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An Analogue Test of Amato's "Good Enough Marriage" Hypothesis

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AN ANALOGUE TEST OF AMATO'S “GOOD ENOUGH MARRIAGE” HYPOTHESIS

By

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This manuscript is dedicated to Kimberly and Taylor Braithwaite.
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ABSTRACT

Research has firmly established that children of divorce tend to divorce at a higher rate than the general population. The mechanism driving the intergenerational transmission of divorce, however, has not been firmly established. The two most promising theories to be advanced by previous research are the “good enough marriage” hypothesis and the modeling of relationship skills hypothesis. The present study employs structural equations modeling to examine the viability of these hypotheses and represents the first direct examination of the attitudinal portions of the “good enough marriage” hypothesis. In a sample of 225 young adults, evidence for an association was observed between perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce and both interpersonal tactics and prodivorce attitudes; however, the present study failed to document a reliable association between perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce and attitudes about commitment as predicted by the “good enough marriage” hypothesis.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Divorce and marital distress are social problems that exert a measurable impact on society. This fact is being made more salient as couples entering their first marriage now face a 50% lifetime divorce rate (Cherlin, 1992; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992). This is particularly noteworthy statistic because divorce has a substantial negative impact on the physical and psychological well-being of the divorcing spouses, their children, and consequently society at large. Divorce, and the concomitant conflict that typically precedes it, has been associated with a number of negative outcomes including unhappiness, psychopathology, physical health problems and hastened mortality (see Amato, 2000; Grych & Fincham, 1990).

Impact of divorce on spouses

The association between divorce and unhappiness has been replicated across cultures. One study that compared findings across 17 different nations (Stack & Eshleman, 1998) found that divorced and separated individuals are significantly less happy than married individuals. This finding held true in 16 of the 17 nations examined in the study. Divorced individuals report more social isolation, less satisfying sex lives, and more negative life events relative to married individuals (Amato, 2000). Further, an 18 year prospective study using a nationally representative sample has demonstrated the divorce leaves a “scar” such that individuals who marry and divorce do not rebound to the levels of happiness that they experienced prior to marriage (Lucas, 2005). This is a unique exception to a robust scientific rule – unlike so many other life stressors that have been empirically examined, divorce does not seem to allow individuals to adapt and rebound to previous levels of happiness once it has occurred (Lucas, 2007).

Individuals who divorce experience higher rates of psychopathology. Empirical research consistently shows that married individuals enjoy better mental health than persons in all other types of close relationships such as dating or cohabiting relationships (Gotlib & McCabe, 1990). In fact marital status is a better predictor of
mental health than any other demographic factor including socioeconomic status, level of education, age, ethnicity, or childhood background (Gove, Hughes, & Style, 1983). In comparison to their married counterparts, divorced individuals experience more depression (Bruce & Kim, 1992) and less general mental well-being (Amato, 2000). Because it is possible that less mentally healthy individuals “select” into divorce, it is important to establish temporal precedence for the association between divorce and psychopathology. Recently, Simon (2002) examined longitudinal data from a large nationally representative sample which showed that the transition to marriage is associated with increases in mental health and that transitions out of marriage are associated with declines in mental health. Further, Overbeek and colleagues (2006) found that divorcees had an increased incidence of a number of diagnosed psychiatric disorders, but this finding disappeared when conflict prior to divorce was controlled for statistically.

That relationship quality moderated the outcomes of the Overbeek et al. (2006) study is consistent with the bulk of the psychological literature on well-being and marriage. This field of research has moved beyond simply looking at relationship status to examine the moderating role of relationship quality. This research has consistently found that individuals in satisfying relationships exhibit greater well-being across a number of different indices and that improving relationship quality leads to commensurate gains in mental health (Beach, Fincham, & Katz, 1998). On the other hand, those in poor quality relationships do not experience the same benefits as those with satisfying marriages and may, in fact, be at increased risk for a number of problems ranging from compromised immune functioning (Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1987) to depression (Beach, Katz, Kim, & Brody, 2003; Fincham, Beach, Harold, & Osborne, 1997) to mortality (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). At the same time, recent research suggests that relationship status continues to account for unique variance in well-being even when controlling for relationship satisfaction. Kim and McKenry, (2002) used longitudinal data from a nationally representative sample to examine the relationship
between psychological well-being, relationship quality and relationship status. In this study, marital status was found to be a significant predictor of well-being even when controlling for relationship quality such that being married predicted greater well-being than all other types of romantic relationships. In sum, there is strong, consistent evidence across clinical and non-clinical samples and across a wide range of variables and indices of mental health that divorce and the concomitant marital distress associated with divorce is associated with increased psychopathology.

Finally, being married is linked to better physical health outcomes. Divorced individuals are more likely to experience violence and increased physical health problems, morbidity, suicide, violence, and increased mortality (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). Compared to married individuals, individuals who divorce are more likely to suffer from long-term medical conditions (e.g., cancer) and they have slower recovery rates and worse chances at surviving when they do (Coombs, 1991). Similarly, mortality rates are higher for divorced individuals in causes of death that have a behavioral component such as lung cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, suicide and accidents (Coombs, 1991; Kposowa, 2000; Litwak et al., 1989). Across a wide range of samples and variables, there is an established association between physical health problems and marital status.

**Impact of Divorce on Children**

The impact of divorce extends beyond the spouses themselves as children from divorced also experience a number of negative outcomes. Children of divorce have higher levels of conduct problems and lower levels of school achievement, psychological adjustment, self-concept, social-adjustment, and positive mother-child and father-child relations (see Grych & Fincham, 1990; Amato & Keith, 1991; Amato, 2000). In addition, children of divorce are more likely to drop out of school, smoke, drink, and be sexually active as teenagers (Wolfinger, 2005). Further, parental divorce is predictive of offspring divorce (Wolfinger, 2000), thus these problematic patterns of behavior are often perpetuated down through the generations.
Although a clear association has been documented between parental divorce and negative outcomes for children, less research has focused on the specific mechanism whereby divorce is transmitted intergenerationally. The research that has examined this issue has focused primarily on three potential mechanisms: demographic/socioeconomic factors, modeling of relationship skills, and socialization of attitudes.

The Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce: Mechanisms

The first place researchers, sociologists in particular, have looked for mechanisms that explain the intergenerational transmission of divorce is among demographic/socioeconomic variables.

**Demographics.** The rationale behind the theory that demographics mediate the intergenerational transmission of divorce is thus: divorce promotes more stressful demographic and socioeconomic conditions for children (e.g. parental absence, lower socioeconomic status, maternal poverty, less educational attainment for children, etc.) which put children of divorce on a path that leads to divorce. For example, one of the best demographic predictors of divorce is young age at marriage (Teachman, 2002). Consequently the demographics hypothesis would predict that parental divorce leads offspring to marry at a younger age thus increasing the probability of divorce. Similar hypotheses have been advanced for other demographic predictors of divorce. Studies examining these predictors as mediators of the intergenerational transmission of divorce have yielded somewhat inconsistent results. Studies that do not obtain null findings suggest that demographic predictors account for only a modest proportion of variance (e.g. Amato, 1996; Wolfinger, 1999) and function in more complex ways than initially suggested (for a review, see Wolfinger, 2005). In short, research has demonstrated that even when controlling for demographic risk factors among children of divorce such as educational attainment and age at marriage, parental divorce continues to predict significant amounts of unique variance in offspring divorce. As a result, research has turned to examine other potential mechanisms that may account for more substantial
portions of variance in the relationship between parental divorce and offspring divorce. The two most promising are modeling of relationship skills and transmission of attitudes about commitment.

**Social learning of relationship skills.** According to the social learning theory, children of divorce are more likely to divorce because they model their parents’ problematic conflict tactics (e.g. conflict patterns) which serve to increase the probability of divorce in their own marriages. Sanders, Halford, and Behrens (1999) demonstrated that female, but not male, children of divorce demonstrate higher rates of problematic communication and conflict tactics in their own marriages. Story, et al. (2004) examined 60 newlywed couples over four years and found that demographic factors did not mediate the relationship between parental divorce and offspring marital outcomes; instead, they found that problematic interpersonal processes (e.g. poor conflict resolution skills) mediated the relationship between parental negativity and divorce and poor offspring marriage outcomes. Segrin, Taylor, and Altman (2005) also examined the impact of family-of-origin variables on relational outcomes in children of divorce in a community sample of 821 individuals. Unlike the Story et al. (2004) study, they found no evidence that deficient conflict management skills mediated the intergenerational transmission of divorce. Rather, the data from their study suggested that attitudinal variables may be a more likely explanation (although this explanation was not entirely supported by their data) such that children of divorce were more likely to have negative attitudes toward marriage. In sum, there appears to be some support for the idea that skills are passed down to children of divorce, but the results of previous research have been equivocal. Further research is needed to determine whether the modeling hypothesis is a robust explanatory mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of divorce.

**Attitudes.** Perhaps the most promising hypothesis to explain the intergenerational transmission of divorce is transmission of attitudes regarding commitment from parents to children of divorce. This hypothesis put forward by Amato
has been termed the “good enough marriage” hypothesis (Amato, 2001). The “good enough marriage” hypothesis asserts that children who see their parent’s marriage as “good enough” prior to divorce are more likely to divorce than those whose parent’s marriage is fraught with conflict. According to the theory, this is because when children view the dissolution of a relationship that in their eyes was “good enough”, it undermines their own sense of commitment to marriage thus increasing the probability of divorce in their own marriage(s). Said, another way, it is not so much the divorce, but the child’s perceptions of the need for a divorce that predict whether the child will also experience divorce. Support for the good enough marriage hypothesis comes from a longitudinal study conducted by Amato and DeBoer (2001). In an interesting and somewhat counterintuitive finding, this study demonstrated that children of divorce whose parents reported low marital conflict prior to the divorce were more likely to divorce than children of divorce whose parents reported high conflict prior to divorce. From this finding, the authors conjecture that attitudes and beliefs about marriage can be transmitted to children and subsequently contribute to children’s propensity to divorce themselves – these attitudes that facilitate divorce are most likely to be passed on if children do not see a need for their parents divorce. Although this seems like a reasonable inference, the Amato and DeBoer (2001) study did not have any direct measures of the children’s perceptions of their parent’s marriage prior to divorce nor measures of attitudes regarding commitment. In fact, to our knowledge, no research has directly tested the association between children’s perceptions of their parent’s marriage, children’s beliefs and attitudes about commitment and children’s relational skills to determine how much these are transmitted via perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce. Thus the present study proposes to examine children’s perception of the parent’s marriage prior to divorce and how these perceptions relate to problematic beliefs about marriage and relationship skills.
Proposed Model and Hypotheses

The proposed model showing the hypothesized relationships between perceptions of parental marital quality prior to divorce, relationship skills and commitment attitudes is shown in Figure 1. According to this model, perceptions of parental marital quality prior to divorce predict both relationship skills and attitudes toward commitment and these two variables mediate the relationship between perceptions of the parental marriage and relationship quality among the child of divorce. Specifically, it is predicted that individuals whose parents divorce when the child does not perceive the need for divorce will have poorer relationship skills and more attitudes that facilitate divorce and that these factors contribute to poor relationship quality in the offspring’s current relationship.

At this point, perhaps it is clear why perception of a “good enough marriage” might predict transmission or attitudes, but why would such perceptions predict an increased transmission of skills? Cunningham & Thornton (2006) found that marital quality facilitates intergeneration transmission of attitudes about marriage such that higher marital quality predicts more parent-child attitude similarity. They hypothesize that this occurs because children are less open to learn from or assimilate their parents’ attitudes about marriage when their parent’s marriage is troubled. Similarly, it is possible that modeling of relationship skills would occur more readily if the child does not view the parent’s relationship as troubled. Perhaps in high conflict marriages, relationship skills are not transmitted because children can clearly see how ineffective and problematic these behaviors are to the marriage thus developing aversion to the problematic behaviors. However, in a marriage that is not fraught with overt conflict, a child may be more open to internalizing and modeling behaviors that undermine marriage because these behaviors are not overtly, obviously problematic. Thus in a more insidious ways, the tactics that may undermine marriage are transmitted more readily when children don’t perceive the need for parental divorce.

The proposed study seeks to test the following hypotheses:
Hypothesis 1: Positive perceptions of the respondent’s parent’s marriage prior to divorce will predict more endorsement of commitment attitudes and interpersonal processes that facilitate divorce.

Hypothesis 2: Commitment attitudes and interpersonal processes will mediate the relationship between perceptions of the respondent’s parent’s marriage prior to divorce and offspring relationship satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3: The hypothesized mediational associations will retain significance even when controlling for the impact of neuroticism on relationship satisfaction.

Hypothesis 4: A structural model that constrains the paths from perceptions of parental marriage to the two mediators (interpersonal processes and commitment attitudes) to be equal will provide a poorer fit to the data than a model that does not constrain the mediators.
CHAPTER 2: METHODS

Participants and Procedure

The data used in the present study comes from a data set collected at the Family Institute at Florida State University. Participants were 228 students drawn from an introductory family science course at a large public university in the southeast. Participants received course credit for their participation in this study. These participants were drawn from a larger study examining college students’ interpersonal relationships which was reviewed and approved by the University Institutional Review Board. Participants in the present study were selected on the basis of their parent’s marital status. Only those individuals whose parents had divorced took part in this portion of the larger study. The age of respondents in the sample to be used ranged from 18 to 38 with the average being 19. Women made up 78% of the sample and the ethnic background of the sample was distributed as follows, Caucasian, 63%; African-American, 14%; Hispanic, 13% and “Other”(e.g. European and Mixed Ethnicity), 8%.

Participants completed an online survey made up of questionnaires that assessed interpersonal variables and the respondent’s perceptions of their parent’s marriage prior to divorcing. Participants also completed a measure of relationship satisfaction approximately 8 weeks after the initial assessment allowing for a longitudinal examination of the impact of the independent variables on relationship satisfaction. The specific measures are described below.

Measures

“Good Enough Marriage” Scale (GEMS). This seven item scale developed for this study assesses perceptions of the quality of the respondent’s parent’s marriage prior to divorce (e.g. “My parents could have worked out their problems if they had not divorced,”; “If someone knew all the details of my parent's marriage they would have advised them to get a divorce”). This face valid scale has demonstrated good internal consistency in pilot data ($\alpha = .89$). In the present study $\alpha = .89$. 

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Communication Patterns Questionnaire -- Constructive Communication Subscale (CPQ-CC). The CPQ-CC is a six-item subscale of the Communication Patterns Questionnaire that assesses the interaction patterns of couples during conflict. The scale generates three scores: the positive communication subscale and the negative communication subscale and the demand withdraw subscale. In the present study, the positive communication subscale was reversed scored such that higher scores indicate less positive communication. The CPQ-CC is highly correlated with observationally coded problem solving behavior \( r = .70 \), Hahlweg et al., 2000) and has demonstrated good internal consistency for females and males, \( \alpha = .81 \) and \( \alpha = .84 \) respectively (Heavey, et al., 1996).

Revised Conflict Tactics Scale – Physical Assault Subscale. The CTS-2 is a psychometrically validated measure that assesses the methods couple use to resolve conflict (Straus, Hamby, Boney-McCoy, & Sugarman, 1996). We used the physical assault subscale only (e.g. "I twisted my partner's arm or hair"). This subscale was coded to reflect how frequently these tactics were being used in romantic relationships. The most severe items on these scales were omitted leaving the resultant scale with 10 items. This version of the scale has been used in previous research and has demonstrated acceptable reliability for the modified measure \( \alpha = .95 \); Braithwaite & Fincham, 2007). In the present study, \( \alpha = .91 \) for this scale.

Funk-Rogge Couples Satisfaction Index (FR-CSI). Starting with 180 items previously used to assess relationship satisfaction Funk and Rogge (under reivew) conducted an Item Response Theory analysis to develop a 4-item measure of relationship satisfaction with optimized psychometric properties. Sample items are “How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?” (answered on a 6 point scale ranging from “not at all” to “extremely”) and “I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner” (answered on a 6 point scale ranging from “not at all true” to “very true”). Their measure correlates .87 with the widely used Dyadic adjustment Scale and -.79 with the
Ineffective Arguing Inventory. Coefficients alpha in previous studies using a similar sample range from .90 to .92 (Fincham et al., under review).

**Neuroticism.** The Neuroticism items from the Ten Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) were used to assess neuroticism. This scale asks participants to indicate the extent to which descriptive words accurately represent or do not represent their personality. The neuroticism items ratings of agreement/disagreement with the following descriptive statements: “Anxious, easily upset”; and “Calm, emotionally stable” (reverse scored). The TIPI has demonstrated good psychometric properties; especially considering its very brief nature (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003).

**Commitment Measures:**

To assess commitment attitudes, we used subscales from Stanley & Markman’s Commitment Inventory (Stanley & Markman, 1992) that tap a number of different facets of interpersonal commitment. Stanley and Markman conceptualize two distinct facets of commitment: personal dedication and constraint commitment. According to their theory, personal dedication refers to “the desire of an individual to maintain or improve the quality of his or her relationship for the joint benefit of the participants.” (p. 595). In contrast, constraint commitment refers to “forces that constrain individuals to maintain relationships regardless of their personal dedication to them” (pp. 595-596). Personal dedication thus reflects a more purposeful form of commitment that springs from a desire to perpetuate and enhance the relationship, whereas constraint implies internally or externally imposed pressures that promote relationship stability, but do not usually spring from or reflect the will of an individual in the relationship. The present study seeks to examine only facets of personal dedication since these this construct represents attitudes toward commitment that can be transmitted to children. The individual subscales used are described below.

**Dedication.** This four item scale derived from the dedication subscales in Stanley and Markman (1992) is designed to assess the broad construct of interpersonal commitment (e.g. “I want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough times we
may encounter”; “My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in life”). This subscale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties and internal consistency of $\alpha = .72$ in similar samples (Stanley, Whitton, & Markman, 2004).

**Couple Identity.** This six item scale assesses the extent to which the respondent’s personal identity is connected to their romantic partner (e.g. “I tend to think about how things affect ‘us’ as a couple more than how things affect ‘me’ as an individual; “I am more comfortable thinking in terms of ‘my’ things than ‘our’ things). This subscale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties and internal consistency ranging from $\alpha = .81 - .90$ (Stanley & Markman, 1992).

**Satisfaction with Sacrifice.** This six item scale assesses willingness to sacrifice personal interests for the good of the romantic partner and relationship (e.g. “I get satisfaction out of doing things for my partner, even if it means I miss out on something I want for myself.”; “Giving something up for my partner is frequently not worth the trouble”). This subscale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties and internal consistency ranging from $\alpha = .74 - .84$ (Stanley & Markman, 1992).

**Alternatives Monitoring.** This six item scale assesses how much an individual in a relationship is considering potential romantic partners other than the current romantic partner (e.g. “I know people of the opposite sex whom I desire more than my partner.”; “I think a lot about what it would be like to be married to (or dating) someone other than my partner.”). This subscale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties and internal consistency ranging from $\alpha = .86 - .89$ (Stanley & Markman, 1992).

**Prodivorce Attitudes.** This six item scale assesses the degree to which respondents endorse attitudes that facilitate divorce (e.g. “The personal happiness of an individual is more important than putting up with a bad marriage.”; “In marriages where parents fight a lot, children are better off if their parents divorce or separate.”). This
subscale has demonstrated adequate psychometric properties and internal consistency ranging from $\alpha = .63 - .67$ (Amato & Rogers, 1999).

Analytic Strategy

Data Preparation

To weed out random responders and/or individuals who did not provide valid data, individuals who took less than 10 minutes to complete the entire survey were removed from the dataset (the median elapsed time was 59 minutes; 10 minutes represented the lowest 1.3% and, in our judgment, the least amount of time in which a person could provide valid data). Using this criterion, three respondents were deleted yielding a total $n = 225$. Full information maximum likelihood estimation was used to impute missing values since there was no reason to suspect that data were missing for any reason other than randomness.

Power Analysis

Power analyses were conducted using the test of not close fit as our criterion. The test of not close fit tests the null hypothesis that the RMSEA is not excellent or close (which means RMSEA is equal or greater than .05), thus the alternative hypothesis is that the fit is close (which means RMSEA = .01). If the model being tested provides a close fit to the data, power is the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis that the fit is not close (MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996). The full structural model in the present study had $n=225$, $df = 71$, thus the criteria $n=200$, $df=70$ were used to conduct our power analysis. Using these criteria, the power estimate for the initial model in the present study was .877 for the test of not close fit.

Identification Status of Models

Both of the measurement models within the full structural model are known to be identified under the three indicator rule for multiple latent variables. The full structural model and the two alternate models pass the t-rule and are recursive. Because recursive models are known to be identified, the full structural model and the two alternate models are known to be identified.
Measurement Models

Before conducting analyses of the full structural model, the goodness-of-fit of the measurement models for the latent variables was examined. The relationship satisfaction items all contributed to a good fitting measurement model, so no changes were made. An examination of the skills model also suggested that the chosen indicators provided a good fitting measurement model. An examination of the commitment model suggested that the prodivorce indicator was not loading well onto the latent variable ($\beta = .085$, $p = .306$). Because this was a variable of interest, the full model was adjusted to include the prodivorce indicator on its own, rather than as part of the commitment latent variable. This change brought the commitment measurement model fit into an acceptable range. The full model comprised of the measurement models is displayed in Figure 2.
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Associations specified in our hypotheses were examined with structural equations modeling (SEM) using AMOS 6.0. Model fit indices indicate the extent to which the proposed causal relationships in the model represent the sample data. A number of indices may be used to indicate good model fit. In a good fitting model, $\chi^2$ is nonsignificant (indicating that the difference between the model and the observed data are not significant), however $\chi^2$ is sensitive to sample size and tends to overestimate significance where n is large (Kline, 2005). For both the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and the Comparative Goodness-of-Fit Index (CFI), values greater than .90 indicate a good fit. And finally, values for the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) less than .05 indicate good fit, values between .06 and .08 indicate moderate fit, and values greater than .08 indicate an increasingly poorly fitting model. The absolute goodness of fit of the models was examined using the $\chi^2$, TLI, CFI, and RMSEA indices to provide converging evidence of model fit. The $\chi^2$ difference test was also employed to compare the relative goodness of fit between models. The results for these analyses are summarized in Table 1. The full model provided a good fit to the data $\chi^2 (df) = 107.8 (71); (p = .003)$, TLI = .934, CFI = .955 and RMSEA = .048. The associations within the model specified in the hypotheses are presented below.

The first hypothesis stated that perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce would predict poorer relationship skills and commitment attitudes that facilitate divorce. To test this hypothesis the path loadings between the GEMS scale (which assesses perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce) and the mediating variables were examined to determine if perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce significantly predicted commitment attitudes, relationship skills and prodivorce attitudes (since this indicator was separated from the commitment attitudes group after contributing to a poorly fitting measurement model). The path between the GEMS and commitment variable was not significant $\beta = .06 (p = .492)$, suggesting that perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce did not significantly predict attitudes about
commitment in current relationships. The path between the GEMS and the skills variable trended toward significance $\beta = .14$ ($p = .097$), suggesting that perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce may play a role in the conflict tactics being used in current relationships such that children of divorce who did not see a clear need for their parents divorce were more likely to employ poor relationship skills in their current relationships. Because the prodivorce indicator was separated from the commitment model, the relationship between the GEMS and this scale was also examined to determine if prodivorce attitudes could be a viable mediator in the relationship between perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce and current relationship satisfaction. The relationship between the GEMS and the prodivorce indicator was significant $\beta = .27$ ($p < .001$), suggesting that children of divorce who did not see a need for their parents divorce endorsed less prodivorce attitudes. This is contrary to what one would predict according to the “good enough marriage” hypothesis which would predict more prodivorce attitudes in such a situation. In sum, support for the first hypothesis was mixed. Perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce were marginally predictive of current relational skills and significantly predictive of prodivorce attitudes, but the direction of the effect for prodivorce attitudes was opposite to what would be predicted by the “good enough marriage” hypothesis. Finally, perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce did not predict commitment attitudes facilitative of divorce (or dissolution of the current romantic relationship) as predicted by the “good enough marriage” hypothesis.

The second hypothesis predicted that commitment attitudes and relational skills would mediate the relationship between perceptions of the respondent’s parent’s marriage prior to divorce and offspring relationship satisfaction. This hypothesis was modified to include prodivorce attitudes as an independent mediator subsequent to the analyses of the measurement models. Although not all of the paths between the GEMS and the three mediators were statistically significant, the process of establishing mediation as described by Baron and Kenny (1986) requires only that there is a non-
zero correlation between the variables examined in the mediational analysis (see also Kenny, 2006). This is so because statistical significance can be subject to suppression effects and/or impacted by sample size. Further, statistical methodologists suggest that detecting a non-zero indirect effect is the only true requirement that must be met for mediation to have occurred (Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998).

Research examining different methods of testing the significance of a mediated effect has suggested that the method of examining the product of the two paths that comprise the indirect effect divided by the pooled estimate of their standard error \( (\alpha\beta/\sigma_{\alpha\beta}) \) is less prone to some of the problems (e.g. inflated Type I error) that arise in other methods such as bootstrapping or the Sobel test (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002). Further the logic for this method is amenable to structural models with multiple mediators (Bollen, 1987). Consequently, the PRODCLIN program (which performs the calculations described above) developed by MacKinnon and colleagues (in press) was used to examine the impact of the mediating variables in the structural model on relationship satisfaction. To do this, the product of the unstandardized path coefficients is divided by the pooled standard error of the path coefficients and a confidence interval is generated. If the values between the upper and lower confidence limits include zero, this suggests the absence of a statistically significant mediation effect. The unstandardized path coefficients and standard errors of the path coefficients for the indirect effect of perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce on relationship satisfaction via the skills latent variable were entered into PRODCLIN to yield lower and upper 95% confidence limits of -.00190 and .04323. The same analysis for the commitment latent variable yielded lower and upper 95% confidence limits of -.01384 and .03368. Finally, the mediational analysis examining indirect effect of perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce on relationship satisfaction yielded lower and upper 95% confidence limits of -.00119 and .04114. These analyses suggest the presence of marginally significant mediation for both the skills latent variable and the prodivorce attitudes variable. To provide a clearer picture
of the significance of these mediation effects, the analyses we replicated using $\alpha = .08$ instead of $\alpha = .05$ -- in these analyses, both the skills mediator and the prodivorce variable significantly mediated the association between perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce and current relationship satisfaction. Here it should be noted that the author is aware that $\alpha = .05$ is the most commonly used significance criterion. These alternate values are reported according to the recommendation of Wainer and Robinson (2003) who suggest that strict adherence to a dichotomous decision rule based on $\alpha = .05$ is an anachronistic approach to null hypothesis testing. Rather than letting scientific findings live or die based on an arbitrarily determined value, Wainer and Robinson suggest that exact $p$ values should be reported and the reader should be allowed to reach his or her own conclusions based on those values. Further, Cohen (1994) suggests reporting confidence intervals rather than relying strictly on $\alpha = .05$. Accordingly, both of these methods have been employed here.

The third hypothesis stated that the mediational associations would retain their significance even when controlling for the impact of neuroticism on relationship satisfaction. The unstandardized path coefficients and standard errors for the indirect effect of perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce on relationship satisfaction via the skills latent variable were entered into PRODCLIN to yield lower and upper 95% confidence limits of $-.00179$ and $.03736$. The same analyses were conducted examining commitment attitudes and generated lower and upper 95% confidence limits of $-.01384$ and $.03370$. Finally, the prodivorce attitudes variable was examined yielding lower and upper 95% confidence limits of $-.00016$ and $.04256$. Mirroring the mediational analyses where neuroticism was not included, the mediational analyses were replicated with $\alpha = .08$ as the significance level. Using this criterion, both the skills latent variable and the prodivorce attitudes variable significantly mediated the association between perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce and current relationship satisfaction. In confirmation of the third hypothesis, including neuroticism in the path model did not attenuate the impact of the mediators in the structural model.
Also relevant to this research question was the relative goodness-of-fit between the original model and the model with neuroticism included. The relative fit of the models is described in Table 1. The model that included neuroticism provided a significantly different fit to the data as evidenced by the significant chi square difference test $\Delta \chi^2(\Delta df) = 35.6$ (13); ($p < .05$). Further, an examination of the fit indices suggests that the model with neuroticism provided a poorer fitting model than the model with neuroticism not included $\chi^2 (df) = 143.4$ (84); ($p < .001$), TLI = .900, CFI = .930 and RMSEA = .056.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis stated that a structural model that constrains the paths from perceptions of parental marriage to the two mediators (interpersonal processes and commitment attitudes) to be equal would provide a poorer fit to the data than a model that does not constrain the mediators. Subsequent to measurement model analyses, this hypothesis was adjusted to include prodivorce attitudes as a mediating variable. By constraining the paths to be equal, the model becomes the functional equivalent of a simpler mediational model where there is one latent variable made up of the three proposed mediators. Thus model fit indicates whether the impact of the three mediators is better accounted for by a single underlying latent construct. If the model fit is better with the paths constrained, it suggests that this nonspecific latent variable derived from all of the indicators is a more viable mechanism mediating the relationship between the predictor (perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce) and the criterion (current relationship satisfaction). Results of this analysis showed that constraining the model provided a significantly different fit to the data $\Delta \chi^2(\Delta df) = 6.9$ (2); ($p < .05$). For the constrained model, $\chi^2 (df) = 114.7$ (73); ($p = .001$), TLI = .927, CFI = .949 and RMSEA = .05. These fit indices suggests that the model fit more poorly than the full model, suggesting that the independent contributions of the proposed mediators (commitment attitudes, relationship skills and prodivorce attitudes) provide a closer fit to the data than a simpler model made up of a larger, nonspecific latent variable.
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The present study represents the first direct test of the attitudinal portions of the “good enough marriage” hypothesis. Although previous research employing excellent sociological research designs has provided preliminary evidence for this hypothesis (Amato & DeBoer, 2001), the existing support for the “good enough marriage” hypothesis is only oblique and thus a direct test was required to more fully establish the viability of this theory. The modeling of relationship skills hypothesis was also tested by examining whether the impact of parental divorce on interpersonal processes is moderated by perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce.

In general, support for the “good enough marriage” hypothesis was lacking. Recall, that the “good enough marriage” hypothesis posits that children of divorce who do not see a need for their parents divorce internalize attitudes about commitment that facilitate divorce. The present study failed to document a reliable association between perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce and attitudes about commitment (i.e. interpersonal identity, willingness to sacrifice, personal dedication, alternatives monitoring) among children of divorce. This is a significant null finding because researchers who study the intergenerational transmission of divorce have cited the “good enough marriage” hypothesis as the most promising theory to explain this phenomenon (e.g. Wolfinger, 2006) even though the attitudinal portions of the hypothesis have never been explicitly tested until now. It is important to note that the findings from the present study do not patently disprove the “good enough marriage” hypothesis because this was an analogue study which used current relationship satisfaction in nonmarital relationships as a proxy for divorce. In addition the study is limited by the nature of the sample (college students with an overrepresentation of women) and the exclusively self-report measurement. On the other hand, key associations delineated by the “good enough marriage” hypothesis were directly tested in a relatively large, ethnically diverse sample of children of divorce -- specifically, that
perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce predict attitudes about commitment that facilitate relationship dissolution -- and null findings were obtained.

The examination of problematic interpersonal skills as a mediator between perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce generated findings that trended toward significance such that children of divorce who did not see a need for their parents divorce were more likely to employ problematic interpersonal processes in their current relationships. These findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that relationship skills and conflict tactics play a role in the association between parental divorce and offspring relationship outcomes. These findings, extend previous research by showing that perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce moderate relationship skills among children of divorce which, in turn, contributes to poorer relationship satisfaction.

Why would interpersonal processes among children of divorce behave the way commitment is predicted to behave in the “good enough marriage” hypothesis? There are at least three plausible possibilities. First, as was mentioned in the introduction, this could be because skills are more readily transmitted from parents to children when the child does not perceive the parental models’ behavior as problematic. Indirect support for this theory comes from Cunningham and Thornton (2006) who found that parent-child concordance for marriage-relevant attitudes is highest when the parents’ marriage is of high quality. Future research is needed to determine the feasibility of this explanation for these findings. Second, one assumption of the "good enough marriage" hypothesis is that children of divorce perceive a need for divorce when there is a great deal of conflict in the parental marriage. Amato and DeBoer (2001) found that low conflict marriages tended to transmit divorce more readily than high conflict marriages. From this they infer that children of divorce perceive a need for parental divorce when there is a great deal of conflict in the parental marriage. But perhaps there is something else in the parental relationship that creates the perception of a need for divorce and also contributes to problematic interpersonal tactics among offspring of divorce. Finally,
and relatedly, it could be that some other third variable explains the intergenerational transmission of divorce that has little if anything to do with perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce. In the present study, we tested one plausible alternate explanation by accounting for the impact of neuroticism (a personality factor that has been robustly related to relationship outcomes) on relationship satisfaction. This analysis suggested that neuroticism could not better explain relationship outcomes among children of divorce than the proposed mediators; in fact, including neuroticism in the model contributed to a poorer fit for the full mediational model. Further, any third variable such as neuroticism must be able to account for the increased intergenerational transmission of divorce among families where parental conflict was low prior to divorce. In short, more research is needed to confidently determine how to reconcile the observed pattern of results with existing findings.

Although support did not emerge for the hypothesis that perceptions of the parental marriage predicted current attitudes toward commitment, these perceptions did predict prodivorce attitudes such that children of divorce who perceived their parents divorce as unnecessary were significantly less likely to endorse prodivorce attitudes. Further, there was an inverse relationship between prodivorce attitudes and current relationship satisfaction. Mediational analyses suggested that prodivorce attitudes mediated the relationship between perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce and current relationship satisfaction. This was an interesting and unexpected finding for two reasons. First, it was not predicted that prodivorce attitudes would behave differently from commitment attitudes. Secondly, the direction of the association between perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce and prodivorce attitudes was opposite to what would be predicted by the “good enough marriage” hypothesis. Whereas the “good enough marriage” hypothesis would predict that perceiving the parental marriage as “good enough” prior to divorce would predict attitudes more facilitative of divorce, the opposite occurred; specifically, the more children of divorce
saw their parents marriage as good enough, the less likely they were to endorse prodiveorce attitudes.

The association between prodiveorce attitudes and relationship outcomes has been examined in previous research. Amato (1996) examined the impact of prodiveorce attitudes as a mediator in the intergenerational transmission of divorce and concluded that prodiveorce attitudes seemed to operate as a mediator in explaining the intergenerational transmission of divorce, but that these attitudes only accounted for a modest proportion of variance. As such in the present study, the prodiveorce attitudes indicator was initially included with the other commitment indicators to comprise the commitment latent variable. Further, Amato & Booth (1991) found that prodiveorce attitudes were higher among children of divorce and children whose parents were still married, but unhappily so. The current findings expand this research by showing that prodiveorce attitudes tend to be lower among children of divorce who saw their parents’ marriage as “good enough”.

The finding that prodiveorce attitudes predict relationship satisfaction over time mirrors the same association Amato and Rogers (1999) found in a sample of married individuals. In this study Amato and Rogers found support for the idea that exchange theory best explains the relationship between prodiveorce attitudes and relationship satisfaction. Exchange theory as proposed by Levinger (1979) suggests that an individual determines whether to maintain or terminate a relationship based on the costs, benefits and barriers to dissolution (i.e. factors that constrain the individual to stay with the relationship against their desires) of the relationship. Within this framework, holding the attitude that divorce is wrong represents a barrier to relationship dissolution. Amato and Rogers suggests that individuals who have prodiveorce attitudes are less likely to expend effort into a relationship because they do not feel constrained to persist with the relationship if it becomes undesirable. In a study where they compared the viability of exchange theory and cognitive dissonance theory to explain the role of prodiveorce attitudes and relationship satisfaction, Amato and Rogers (1999) found that,
consistent with exchange theory, prodivorce attitudes predict poorer marital satisfaction over time. The findings from the present study mirror and extend their findings in that the present data suggest that prodivorce attitudes predict declines in relationship satisfaction over time in non-marital romantic relationships and that these attitudes are associated with perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce.

The current findings show that children of divorce who perceived their parents marriage as “good enough” prior to divorce are more likely employ poorer interpersonal skills but less likely to endorse prodivorce attitudes. How do these findings fit in with Amato and Deboer’s finding (2001) that showed low conflict marriages transmit divorce more readily than high conflict marriages? It is possible that the observed pattern of results can be explained by the developmental nature of romantic relationships. Conceivably, commitment attitudes play a different role once individuals are married, but the latent expression of these commitment attitudes is better captured by prodivorce attitudes in non-marital relationships. Previous research has shown that commitment and patterns of behavior relevant to commitment change based on the course of the relationships with the key line of demarcation being engagement and marriage (e.g. Kline et al., 2004; Van Lange et al., 1997). It is possible that these attitudes set in motion events (e.g. mate selection processes) within dating relationship prior to marriage that increase the odds of divorcing in the long run. For instance, breaking up a bad relationship prior to getting married and having children is a healthy and normative process in mate selection. Perhaps individuals who have lower prodivorce attitudes are more susceptible to positive illusions within premarital relationships (see Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996) and are thus more likely to see a premarital relationship as satisfying and viable even though problematic conflict patterns are present to a degree that might lead others to terminate the relationship. Consequently, they are more susceptible to be swept up in the inertia of a bad relationship, and slide into a marriage that has increased potential for divorce (Stanley, Rhoades, & Markman, 2006). More research is needed to determine whether this may be the case.
In conclusion, the present study sheds further light on the impact of divorce on the dynamics of interpersonal relationships among children of divorce. Although empirical support for Amato’s “good enough marriage” hypothesis was lacking, the present study did find that perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce predict transmission of problematic interpersonal skills. Additionally, it was observed that children of divorce who did not see a need for their parents divorce were less likely to endorse prodivorce attitudes and this decrement in prodivorce attitudes was associated with increased relationship satisfaction in nonmarital relationships among emerging adults. In short, perceptions of a “good enough” parental marriage among children of divorce predicted behaviors that contribute to divorce, but attitudes that reject it.
Footnotes

It should be noted that it is possible that children of divorce are more likely than children whose parents did not divorce to end up in situations where constraint is high, but this is another empirical question for another day.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ (df)</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>TLI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)†</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Model</td>
<td>107.8 (71)</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.934</td>
<td>.955</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>143.4 (84)</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>.930</td>
<td>.056</td>
<td>35.6 (13)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constrained</td>
<td>114.7 (73)</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.927</td>
<td>.949</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>6.9 (2)*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*TLI = Tucker-Lewis index; CFI = comparative goodness-of-fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error approximation.
† $\Delta\chi^2$ relative to Full Model
* = $p < .05
Figure 1. Proposed Model: Mediational model in which interpersonal skills, commitment attitudes, and prodivorce attitudes mediate the relationship between perceptions of the parental marriage prior to divorce and relationship satisfaction among children of divorce.
Figure 2. Full mediational model with path coefficient information included.

**p < .01; *p < .05; †p = .077; ‡p = .097
**Figure 3.** Full mediational model with impact of t1 neuroticism on T2 relationship satisfaction included.

**p < .01; *p<.05; †p = .059; ‡p = .098**
REFERENCES


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