes, behaviors, and emotional reactions of others. Bandura (1989) believed that human behavior was learned through observation. Through observation we form ideas on the behavior of others, and then
possibly adopt these behaviors as our own. According to Bandura, human behavior is learned observationally through the process of modeling. The parents of a child are usually one of the child’s first models of behavior. When the process of divorce is taking place (or even before the divorce is underway), parents may display forms of negative behavior in front of their child. This is the first stage of modeling known as acquisition. When children observe their parents’ divorce, they may not realize that they are learning their parents’ negative behavior as they observe it (Bandura, 1989).

During parental divorce, parents may model certain behaviors such as poor communication skills, poor conflict resolution skills, and poor problem solving skills. The child observes their behavior and internalizes the behavior as their own. This is the second stage of modeling known as internalization. As a result, the child learns to communicate with other people in a negative way (Bandura, 1989). The child not only uses these negative communication skills as a child, but may carry the behaviors into their adolescent years, young adult years, and so on. In other words, the parental conflict the child learns from their parents’ divorce not only affects them in their childhood, but also affects their long-term development. Bandura’s social learning theory has helped researchers understand how the divorce itself (and the events that occur within the divorce) affect the way children communicate with others, as well as how they deal with problem solving (Toomey & Nelson, 2001). Grych and Fincham (1990) found in a landmark review of literature that children might learn their negative behaviors from parental modeling because they view their parents’ communication skills as what is normal in a relationship. As a result, children whose parents divorced may not have had positive role models for conflict resolution and problem solving (Amato, 1996).

Besides learning poor communication skills, other researchers have found that young adults who have observed parental divorce in their childhood have more negative attitudes toward dating and romantic relationships (Jennings, Salts, & Smith, 1991). Amato (1996) found that when the parents’ relationship is poor or no longer existent, the model for male-female interactions may be misunderstood by the children involved. Amato (1996) suggested that children from divorced families have been exposed to poor models of behavior and may not learn the skills that facilitate successful functioning within marital roles. Amato also proposed that these children may have developed characteristics such as difficulties with trust and commitment that add to relationship stress (Amato, 1996).

In similar findings, Westervelt and Vandenber (1997) suggested that the marital
relationship of parents is the first intimate relationship that children observe, and children from divorced families are more likely exposed to less intimacy between their parents (and possibly more intimacy with other adults) and more distance when compared to intact families. Similarly, Hetherington (1972) acknowledged that different intimacy patterns may be witnessed by their children, and as a result, may lead the children to feel it is acceptable to date more and to be more sexually active. Gabardi and Rosen (1992) also found that young adults from divorced families have a greater desire to engage in sexual activity in their intimate relationships. These researchers hypothesized that children may observe their parents engaging in sexual relationships as a way to secure intimate relationships following divorce, and as a result, the young adults view sexual activity as a way to create a better intimate relationship for themselves (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992).

While some researchers (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992; Hetherington, 1972) have found that children from divorced families may have a greater desire to engage in sexual relationships, other researchers have found that children from divorced families may be neglected during (or after) a divorce, and as a result, sometimes fear intimacy and abandonment (Darlington, 2001; Evans, 1987). These children who were neglected learn to be independent of others for their emotional needs because their needs are usually not met (Evans, 1987). Evans (1987) also discovered that when relationships do occur for these young adults they are more likely to stay with their partner even if the relationship is emotionally damaging just to avoid being by themselves. Glenn and Kramer (1987) suggested that these findings may be due to an “emotional neediness” which can be caused by the modeling of the parents. Cartwright (2005) proposed that the lack of a role model for a good adult relationship may result in a lack of confidence in being able to sustain a secure relationship. Some of the young adults who displayed a lack of confidence with commitment even expressed doubts about marriage as well as a fear of divorce in their own future (Cartwright, 2005).

Impact of Divorce on Children

Despite improvements in the divorce rate and economic impact, the stress is tremendous on each individual involved in the divorce process. Divorce has become an institution in itself affecting not only the husband and wife, but also their offspring (Taylor, 2001). Unfortunately, the child or children involved may suffer the most. During the divorce period, daily rituals, family time, and interactions change among the family members. These changes can be extremely difficult for a child to deal with, especially if parental conflict is observed. A child in
the middle of a divorce battle can possess feelings of grief, sadness, guilt, anger, resentment, and/or isolation (Taylor, 2001). Taylor (2001) explained that the level of impact divorce causes may differ among children from minor to extreme, but research indicates that there is always an impact. In fact, children can suffer for many years from psychological and social difficulties related to the stresses of divorce, and these difficulties can even continue into the young adulthood years (Taylor, 2001).

Taylor (2001) found, through a qualitative interview, some interesting perspectives on parental divorce through the children’s eyes. For one, he found that children felt that their parents did not know or understand that the children were also hurting during the process. Some of the children even revealed that they felt that their parents were ignoring their emotional needs that were brought on by the divorce. Over half of the participants also felt that they were in some way responsible for their parents’ divorce. Most of these children remembered wanting a more peaceful atmosphere during the divorce process with less fighting and arguing, and wanting their parents to seek help from counseling. From those that responded with wanting a more peaceful home life during the divorce they also felt that their parents needed counseling, communication and dispute resolution skills (Taylor, 2001).

**Age at Divorce**

Several researchers have reported that the age of the child at the time of the divorce affects the impact of parental divorce (Hetherington, 1979; Shulman, Scharf, Lumer, & Maurer, 2001; Westervelt & Vandenberg, 1997). Shulman et al. (2001) examined the degree to which perception of parental divorce among young adults is related to their description of the relationship with their parents. These researchers found that young adults whose parents divorced before the age of 12 described a greater sense of current and past loss. Consistent with Shulman et al.’s (2001) findings, Hetherington (1979) claimed that the younger the child at the time of divorce, the more severe the child’s reactions would be in the future. Westervelt and Vandenberg (1997) discovered that children who were younger at the time of their parents’ divorce were more likely to score lower on measurements of trust. When parents divorce early in a child’s life the child is more likely to miss out on significant developmental models and is also more likely to form misconstrued beliefs about their parents’ divorce (Westervelt & Vandenberg, 1997).

Zill et al., (1993) studied the long-term effects of parental divorce on parent-child relationships, adjustment, and achievement in young adults. They found that long term effects of
parental divorce can be seen in young adults. Effects of parental divorce were seen 12 to 22 years later in poor relationships with parents, increased levels of problem behavior, an increased chance of dropping out of school, and a need for psychological help. The age of the child at the time of the divorce is an important factor developmental psychologists believe to be a cause of poor development in children and young adults. Developmental psychologists believe that younger children are more vulnerable to the negative effects of divorce due to the fact that they are less able to understand the situation at home when compared to older children (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993).

Zill et al. (1993) placed young adults in two groups according to their age when their parents divorced (under 6-years-old and 6 to 16-years-old). They found that parental divorce before the age of 6 poses more of a risk to young adults’ development than does parental divorce later in childhood. Eighteen to twenty-two year old participants, whose parents separated or divorced before they were 6 years-old, reported significantly poorer relationships with both parents than young adults whose parents had not separated or divorced. They discovered that the participants from divorced homes were twice as likely as other young adults to have poor relationships with their parents (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993).

**Long-term Effects of Divorce on Children**

Although divorce negatively and directly impacts children during their childhood and adolescent years, the damage done can indirectly continue on into their young adult and adult years as well. In fact, children can suffer for several years from psychological and social difficulties caused by the stress within the family after the divorce (Taylor, 2001). Although researchers have been studying the short-term effects of divorce on children for decades, little is actually known about the long-term effects of divorce. Recently, researchers have discovered that parental divorce during childhood does in fact have an impact on children later in life (Christensen & Brooks, 2001; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Christensen and Brooks (2001) found that adult children who experienced their parents’ divorce as children encountered more relationship problems and possessed a lower overall quality of life (Christensen & Brooks, 2001).

Amato and Keith (1991) utilized meta-analysis to compare 92 studies on parental divorce and its effects on children over a period of forty years. The decades were divided into three eras: 1950-1969, 1970-1979, and 1980-1989. Amato and Keith examined variables such as school achievement, conduct, psychological adjustment, self-concept, social adjustment, mother-child
relations, and father-child relations between children from intact families and children from
divorced families. In the long-term, young adults from divorced families experienced lower
academic achievement, an increase in behavior problems, more negative self-concepts, and an
increase in social relationships. The results revealed that divorce had stronger effects on boys
than on girls in some areas (Amato & Keith, 1991).

In a more recent study, Amato (2001) analyzed 67 studies published in the 1990’s.
Compared with children from continuously intact homes, children from divorced homes
continued to score significantly lower on measures of academic achievement, conduct,
psychological adjustment, self-concept, and social relations. A possible explanation for the gap
in well-being between children from divorced homes and intact homes increasing in the 1990’s,
is that living in an intact home may have been more beneficial. With the economy expanding in
the United States in the 1990’s, the group that experienced the largest amount of growth in
income consisted of intact families with both parents working. While married couples had both
husband and wife bringing in incomes, single parent homes experienced a decrease in economic
resources in the 1990’s. Therefore, children from intact homes may have had more opportunities
to achieve more educationally and socially due to the increased household income. In addition,
Amato (2001) found that both boys and girls were significantly affected by divorce and display
poor outcomes in both the short-term and in the long-term (Amato, 2001).

In contrast to the findings that children are affected by divorce in the short-term as well
as long-term (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002; Taylor, 2001), Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) found
that some of the young adults who seemed calm and untroubled at younger ages were later
involved in multiple romantic relationships and impulsive marriages that ended in early divorce.
Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) concluded that one cannot predict long-term effects of divorce
on children from how they react shortly after their parents’ divorce. Wallerstein (1991) noted
that the long-term psychological consequences appear the most when the children from divorce
homes are on the verge of adulthood and are examining major life decisions such as love,
commitment, and marriage. Wallerstein (1991) also stated that there are other important
transitions that occur in young adulthood that may also initiate problems in young adults from
divorced homes. These transitions include completing education goals, the establishment of
independence from parents, romantic relationships, and entering into employment or a career.
Wallerstein explained that these transitions help establish the young adults identity as an adult
Effects of Parent-Child Relationships on Parent-Young Adult Relationships

Amato and Booth (1996) studied parent-child relationships and its effects on later parent-young adult relationships by using national longitudinal data to examine parent-child relationships before and after parental divorce. They found that parent-child relationships after divorce are frequently problematic (Amato & Booth, 1996) and there is a threat to the loss of parent-child relationships (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). Although mother-child relationships displayed some tension after divorce, it was father-child relationships that seemed to decrease over time. Because mothers usually gain custody over their children after divorce, relations between children and their fathers are extremely fragile for some time (Amato & Booth, 1996). According to Amato and Keith (1991), reduced paternal contact is one of the most consistent and definite effects of divorce on children. In a similar study, Zill et al., (1993) also found that the majority of the participants had poor relationships with their fathers. This finding was not surprising, given the fact that most fathers after divorce or separation do not provide financial support nor continue to regularly contact their children. Furthermore, fathers become more detached and less nurturing towards their children after divorce (Furstenberg, Nord, Peterson, & Zill, 1983).

Amato and Booth (1996) found that divorce appears to have a unique effect on fathers’ affection for their children but not on mothers’ affection for their children. Amato and Booth’s found that about 15% of fathers had sole or joint custody of children following divorce. In a similar study, Amato and Keith (1991) found that parental divorce was significantly associated with poorer relationships with both parents, although the mean effect sizes were stronger for fathers (-.26) than for mothers (-.19). Given the fact that divorce usually results in father and children living in different residences, it is not unexpected that divorce is followed by a further decline in the fathers’ relations with their children (Amato & Booth, 1996). These researchers explained that marital quality has an impact on the parents’ relations with their children. They believed that marital problems might distract parents, and as a result, may leave them emotionally unavailable and incapable of dealing with their children’s needs. Marital problems may also result in parents being more irritable and argumentative when dealing with their children (Amato & Booth, 1996).

Poor parent-child relationships continuously affect children as they enter into young adulthood (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). Dunlop (1996) found that parent-young adult relationships are very important for children from divorced and intact homes. He found that all
of the young adults between the ages of 23 and 27 from divorced homes were still in contact with their mothers and had many positive comments to make about them. Dunlop (1996) reported that only half of the young adults from divorced homes spoke positively about their fathers. In Darlington’s (2001) qualitative study, most of the young adults had positive and healthy relationships with both parents. Many of the young adults who had negative feelings towards one parent after the divorce, had a better view of them in young adulthood. Some of the participants explained that they were able to see the point of view of the other parent now that they were older. They also described themselves as now having an active role in maintaining their relationships with their parents (Darlington, 2001).

In contrast to the above, Zill et al., (1993) found a significant effect of divorce on mother-child relationship in young adulthood. Girls in this study were found to be more likely than boys to respond to divorce by developing poor relationships with their mothers when they are young adults, but not in their adolescent years. Interestingly, this is consistent with Wallerstein’s (1991) notion that one cannot predict long-term effects of divorce on children from how they react soon after their parents’ divorce such as in the adolescent years. Wallerstein (1991) further stated that long-term consequences appear at their worst when the child is a young adult and making major life decisions. Zill et al., (1993) found that 29% of young adult women from divorced homes revealed poor relationships with their mothers whereas only 14% of young adult women from intact families had poor relationships with their mothers. Interestingly, young adult men from divorced families and young adult men from intact families had about the same percentage of poor relationships with their mothers – 19% and 20% (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993).

Effects of Parent-Child Relationships on Romantic Relationships

The parents of a child are usually one of the child’s first models of behavior (Bandura, 1989), and the marital relationship of parents is usually the first intimate relationship that children observe (Westervelt & Vandenberg, 1997). Many researchers (Amato & Booth, 1996; Franklin, Janoff-Bullman, & Roberts, 1990) have found that children who come from divorced homes typically have less contact with the non-custodial parent, and as time passes, the parent-child relationship further deteriorates. As the non-custodial parent and the child have less contact throughout the years, the parental model for intimate relationships is observed less, perhaps not even at all. As these children of divorce reach young adulthood, they have been
found to display problems when dealing with intimate relationships (Franklin, Janoff-Bullman, & Roberts, 1990).

Mahl (2001) interviewed 28 college students about their romantic relationships and their experiences related to their parents’ divorce. The results demonstrated the importance of parent-child relationships on the long-term adjustment of children from divorced homes. When the participants were asked what it takes to have a successful romantic relationship, most participants expressed the same concepts such as trust, communication, arguments, intimacy, and compatibility. Mahl also discovered that connections stemmed linking the participant’s perceptions of romantic relationships and the parent-child relationships that developed after the parental divorce. Many of the young adults continued to keep a close relationship with their parents following the divorce. Mahl also found that young adults who have close relationships with their parents strive to develop romantic relationships which emphasize characteristics that are found in their relationships with their parents such as intimacy, communication, and nurturing. During the interviews in this study, many participants revealed that while they felt cautious about marriage, they did not carry such caution when dealing with romantic relationships. In fact, many of the participants believed that their relationships would be successful and they would not worry about being in a romantic relationship (Mahl, 2001).

Mahl (2001) found that some participants did not maintain a relationship with their parents, including decreased monitoring and nurturing. Individuals who were not close to their parents following the divorce seemed to have a difficult time connecting with their romantic partners. One participant explained that following her parents’ divorce her mother was no longer concerned about her children’s lives, and instead focused on her own romantic relationships. Along with her mother not paying attention to them, their father moved away shortly after the divorce and kept little contact with the children. With both parents showing little concern for their children after the divorce, the children were left without supervision. When describing her first romantic relationship, she revealed the impact that her mother’s “betrayal” had on her ability to trust her first boyfriend and feel comfortable in the relationship. Mahl suggested that she had a difficult time trusting her boyfriend for two possible reasons. For one, she may have feared that her boyfriend would reject her if he did not feel the same way she did. Second, because her emotional attachment to her mother had been disturbed after the divorce, she lacked the model (her mother) of how to feel secure in her romantic relationships. Her father was also absent after the divorce, which could also have contributed to her fears in her romantic
relationship (Mahl, 2001).

The father plays a vital role in supporting his children’s capacity for positive intimacy (Biller, 1993). As a result, when children from divorced homes reach young adulthood and encounter romantic relationships and intimacy, they may lack the proper skills to maintain positive romantic relationships (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). Schaick & Stolberg found that parental involvement is equally important for all children, regardless of the gender. They also found that paternal involvement is a powerful influence on young adult romantic relationships. High levels of reported paternal involvement were found to predict high levels of intimacy, commitment, and trust in young adult intimate relationships. Low levels of paternal involvement were found to predict high levels of insecure attachment styles in young adult romantic relationships. Perhaps the young adults from divorced homes may be fearful that their relationships will end just like their parents, and as a result, fear emotional intimacy. Amato and Booth (1991) found that greater marital instability, lower marital happiness, and lower spousal interaction in young adult children are all associated with poor father-child relationships.

**Intimacy in Young Adult Romantic Relationships from Divorced Homes**

While this research has mainly focused on the impact divorce has on the mental health and well-being of young adults, some researchers have focused in on the impact parental divorce has on future intimate relationships (Garbari & Rosen, 1992; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002), attitudes towards marriage, and attitudes towards divorce (Cartwright, 2005; Darlington, 2001). The ability to maintain successful social and intimate relationships is a necessary part of life. In order to achieve successful romantic relationships, each person must establish an adequate level of intimacy with each other (Johnston & Thomas, 1996). Unfortunately, young adults who come from divorced homes usually develop negative expectations of social and intimate relationships (Mahl, 2001). Many young adults who experienced parental divorce as children confront issues of love, commitment, and marriage with anxiety and sometimes with great concern about betrayal, abandonment, and not being loved (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) discovered that young adults may find it difficult to become intimate in relationships and believe that they may not be able to be stable and faithful (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

On the other hand, some researchers have found that young adults who experienced parental divorce during their childhood years also regularly display accelerated courtship patterns and interest in relationships (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Hepworth and Ryder (1984)
supported this idea when they found that adults from divorced families were very interested in being in at least some kind of relationship, regardless of whether the relationship was serious or casual. Gabardi and Rosen (1992) found that children of divorced parents also begin their relationship careers earlier, become sexually active at a younger age, have a greater number of sexual partners, have shorter relationships, and have a more negative opinion of their romantic relationships.

Experiencing parental divorce may also increase insecure attachments in young adult relationships, resulting in young adults who seek out relationships, but at the same time fear abandonment (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Researchers have proposed possible explanations behind young adults and their jumping feet first into relationships after observing their parents’ divorce. One explanation may be that children develop a fear of abandonment during the divorce process, and carry that insecurity on into their young adult relationships (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980). Children of divorce may express their insecurity about being in an intimate relationship by hastily jumping into physical intimacy (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Researchers have supported the idea that children who are neglected sometimes fear intimacy and abandonment (Toomey & Nelson, 2001). Toomey and Nelson (2001) found that children who have witnessed divorce first hand learn to depend on others for their emotional needs and security, and they may also learn to settle for any relationship, even a bad one, just to avoid being alone.

Cartwright (2005) focused on gaining further insight into the life-experiences of young adults whose parents separated/divorced during childhood or adolescence, and to attain insight into their understanding of the impact it has had on their lives and will have in the future. Cartwright conducted forty life-story interviews with participants ranging from 19 to 29 years old. The majority of the participants considered that they had experienced or at the present time were experiencing negative effects in their lives. These included problems with parent(s), problems in intimate relationships, and problems in their own emotional well-being in every day life. Many participants described problems with not trusting others, communication difficulties, self-esteem issues, being too emotional, and feelings of stress related to family experiences. For many of the participants, these negative feelings extended to doubts about marriage as well. One of her participants explained, “My whole life I have never wanted to get married. I’ve always been like: No way would I get married if you’re just going to get divorced”. Some of the participants in the study often linked their doubts about marriage with their observations of their parents’ marriage falling apart (Cartwright, 2005, p.133).
Cartwright (2005) also reported that many of the participants mentioned a lack of a role model for a good relationship and related this with a lack of confidence in being able to maintain an intimate relationship. One of her participants stated “One thing is I don’t feel like I have a role model relationship to kind of follow, so it’s always like, how do you go about conducting one?” (Cartwright, 2005, p.133). Several other studies have supported the idea that intimacy, security, commitment, and trust in adult relationships are often threatened by experiencing a parental divorce sometimes during childhood (Mahl, 2001; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002; Schaick & Stolberg, 2001; Toomey & Nelson, 2001).

Some of the participants in Mahl’s (2001) study were able to point out their parents’ problems in their marriage and strive to not make the same mistakes in their own romantic relationships. One participant described how her parents did not communicate and were never affectionate in their relationship. In response to her observations of her parents’ communication problems, the participant emphasized the importance of communication as a key to solving problems that she may encounter in her own romantic relationships. Wallerstein (1985) found that the young adults from her study were apprehensive about repeating their parents’ pattern of unhappy marriage and divorce, and did not want to expose children of their own to divorce. Johnston and Thomas (1996) proposed that feelings of apprehension towards marriage may, in part, be due to witnessing parental divorce and remembering the pain that it caused their parents as well as themselves.

Darlington (2001) reported that when considering their own future relationships, young adults who observed parental divorce as children were more likely to express a desire not to divorce themselves. The participants reported a variety of strategies they would use to not repeat their parents’ patterns of divorce such as not rushing into romantic relationships, developing positive relationship skills, and making sure they obtained financial security before engaging in marriage and having children. Some of Darlington’s (2001) participants considered the possibility that they may find themselves in a relationship where divorce is inevitable. These young adults explained that if divorce was the only option, then they would make the transition for the child as smooth as possible. If divorce does occur, the participants suggested that they would try not to argue in front of their children, to keep close contact with their children, to respect their wishes on where they want to live, and leave open the opportunity that they may change their mind in the future (Darlington, 2001).
Gender Differences in Young Adults from Divorced Homes

The experience of parental divorce may affect men and women in different ways (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Gender differences have been found in conflict, communication styles, and intimacy of men and women from divorced homes. Studies on young adults of divorce have shown that women are more negatively affected by memories of the dissolution of their parents’ marriage (Wallerstein, 1991). Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1989) found that women tended to appear better off psychologically than men shortly after the divorce of their parents, but then during adolescent and young adulthood the gender differences seemed to reverse. As a result, young adult women experience more problems, while men seemed to improve over time (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

Many researchers describe women as the barometer of the emotional well-being of the relationship (Gottman, 1994). In other words, women typically have the role of bringing up conflict situations and keeping the couple on a problem-solving path (Gottman, 1994). They are also known for dissipating negative behavior by injecting humor, caring, and concern at the appropriate time (Gottman, 1994). Such women actually respond to insecurities by demanding more from their partners than they ordinarily would (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Amato and Booth (1994) proposed that women are more likely to lose contact with their fathers after parental divorce, which can increase insecure attachments in young adult relationships. When fathers are not involved or do not have continuous contact with their children, young adults tend to be more insecure when dealing with issues of intimacy (Summers et al., 1998). The increased insecurity may cause them to want intimate relationships yet at the same time fear abandonment (Amato & Booth, 1994).

Sinclair and Nelson (1998) found that women report higher frequency of intimacy than men, which supports Garbari and Rosen’s (1992) findings. These researchers suggest that sex-role socialization may cause men and women to act differently about intimacy. Women feel more comfortable expressing their emotions, and as a result, increasing their capacity for intimacy in romantic relationships. Men are seen as not having the same ability to express their emotions compared to women; therefore, they may experience lower levels of intimacy (Garbari & Rosen, 1992). Cooney (1994) proposed that daughters of divorce have learned to deal with the absence of a father figure by searching for a male partner, and they discovered that they also exhibit higher levels of promiscuity and engage in more relationships than males from divorced homes.
Mullett and Stolberg (2002) assessed the long-term impact of experiencing parental divorce on young adult intimate relationships. Differences in intimacy levels and communication patterns were evaluated in four types of couples: (a) those in which neither young adult experienced parental divorce, (b) only the male young adult experienced parental divorce, (c) only the young female adult experienced parental divorce, or (d) both young adults experienced parental divorce. Participants were 136 undergraduate college students between the ages of 18 and 30 who had been in a relationship for at least 3 months. Similar to Summers et al.’s (1998) findings, Mullett and Stolberg (2002) reported that couples in which the woman experienced parental divorce had significantly lower levels of intimacy and constructive communication, and higher levels of demand-withdrawal patterns and avoidance of conflict. Mullett and Stolberg (2002) found that divorce did not appear to influence intimacy and communication patterns of couples in which the young adult male experienced parental divorce. Interestingly, they found that young adult intimacy levels and communication patterns were not significantly different from those in couples in which neither men or women experienced parental divorce. They were also more likely to choose a partner with opposite conflict management styles from their mothers. Men tend to choose a partner who could handle conflict in a positive manner, resulting in conflict that is less threatening (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Young adult men from divorced homes have also been found to have less favorable attitudes towards marriage than women from divorced homes (Jennings, Salts, & Smith, 1991).

Mullett and Stolberg (2002) hypothesized that when a couple had both experienced parental divorce there would be a compounded effect on intimacy and communication patterns in the relationship, but that was not the case in this study. Even though young adult women from divorced homes displayed significantly lower levels of intimacy and constructive communication, and higher levels of demand-withdrawal patterns and avoidance of conflict, Mullett and Stolberg found that divorce did not impact men in the same negative way. As a result, they concluded that couples in which both experienced parental divorce would probably still have problems in intimacy and communication, but it would not be a compounded effect as predicted by the researchers.

Relationships in which the woman experienced childhood parental divorce may be at particular risk for problems because they may not have learned the proper communication skills from their parents. Gottman (1994) found that women who have experienced parental divorce at a young age may be at increased risk for dissolution in a relationship because they may not have
developed the necessary skills to communicate in a positive manner. Couples in which the woman experienced parental divorce have higher levels of negative verbal communication than couples in which neither person experienced parental divorce (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Furthermore, women who have experienced parental divorce may, as a result, display higher levels of negative verbal and non-verbal communication than normal (Gottman, 1994). A possible explanation is that in divorcing families, daughters tend to become more directly involved in the conflict and usually side with the mother and against the father (Cummings, Vogel, Cummings, & El-Sheikh, 1989). As a result, they may learn negative communication patterns from their involvement in the marital conflict and taking sides as a child. Consequently, young adult women may have difficulty dealing with conflict and be at an increased risk for divorce in the future (Gottman, 1994). In Amato and Keith’s (1991) study, they found that married women from divorced families were more likely to divorce themselves when compared to married men from divorced families.

**Intact Homes vs. Divorced Homes – Parent-Young Adult Relationships**

Recent research has also shown that parent-child relationships are different when comparing young adults from intact homes and young adults from divorced homes (Amato & Booth, 1991; Booth & Amato, 1994; Cooney, 1994). Young adults from divorced homes feel less affection for their parents and have less contact with their parents than young adults from intact homes (Amato & Booth, 1991). Cooney (1994) examined the association between recent parental divorce and parent-child relations from young adults between the ages of 18 to 23. Her study examined the influence of recent parental divorce on contact and affective relations between 485 white young adults and their parents. Results showed that young adults from divorced homes had less contact with their fathers, and daughters from divorced homes reported less intimacy in relation to their fathers than young adults from intact homes. Interestingly, relations with mothers did not differ between young adults from intact homes and young adults from divorced homes. The majority of young adults from intact homes reported at least weekly contact with their fathers (80%), while less than 60% of young adults from divorced homes had weekly contacts with their fathers. Practically none of the young adults from intact homes had such limited contact with their fathers (Cooney, 1994).

Cooney’s (1994) results demonstrated to a certain extent that young adults’ relationships with mothers and fathers are more closely linked in intact homes than in divorced homes. Sons from intact homes report a significantly stronger connection between their contact levels with
both the mother and father, than sons from divorced homes. For daughters, it is the connection between intimacy with both the mother and father that is significantly greater in intact homes than in divorced homes. Based on these findings, Cooney (1994) concluded that parent-child relationships in intact homes appear to function as a system of relationships (interdependent on one another), whereas, those in divorced homes exist basically separate from one another.

**Intact Homes vs. Divorced Homes – Romantic Relationships**

Some researchers have found that young adults from divorced families differ significantly from those from intact homes when dealing with relationships. Young adults who experienced their parents’ divorce, compared to those whose parents remained continuously married, are more likely to have problems in their intimate relationships with hurt feelings, communication, and anger (Amato, 1996). Westervelt and Vandenberg’s (1997) findings also revealed that young adults from divorced families reported less intimate relationships than those from intact families. Compared to adults from intact homes, young adults from divorced homes have been found to be less trusting of their partners and more hesitant to get involved in intimate relationships on a deeper emotional level as they fear being rejected and hurt (Darlington, 2001; Johnston & Thomas, 1996). This finding is not surprising since many researchers (Amato & Booth, 1991; Bandura, 1989; Westervelt & Vandenberg, 1997) have found that parents serve as a child’s first model. If children observe their parents in a healthy relationship, they may learn to utilize their parents’ successful behavior in their own future relationships (Amato, 1996). Whereas, if they observe their parents in a relationship that falls apart, they may find it harder to maintain their own relationships in the future (Westervelt & Vandenberg, 1997).

Franklin et al., (1990) studied the issue of trust concerning intimate relationships as well as social relationships and found that young adults from divorced homes have a hard time trusting intimate partners, but do not differ from young adults from intact families on measures of general trust in people. Consequently, young adults of divorce may be more timid about getting involved in intimate relationships, but divorce does not seem to affect their ability to trust others in social relationships (Franklin, Janoff-Bullman, & Roberts, 1990).

In contrast, couples in which one or both of the people have experienced parental divorce as a child may notice higher levels of negative verbal and non-verbal communication than couples from intact homes (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Couples from divorced homes have actually been found to display significantly lower rates of positive problem solving (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). Couples from intact homes are more likely to have been exposed to more
successful models of problem solving and more positive relationships with their parents, which
decrease their fear of intimacy. In other words, couples from intact homes may have learned
more successful problem solving skills from their parents, which would increase their level of
intimacy and result in a decreased risk of divorce (Gottman, 1994).

Although young adults from intact homes may be at a lower risk for divorce, couples
from divorced families would be at a noticeably increased risk of divorce for the exact opposite
reasons (Gottman, 1994). Young adults from divorced homes may fear intimacy or desire
different levels of intimacy, which would eventually create demand-withdrawal patterns.
Furthermore, both partners may fear and avoid conflict, which can result in a decrease in
intimacy over time and eventually hurl them into an uncontrollable spiral towards the divorce
they were trying to avoid in the first place (Gottman, 1994). Amato and Keith (1991) also found
that young adults who experienced divorce as children held more positive attitudes towards
divorce later in life than young adults who grew up in intact homes (Amato & Keith, 1991).

Although some researchers have found that young adults who experienced their parents’
divorce, compared to those whose parents remained continuously married, were more likely to
have problems in their intimate relationships (Amato, 1996), other researchers beg to differ.
Sinclair and Nelson (1998) studied the impact parental divorce has on college students from
divorced and intact homes on romantic relationship belief and intimacy. They found no
significant difference in intimacy levels in romantic relationships between young adults from
divorced homes and young adults from intact homes. In a similar study, Garbari and Rosen
(1992) came to the same conclusion when they compared intimacy in romantic relationships of
young adults from divorced homes and intact homes. The researchers found that there were no
differences between students from divorced homes and intact homes in measures of intimacy,
attitudes towards marriage, and dating satisfaction.

Summary

According to research, divorce in families increases the stress levels of the marital couple
as well as their children. Children who experience divorce often suffer for several years from
psychological and social difficulties caused by the stress after the divorce, and the damage done
can also indirectly continue on into their young adult years. Although researchers have been
studying the short-term effects of divorce on children for decades, little is actually known about
the long-term effects of divorce. Many young adults who experienced their parents’ divorce
confront issues of love, commitment, and marriage with anxiety, sometimes with great concern
about betrayal, abandonment, and not being loved. Some researchers have suggested that childhood parental divorce may affect parent-child relationships, as well as future romantic relationships for young adults in a negative way.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample in this study consisted of 63 undergraduate students who attended a basic studies course at Florida State University. The participant’s ages were between 18-24 years of age with the average age being 19 years and 5 months old. There were 45 women and 18 men who agreed to participate. Twenty two participants were from divorced families and 41 participants were from intact families. The participant’s ethnic backgrounds were also recorded which included 49 Caucasian students, 8 African American students, 4 Hispanic students, 1 Asian American student, and 1 Other.

Instrumentation

Three measures used in this study included: Personal Information Questionnaire (designed by the researcher), Parent-Child Relations Scale (Cooney, 1994), and the Fear of Intimacy Scale (Descutner & Thelen, 1991).

Personal Information Questionnaire. The Personal Information Questionnaire contained a total of 11 questions created by the researcher. All students were asked questions regarding age, gender, race/ethnicity, current year in college, personal marital status, and parental marital status. Students of divorced parents were asked to respond to questions regarding their age at parental separation, living arrangements with their parents after the divorce, and satisfaction with their relationships with both parents.

Parent-Child Relations Scale. Cooney’s (1994) Parent-Child Relations Scale was adapted from Walker and Thompson (1983). The Parent-Child Relations Scale is a 15-item scale that assesses the affective closeness between adult children and each of their parents. The scale asks the participants to respond to statements dealing with feelings between the participants and each of their parents (“you respect each other,” “you are honest with each other”), which they report to be either often, sometimes, hardly ever, or never true of the parent-child relationship. Scores range from 15 to 60, with high scores representing greater parent-child intimacy. The Cronbach’s alphas for the mother-child and father-child scales were .92 and .96.

Fear of Intimacy Scale. The Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) developed by Descutner and Thelen (1991) was used to measure comfort with intimacy. The Fear of Intimacy Scale (FIS) is a 35-item instrument that measures the level of fear of intimacy the participants have in
relationships. The FIS consists of two parts. Part A contains 30 statements that require respondents to imagine themselves in a close dating relationship and to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement on a five-point likert scale. Part B consists of five statements pertaining to their past relationships that respondents rate on a five-point likert scale. Scores can range from 35 to 175. The higher the FIS score the lower the fear of intimate relationships. Descutner and Thelen (1991) have shown the scale to be a valid and reliable measure of an individual’s anxiety about close dating relationships. The FIS has exceptional internal consistency, with an alpha of .93. The FIS also has good construct validity when compared to several other measures (Descutner & Thelen, 1991).

**Procedure**

First, the researcher received Departmental permission to conduct the study. After IRB permission was granted to conduct the study, the researcher administered the questionnaires to 100 undergraduate students in a basic studies class during one 50 minute class period. The researcher informed the students that the focus of the study was on perceptions of young adults who have experienced divorce and those who have not with regard to parent-child relationships and romantic relationships. Participants were told that they had to be 18 years of age or older to participate in the study. Consent forms were collected from participants and the questionnaires were distributed. It took participants approximately 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

**Hypotheses and Data Analyses**

**Hypothesis 1.** Young adults from divorced families will report more negative relationships with their parents (as measured by the Parent-Child Relations Scale) than young adults from intact families. This hypothesis was tested by using a T-test.

**Hypothesis 2.** Young adults from divorced families will have more problems with intimacy (as measured by the Fear of Intimacy Scale) than young adults from intact families. This hypothesis was tested by using a T-test.

**Hypothesis 3a.** Young adult women who have experienced divorce in their families will report more negative parent-child relationships than young adult men who have experienced divorce in their families. This hypothesis was tested by using a T-test.

**Hypothesis 3b.** Young adult women who have experienced divorce in their families will report more problems with intimacy than young adult men who have experienced divorce in their families. This hypothesis was tested by using a T-test.
**Hypothesis 4a.** Young adults who have experienced divorce in their families before the age of 6 will report more negative parent-child relationships than young adults who have experienced divorce in their families after the age of 6. This hypothesis was tested by using a T-test.

**Hypothesis 4b.** Young adults who have experienced divorce in their families before the age of 6 will report more problems with intimacy than young adults who have experienced divorce in their families after the age of 6. This hypothesis was tested by using a T-test.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

The perceptions of young adults who have experienced parental divorce and those who have not with regard to parent-child relationships and romantic relationships were examined. From the one hundred young adult students who were asked to participate, sixty-three young adults (22 students from divorced homes and 41 students from intact homes) between the ages of 18 to 24 agreed to participate in the questionnaire session for the study. During the session participants completed a questionnaire packet containing 3 questionnaires: Personal Information Questionnaire (designed by the researcher), Parent-Child Relations Scale (Cooney, 1994 adapted from Walker & Thompson, 1983), and the Fear of Intimacy Scale (Descutner & Thelen, 1991).

The young adult students’ responses were analyzed by using T-tests. The results are as follows:

Hypothesis 1:

Young adults from divorced families will report more negative relationships with their parents (as measured by the Parent-Child Relations Scale) than young adults from intact families. The first hypothesis was supported ($p<.000$). Young adult students from intact families had higher mean scores ($M= 115.20, S.D.=8.31$) on the parent-child measure than did young adults from divorced homes ($M=100.4, S.D=17.3$). These scores indicate that the young adults from intact families showed greater parent-child intimacy than the young adults from divorced homes. Means and standard deviations for the Parent-Child Relations Scale scores for young adults who have experienced divorce and those who have not are presented in Table 1.

Hypothesis 2:

Young adults from divorced families will have more problems with intimacy (as measured by the Fear of Intimacy Scale) than young adults from intact families. The second hypothesis was not supported ($p< 0.345$). Although mean scores on the fear of intimacy scale were higher for students from divorced families ($M=71.6, S.D.=19.5$) than they were for students from intact families ($M=66.6, S.D.=20.1$), these mean score differences were not statistically significant. These scores indicate that the students from divorced homes showed slightly lower fears of intimacy than the students from intact
homes. Means and standard deviations for the Fear of Intimacy Scale scores for young adults who have experienced divorce and those who have not are presented in Table 1.

**Hypothesis 3a:**

Young adult women who have experienced divorce in their families will report more negative parent-child relationships than young adult men who have experienced divorce in their families. The hypothesis was not supported ($\rho< .171$). Mean scores for females (M=97.6, S.D.=18.6) were somewhat lower than males (M=109.80, S.D.=7.16) but not significantly different. These scores indicate that the female students from divorced homes showed less parent-child intimacy than the male students from divorced homes. Means and standard deviations for the Parent-Child Relations Scale scores for young adults from divorced families are presented in Table 2.

**Hypothesis 3b:**

Young adult women who have experienced divorce in their families will report more problems with intimacy than young adult men who have experienced divorce in their families. The hypothesis was not supported ($\rho< .388$). Although scores by women were higher (M=73.6, S.D.=20.6) than scores for men (M=64.8, S.D.=14.4), these scores were not significantly different. These scores indicate that the female students from divorced homes showed less fear of intimacy than the male students from divorced homes. Means and standard deviations for the Fear of Intimacy Scale scores for young adults from divorced families are presented in Table 2.

**Hypothesis 4a:**

Young adults who have experienced divorce in their families before the age of 6 will report more negative parent-child relationships than young adults who have experienced divorce in their families after the age of 6. The hypothesis was not supported ($\rho< 0.289$). Although scores by young adults who experienced parental divorce before the age of 6 were lower (M=96.4, S.D.=17.3) than scores for young adults who experienced parental divorce after the age of 6 (M=104.4, S.D.=17.1), these scores were not significantly different. These scores indicate that the students from divorced homes who experienced parental divorce before the age of 6 showed slightly less parent-child intimacy than the students from divorced homes who experienced divorce after the age of 6. Means and standard deviations for the Parent-Child Relations Scale scores for
young adults who have experienced divorce before the age of 6 and those who have experienced divorce after the age of 6 are presented in Table 3.

Hypothesis 4b:

Young adults who have experienced divorce in their families before the age of 6 will report more problems with intimacy than young adults who have experienced divorce in their families after the age of 6. The hypothesis was not supported ($p<0.437$). Although scores by young adults who experienced parental divorce before the age of 6 were lower ($M=68.3$, $S.D.=18.1$) than scores for young adults who experienced parental divorce after the age of 6 ($M=74.9$, $S.D.=21.0$), these scores were not significantly different. These scores indicate that the students from divorced homes who experienced parental divorce before the age of 6 showed a slightly greater fear of intimacy than the students from divorced homes who experienced divorce after the age of 6. Means and standard deviations for the Fear of Intimacy Scale scores for young adults who experienced divorce before the age of 6 and those who experienced divorce after the age of 6 are presented in Table 3.
Table 1
Means and standard deviations for the Parent-Child Relations Scale and FIS scores for young adults who have experienced divorce and those who have not (N=63)

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<th>Intact Homes (n=41)</th>
<th>T-value</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Relations Scale</td>
<td>Mean 100.4</td>
<td>115.20</td>
<td>-4.61*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 17.3</td>
<td>8.31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fear of Intimacy Scale</td>
<td>Mean 71.6</td>
<td>66.6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SD 19.5</td>
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* p<.01
Table 2
Means and standard deviations for the Parent-Child Relations Scale and FIS scores for young adult females and males who have experienced divorce (N=22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Females (n=17)</th>
<th>Males (n=5)</th>
<th>T-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Relations Scale</td>
<td>97.6</td>
<td>109.80</td>
<td>-1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>7.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Intimacy Scale</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Means and standard deviations for the Parent-Child Relations Scale and FIS scores for young adults who experienced divorce before the age of 6 and those who experienced divorce after the age of 6 (N=22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures:</th>
<th>Before the Age of 6</th>
<th>After the Age of 6</th>
<th>T-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=11)</td>
<td>(n=11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Child Relations Scale</td>
<td>Mean 96.4</td>
<td>Mean 104.4</td>
<td>-1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 17.3</td>
<td>SD 17.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of Intimacy Scale</td>
<td>Mean 68.3</td>
<td>Mean 74.9</td>
<td>-0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD 18.1</td>
<td>SD 21.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in parent-child relationships and intimacy issues among young adults who have experienced parental divorce and those who have not. In this chapter, findings will be discussed and compared with previous research on the subject. In addition, implications for practice and future research will also be discussed.

Every year, approximately one and one-half million children experience their parents’ divorce (Mullett & Stolberg, 2002, p. 40). Even though divorce is such a common problem in our country, little is actually known about the long-term effects of divorce on children of the divorcing parents. Past research (Taylor, 2001; Zill et al., 1993) has suggested that parental divorce may be related to difficulties in “family formation” during the young adulthood years. For example, Taylor (2001) found from his findings that children can suffer for many years from psychological and social difficulties related to the stresses of divorce, and these difficulties can even continue into the young adulthood years. Some of the children in his study revealed that they felt that their parents were ignoring their emotional needs that were brought on by the divorce, and over half of the participants felt that they were in some way responsible for their parents’ divorce. Some of the participants even suggested that their parents needed counseling and education to learn communication and dispute resolution skills (Taylor, 2001).

The results of this study demonstrated that parental divorce does have a negative effect on parent-child relationships in the young adulthood years. The young adult men and women who had experienced divorce reported having more negative relationships with their parents when compared to young adults who had not experienced their parents’ divorce. In other words, many of the young adults from divorced homes felt that they were not as close to their parents, able to trust them as much, or even respect each other when compared to the young adults from intact homes. These findings are consistent with those of Cartwright (2005). Cartwright (2005) gathered 40 life-story interviews for her study and found that the participants generally talked more frequently about the negative effects their parents’ divorce had on them. Seventy percent of the participants linked current emotional well-being problems such as self-esteem, self concept, trust in others, communication, and jealousy to divorce-related experiences. Many of the participants felt that their parents were being selfish for separating or making other decisions
that had a negative effect on them. Some even expressed a loss of respect for their parents after the divorce (Cartwright, 2005).

Social Learning theorists emphasize the importance of observing and modeling the behaviors and reactions of others. Bandura (1989) believed that human behavior was learned through observation, which is known as the process of modeling. The parents of a child are usually one of the child’s first models of behavior; therefore, it makes sense that young adults who have experienced divorce may have a different idea of how to behave when interacting with others including parents, family members, friends, peers, etc. Amato (1996) proposed that children from divorced families may have observed poor models of behavior from their parents, and may not have learned the skills and attitudes that facilitate successful functioning in relationships. Amato also suggested that children who have experienced parental divorce may have also developed other bad traits, including problems with trust and commitment that add to the stress in relationships (Amato, 1996).

Previous studies have discovered that many young adults who have experienced their parents’ divorce encounter problems with love, commitment and marriage, and sometimes have concerns about betrayal and not being loved (Mahl, 2001). Mahl used unstructured interviews to study the relationship between parental divorce and romantic relationships. Three phases of data collection can be distinguished in his study. The first phase consisted of 14 interviews that focused on participants describing incidents from the past and/or current romantic relationships. The second phase consisted of 4 interviews that focused on the connection between participants’ conceptualizations of romantic relationships and their family experiences. The third phase consisted of 3 test cases that supported the initial theory and provided the researcher the ability to conclude that the data collection was complete (Mahl, 2001).

Mullett and Stolberg (2002) suggested that children may learn many of their intimate communication skills from their family of origin. Unfortunately, parental divorce oftentimes exposes children to models of improper communication and conflict management tactics (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Therefore, children who have experienced their parents’ divorce may not have had good role models for their own appropriate conflict resolution and problem solving skills (Amato, 1996). Despite these findings, participants in this study who had experienced divorce did not differ significantly from participants who had not experienced divorce on the Fear of Intimacy Scale. Although the mean scores on the Fear of Intimacy Scale were slightly higher for young adults who had experienced divorce when compared to young adults who had
not, the differences were not statistically significant. The small sample size for this study may be one reason for this lack of a difference. There were only 22 participants from divorced families, and most of these participants were women. Another explanation for the lack of differences may be due to the Fear of Intimacy measure and its sensitivity to uncovering differences for young adults. The FIS asks participants to rate their behavior in an imagined relationship. Perhaps using a scale such as the Miller Social Intimacy Scale, which is designed to measure the level of intimacy the participant has currently experienced, would be better able to show a statistically significant difference. The Cronbach’s alpha for the MSIS was 0.9272; therefore, this measure might be more statistically reliable.

There were no gender differences in parent-child relations and fear of intimacy for participants in this study. There were only 5 male participants from divorced homes compared to 17 female participants from divorced homes. This disparate sample of men and women may also have contributed to the lack of statistically significant differences. Another possible reason for the lack of statistical significance may have been the measures used to obtain information about the participants’ parent-child relationships and romantic relationships. Perhaps utilizing more than one measure for each dependent variable might have influenced the results of this study. Darlington (2001) conducted a qualitative study using focused in-depth interviews to study the impact parental divorce had on young adults’ relationships with their parents and their attitudes towards relationships and marriage. Six major themes were found in her study including not wanting to rush into a relationship, the need for emotional independence, the need for financial security, not wanting to repeat the pattern of parental divorce, and the importance of communication in relationships (Darlington, 2001). Conducting similar in-depth interviews as well as using the Parent-Child Relations Scale and Fear of Intimacy Scale might have resulted in more statistically significant differences between the genders.

Previous research has found that younger children are more often vulnerable to the effects of parental divorce because they are less able to comprehend the problems occurring in their household when compared to older children (Zill et al., 1993). They reported that if parental divorce occurs before the age of 6, it poses more of a risk to young adults’ development than parental divorce later in childhood. Zill et al. also found that 18 to 22-year-old subjects whose parents separated or divorced before they were 6 years-old had considerably poorer relationships with both parents than young adults whose parents had not separated or divorced (Zill, et al., 1993). Researchers have suggested that when parents divorce early in a child’s life,
the child is more likely to miss out on significant developmental models and is also more likely to form misconstrued beliefs about their parents’ divorce (Westervelt & Vandenberg, 1997).

In the current study, no differences on the Parent-Child Relations Scale and the Fear of Intimacy Scale were found between participants who had experienced divorce before the age of six and those who had experienced divorce after the age of six. Again, sample size may have contributed to these findings. There were only 11 participants in the group of young adults who experienced divorce at the age of 6 and under, and there were only 11 participants in the group of young adults who experienced divorce after the age of 6. Despite the absence of statistically significant findings, the mean scores still suggest a slight trend. For example, the highest score of 126 (which means having a lower fear of intimacy) was given to a young adult who experienced divorce at the age of 16. The lowest scores of 44, 49, and 53 (which means having a higher fear of intimacy) were given to young adults who experienced divorce at the ages of 5 years old, 1 years old, and 2 months old respectively. Perhaps if there were more participants in each group, a more statistically significant difference might have been identified. Another explanation for the lack of significance might be due to the fact that this study used only one measure to study parent-child relationships and one measure to study romantic relationships. Possibly using multiple measures for each dependent variable such as the FIS, MSIS, Parent-Child Relations Scale, and an in-depth interview might have resulted in finding more statistically significant differences between young adults who experienced divorce before the age of 6 and young adults who experienced divorce after the age of 6.

One limitation of this study was that the sample was gathered from only one university setting. In the future, researchers should gather data from a wider variety of colleges and universities all over the country to hopefully enhance the quality of the sample. Another limitation of this study was that the sample did not include non-students. Future researchers should attempt to include not only college students, but also non-students so a wider variety of information and past experiences could be collected for data analysis. Another limitation of this study was that the parents of the young adults who participated in this study were not involved in this research experiment. In the future, researchers should perhaps involve both the young adults and their parents in the study to gain different perspectives on past experiences.

**Implications for Research and Practice**

This current study provides support for continuing research on the different perceptions young adults have (divorced vs. intact) when dealing with parent-child relationships and
romantic relationships. The results found from the Parent-Child Relations Scale comparing young adults from divorced homes with young adults from intact homes suggests that divorce does have a negative effect on parent-child relationships. It has been found in previous studies that poor parent-child relationships continuously affect children as they enter into young adulthood (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001). In addition, Dunlop (1996) found that parent-young adult relationships are very important for children from divorced and intact homes.

When considering the fact that this study’s results on parent-child relationships supported several past study’s findings that divorce does have a negative effect on parent-child relationships, parents in the process of divorce should be made aware of the possible effects their separation may have on their relationships with their children closely following the divorce as well as in the future. Perhaps when parents feel that divorce is the only option left, a relationship building class or counseling session between the parents and children involved in the divorce might be an appropriate recommendation. A relationship building class or counseling session could help parents and children stay connected in a positive way before, during, and after the divorce process so the parent-child relationships are not damaged from the separation. And since parent-child relationships are extremely important for development, even parents and children from intact homes should strongly consider participating in relationship building classes together to keep their relationships strong throughout the years.

Several studies have supported the idea that intimacy, security, commitment, and trust in adult relationships are often threatened by experiencing a parental divorce sometime during childhood (Schaick & Stolberg, 2001, p. 102). With that said, parents need to be made aware of the strong influence their actions have on their children’s present behavior as well as their future behavior. Parenting classes should be recommended to those going through the process of divorce to help them understand how their actions may affect their children when dealing with future relationships and to provide possible ways they can alleviate the stresses that arise from divorce. Family counseling may also be a good suggestion for families dealing with the stresses that are associated with the process of divorce so the parents and children can both have someone to help guide them and talk them through the difficult obstacles the separation may cause for the family members.

Researchers have reported that parental divorce during childhood does have an impact on children later in life (Christensen & Brooks, 2001; Mullett & Stolberg, 2002). In addition, Christensen and Brooks (2001) found that adult children who experienced their parents’ divorce
as children confronted more relationship problems and possessed a lower overall quality of life (Christensen & Brooks, 2001). Although only one hypothesis was supported in this study, previous research has found that parent-child relationships (Schaick & Stolberg, 2002) and romantic relationships (Westervelt & Vandenberg, 1997) are affected more negatively from experiencing parental divorce when compared to young adults from intact homes. Since the parents of a child are usually one of the child’s first models of behavior (Bandura, 1989), and the marital relationship of parents is usually the first intimate relationship that children observe (Westervelt & Vandenberg, 1997), divorce and its effects on children and young adults needs to be researched more in-depth in the future.

When observing the scores of the Parent-Child Relations Scale in the divorced group, it seems that the relationship between most of the participants and their mothers are strong, but when the scores dealing with the relationship with the fathers are observed, a greater difference can be seen. The majority of the Mother-Child Relations Scale scores were in the 50’s, which is a positive sign since the highest score possible is 60 (meaning greater parent-child intimacy). Unfortunately, when the Father-Child Relations Scale scores are observed there are 4 participants that scored a 15, which is the lowest possible score a participant can receive on this scale indicating low parent-child intimacy. In addition, out of the 22 participants from the divorced group, only 11 of the participants scored in the 50’s for the Father-Child Relations Scale while 21 participants scored in the 50’s for the Mother-Child Relations Scale. The main reason the scores for the Father-Child Relations Scale were so different from the Mother-Child Relations Scale may have been because the majority of the participants ended up living with their mothers after the divorce was finally completed.

Researchers (Amato & Booth, 1996) have found that children who come from divorced homes generally have less contact with the non-custodial parent, and as time goes by, the non-custodial parent-child relationship deteriorates even further. As the non-custodial parent and the child have less contact throughout the years, the parental model for intimate relationships is observed less, and in some cases, not even at all. As a result, the children who experienced divorce reach young adulthood, and may possibly display problems when dealing with intimate relationships (Franklin, Janoff-Bullman, & Roberts, 1990). The differences in effects divorce has on father-child relationships and mother-child relationships need to be researched further to better understand what can be done in the future to make sure neither parent-child relationship suffers. The Parent-Child Relations Scale would still be an adequate scale to use for measuring
parent-child relationships, but adding another measure such as an in-depth interview could possibly help researchers gain a better understanding of how parent-child relationships are affected by parental divorce.

Although this study’s findings did not support past researchers’ findings about romantic relationships, implications for future research can be made from this study’s results. The Fear of Intimacy Scale would still be an appropriate measure to use to study romantic relationships in young adults, but the addition of possibly one or two more measures might increase the chances that a statistically significant difference could be found. The Miller Social Intimacy Scale may be a suitable measure to use along with the FIS. While the FIS asks participants to rate their behavior in an imagined relationship, the Miller Social Intimacy Scale was developed to measure the maximum level of intimacy experienced by individuals in a close relationship. Therefore, using both measures would better ensure that a great deal more information would be gathered on romantic relationships, and would therefore more likely result in a more statistically significant difference being observed if such a difference did truly exist.

The age of the child at the time of the divorce is another important factor researchers believe to be a cause of poor development in children and young adults. Developmental psychologists believe that younger children are more vulnerable to the negative effects of divorce due to the fact that they are not as capable of understanding the situation their parents are going through when compared to older children (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). The young adults who experienced divorce at the age of 6 and under had the lowest scores on the FIS (meaning higher fear of intimacy) when compared to the young adults who experienced divorce after the age of 6. In the future, researchers need to focus more on studying how the age at the time of the divorce effects how the child learns to deal with parent-child relationships and romantic relationships.

For future research, a longitudinal study might be a better way to pinpoint the developmental areas that are affected and at what time during childhood children are affected the most by the divorce process so that better parenting techniques could be identified. A longitudinal study could also better help researchers see how children who experience divorce early in childhood differ from those who experience divorce later in childhood. Gender differences could also be better measured in a longitudinal study along with differences in parent-child relationships and romantic relationships. And although this study gathered information that was not ultimately used in the analysis of data, such as marital status, ethnic
background, etc., future researchers should take the time to focus on these other variables along with the parent-child relationships, romantic relationships, gender, and age at the time of the parental divorce that are the focal points of this study.

Future researchers would also benefit from having young adult non-students participate in this type of study along with the young adult students. Including non-students would allow for a wider variety of opinions and past experiences to hopefully increase the likelihood of statistical differences being found in the data analysis. And finally, future researchers should attempt to draw from as large a sample as possible in order to be able to generalize the findings to similar groups. Ensuring that there would be a larger sample of participants would also allow for a wider variety of ethnic backgrounds to be involved in the study. Further research is imperative on this topic, not only to discover the effects divorce has on children’s well-being and to identify the causes of negative impact on their well-being, but also to help suggest solutions that could result in concrete recommendations to parents and children alike that would better help them relieve the pressures that arise as a result of an ongoing divorce process. Science may not be able to undo the emotional trauma adults are already experiencing or have experienced from a divorce process that is already underway or already completed, but any improvements that could be offered through counseling to the children of divorced or divorcing parents would give the next generation of married adults a chance to do better for themselves when their time comes to deal with their own relationship difficulties.
APPENDIX A

Informed Consent Form
PERCEPTIONS OF YOUNG ADULTS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED DIVORCE AND THOSE WHO HAVE NOT WITH REGARD TO PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS AND ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

I have been informed that Jennifer Brooks, who is a graduate student at Florida State University, has requested my participation in a research study at this institution titled Perceptions of Young Adults Who Have Experienced Divorce And Those Who Have Not With Regard To Parent-Child Relationships And Romantic Relationships.

The purpose of this study is to compare the perceptions of young adults who have experienced divorce and those who have not with regard to parent-child relationships and romantic relationships. In addition, gender differences and age at time of divorce will be examined.

My participation will involve reading and signing a consent form which will be attached to the questionnaire packet containing 3 questionnaires. The researcher will notify the class before passing out the questionnaire packets that participants must be 18 years of age or older to participate in the study and if a student is younger than 18 years of age, they cannot fill out a questionnaire packet. The researcher will pass out the questionnaire packets to the participants who are 18 years of age or older and allow the students to ask any questions about the consent form, questionnaires, study, etc. After all questions have been answered the researcher will give the participants as much time needed to read and sign the consent form and then complete all three questionnaires. The questionnaire session should not take longer than 20-30 minutes to complete. After all students have answered the three questionnaires and returned them to the researcher, the researcher will then explain that our information is confidential (to the extent allowed by law) and nobody except the researcher will have access to the answers. If any participant would like their questionnaires returned to them after the study is complete that can be honored. My participation in this study is voluntary. If I choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty (it will not affect my grade, treatment/care, etc).

There are foreseeable risks or discomforts to me if I agree to participate in the study. The possible risks of answering questions (about intimacy) could potentially evoke mild to moderate temporary distress. Participants can request referrals to local counseling centers such as Thagard Student Health Center, FSU Marriage and Family Therapy Center, etc.

Although there may be no direct benefits to me, the possible benefits of my participation in the research are endless to future research in this area of interest. This study will hopefully lead to an increased awareness and a more in-depth understanding of the long-term effects of parental divorce on children. And hopefully allow for future research to develop new parenting techniques and alternative approaches to alleviate the stresses that arise from divorce.

The results of this research study may be published but my name or identity will not be revealed. The researcher will do the following to maintain confidentiality of my records: Jennifer Brooks will only have the consent forms attached to the questionnaires until she knows which questionnaires have been completely answered and which questionnaires have not. The researcher will then separate the questionnaire packets that have been filled out completely from the questionnaire packets that have not. The researcher will then select a number for each questionnaire packet which will be written down on the questionnaires as well as the consent form attached. A master coding sheet will then be made indicating the number that represents each participant. The consent forms will then be removed.
from all questionnaire packets and will be kept in a locked filing cabinet (along with the questionnaire packets not being used for the study) in case participants would like their questionnaires returned to them after the study. During the course of the study nobody except the researcher will have access to the questionnaires, master coding sheet, or consent forms. After the study is complete the participants will be given the opportunity to get back their questionnaire packets, but after one week of this notification, the master coding list will be shredded and destroyed to ensure confidentiality.

I will not be paid for my participation.

Any questions I have concerning the research study or my participation in it, before or after my consent, will be answered by the researcher, Jennifer Brooks (850) 766-2855 (jenn5681@aol.com) or the thesis advisor, Dr. Ron Mullis (850) 644-6021.

In case of injury, if I have questions about my rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if I feel I have been placed at risk, I can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Office of the Vice President for Research, at (850) 644-8633.

The nature, demands, benefits and any risk of the project have been explained to me. I knowingly assume any risks involved.

I have read the above informed consent form. I understand that I may withdraw my consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I may otherwise be entitled. In signing this consent form, I am not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies. A copy of this consent form will be given (offered) to me.

Subject's Signature ____________________________ (Date) ___________________
APPENDIX B

IRB Approval Form
APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 6/7/2007

To:
Jennifer Brooks
2915 Sharer Road, Apt. 925
Tallahassee, Florida 32312

Dept.: FAMILY & CHILD SCIENCE

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
Perceptions of Young Adults Who Have Experienced Divorce and Those Who Have Not With Regard to Parent-Child Relationships and Romantic Relationships

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Human Subjects Committee at its meeting on 5/9/2007. Your project was approved by the Committee.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by 5/7/2008 you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. The principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

cc: Ronald Mullis
HSC No. 2007.313
APPENDIX C

Parent-Child Relations Scale
Below are a series of statements about your relationship with your mother. After each one, circle whether the statement is often true, sometimes true, hardly ever true, or never true.

1. You both want to spend time together.

   4. OFTEN TRUE     3. SOMEBTIMES TRUE     2. HARDLY EVER TRUE     1. NEVER TRUE

2. She shows that she loves you.

   4. OFTEN TRUE     3. SOMEBTIMES TRUE     2. HARDLY EVER TRUE     1. NEVER TRUE

3. You are honest with each other.

   4. OFTEN TRUE     3. SOMEBTIMES TRUE     2. HARDLY EVER TRUE     1. NEVER TRUE

4. You can accept each other’s criticisms of your faults and mistakes.

   4. OFTEN TRUE     3. SOMEBTIMES TRUE     2. HARDLY EVER TRUE     1. NEVER TRUE

5. You like each other.

   4. OFTEN TRUE     3. SOMEBTIMES TRUE     2. HARDLY EVER TRUE     1. NEVER TRUE

6. You respect each other.

   4. OFTEN TRUE     3. SOMEBTIMES TRUE     2. HARDLY EVER TRUE     1. NEVER TRUE

7. Your lives are better because of each other.

   4. OFTEN TRUE     3. SOMEBTIMES TRUE     2. HARDLY EVER TRUE     1. NEVER TRUE
8. You both enjoy the relationship.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

9. She cares about the way you feel.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

10. There’s unselfishness in your relationship.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

11. She thinks of your best interest.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

12. You’re lucky to have her in your life.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

13. She makes you feel better.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

14. She is important to you.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

15. You love each other.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE
Below are a series of statements about your relationship with your father. After each one, circle whether the statement is often true, sometimes true, hardly ever true, or never true.

1. You both want to spend time together.
   4. OFTEN TRUE  3. SOMETIMES TRUE  2. HARDLY EVER TRUE  1. NEVER TRUE

2. He shows that he loves you.
   4. OFTEN TRUE  3. SOMETIMES TRUE  2. HARDLY EVER TRUE  1. NEVER TRUE

3. You are honest with each other.
   4. OFTEN TRUE  3. SOMETIMES TRUE  2. HARDLY EVER TRUE  1. NEVER TRUE

4. You can accept each other’s criticisms of your faults and mistakes.
   4. OFTEN TRUE  3. SOMETIMES TRUE  2. HARDLY EVER TRUE  1. NEVER TRUE

5. You like each other.
   4. OFTEN TRUE  3. SOMETIMES TRUE  2. HARDLY EVER TRUE  1. NEVER TRUE

6. You respect each other.
   4. OFTEN TRUE  3. SOMETIMES TRUE  2. HARDLY EVER TRUE  1. NEVER TRUE

7. Your lives are better because of each other.
   4. OFTEN TRUE  3. SOMETIMES TRUE  2. HARDLY EVER TRUE  1. NEVER TRUE

8. You both enjoy the relationship.
   4. OFTEN TRUE  3. SOMETIMES TRUE  2. HARDLY EVER TRUE  1. NEVER TRUE
9. He cares about the way you feel.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

10. There’s unselfishness in your relationship.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

11. He thinks of your best interest.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

12. You’re lucky to have him in your life.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

13. He makes you feel better.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

14. He is important to you.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE

15. You love each other.

   4. OFTEN TRUE   3. SOMETIMES TRUE   2. HARDLY EVER TRUE   1. NEVER TRUE


APPENDIX D

Fear of Intimacy Scale
II

Part A Instructions: Imagine you are in a close, dating relationship. Respond to the following statements as you would if you were in that close relationship. Rate how characteristic each statement is of you on a scale of 1 to 5 as described below, and put your response in the space to the left of the statement.

1 = Not at all characteristic of me
2 = Slightly characteristic of me
3 = Moderately characteristic of me
4 = very characteristic of me
5 = Extremely characteristic of me

Note: In each statement “O” refers to the person who would be in the close relationship with you.

_____ 1. I would feel uncomfortable telling O about things in the past that I have felt ashamed of.
_____ 2. I would feel uneasy talking with O about something that has hurt me deeply.
_____ 3. I would feel comfortable expressing my true feelings to O.
_____ 4. If O were upset I would sometimes be afraid of showing that I care.
_____ 5. I might be afraid to confide my innermost feelings to O.
_____ 6. I would feel at ease telling O that I care about him/her.
_____ 7. I would have a feeling of complete togetherness with O.
_____ 8. I would be comfortable discussing significant problems with O.
_____ 9. A part of me would be afraid to make a long-term commitment to O.
_____ 10. I would feel comfortable telling my experiences, even sad ones, to O.
_____ 11. I would probably feel nervous showing O strong feelings of affection.
_____ 12. I would find it difficult being open with O about my personal thoughts.
_____ 13. I would feel uneasy with O depending on me for emotional support.
_____ 14. I would not be afraid to share with O what I dislike about myself.
_____ 15. I would be afraid to take the risk of being hurt in order to establish a closer relationship with O.
_____ 16. I would feel comfortable keeping very personal information to myself.
_____ 17. I would not be nervous about being spontaneous with O.
_____ 18. I would feel comfortable telling O things that I do not tell other people.
_____ 19. I would feel comfortable trusting O with my deepest thoughts and feelings.
_____ 20. I would sometimes feel uneasy if O told me about very personal matters.
_____ 21. I would be comfortable revealing to O what I feel are my shortcomings and handicaps.
_____ 22. I would be comfortable with having a close emotional tie between us.
_____ 23. I would be afraid of sharing my private thoughts with O.
_____ 24. I would be afraid that I might not always feel close to O.
_____ 25. I would be comfortable telling O what my needs are.
_____ 26. I would be afraid that O would be more invested in the relationship than I would be.
_____ 27. I would feel comfortable about having open and honest communication with O.
_____ 28. I would sometimes feel uncomfortable listening to O’s personal problems.
_____ 29. I would feel at ease to completely be myself around O.
_____ 30. I would feel relaxed being together and talking about our personal goals.

Part B Instructions: Respond to the following statements as they apply to your past relationships. Rate how characteristic each statement is of you on a scale of 1 to 5 as described in the instructions for Part A.

_____ 31. I have shied away from opportunities to be close to someone.
_____ 32. I have held back my feelings in previous relationships.
_____ 33. There are people who think that I am afraid to get close to them.
_____ 34. There are people who think that I am not an easy person to get to know.
_____ 35. I have done things in previous relationships to keep me from developing closeness.

APPENDIX E

Personal Information Questionnaire
III

1. What is your age? _____ years _____ months

2. What is your gender? (Circle one)
   Male      Female

3. What do you consider your racial/ethnic group? (Circle one)
   Caucasian  African American  Hispanic  Asian-American  Native-American  Other _______

4. What is your current year in college? (Circle one)
   Freshman  Sophomore  Junior  Senior

5. What is your marital status? (Circle one)
   Single  Dating Casual  Exclusively Dating  Cohabitating  Married  Divorced  Widow

6. What is your parent’s marital status? (Circle one)
   Married  Divorced  Never Married

**NOTE:** Questions #7 through #11 should only be answered by those whose parents are divorced as of this date.

7. How old were you when you experienced your parent’s divorce? _____ years old

8. Who did you live with after your parents divorce? (Circle one)
   Mother  Father  Grandparents  Other ________________
9. How often did you visit the non-custodial parent after the divorce? (Circle one)

Never     Once A Month     2-3 Times A Month     Once A Week     2-3 Times A Week

Daily     Other ________________

10. How would you rate your satisfaction with your relationship with your father after the divorce? (Circle one)

1 2 3 4 5
Not Satisfied Very
Satisfied Satisfied

11. How would you rate your satisfaction with your relationship with your father after the divorce? (Circle one)

1 2 3 4 5
Not Satisfied Very
Satisfied Satisfied
REFERENCES


Westervelt, K., & Vandenbergh, B. (1997). Parental divorce and intimate relationships of young adults, Psychological Reports, 80, 923-926.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Personal

Name: Jennifer Lee Brooks
Birthplace: DeLand, Florida
Birthdate: May 6, 1981

Education

Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida
Bachelor of Science: Family, Child, and Consumer Sciences and Psychology
Spring, 2003.

Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida
Master of Science: Family and Child Sciences
Spring 2008.

Volunteer Work

Day Care Assistant: Downtown Babies, Tallahassee, FL
Assisted day care attendants with teaching the children, preparing breakfast/lunch/snacks, and monitoring nap time, activities, and computer time.

Associations

Kappa Omicron Nu