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# The Effects of Parental Divorce on the Success of Romantic Relationships

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## Introduction

Divorce, particularly the problems that exist between the couple, during and after the divorce are quite harmful to the children involved (Trinder, Kellet, & Swift, 2008). Divorce can also influence the level of happiness in some children (Delucia-Waack & Gellman, 2007), leading children to feel more anxious, fearful of rejection, and have lower self esteem (Summers, 1998), causing problems to occur in the development of relationships with others as the child matures. Burt, Barnes, McGue, and Iacono (2008) go so far as to suggest that divorce is a predictor of criminal behavior.

Children of divorced parents tend to have problems in their romantic relationships (Summers, 1998). In fact, divorce among young adult couples is predicted by parental divorce (Delucia-Waack & Gellman, 2007). Although there exists a possibility that divorce is a predictor of romantic relationship success among young adults, other factors have been studied. For example, the relationships between mother and child and father and child affect children's psychosocial adjustment (Summers, 1998). The strength of the relationship between the parent that the children live with and the children themselves also affects psychological adjustment. Trinder et al. (2008) also suggested that the better the relationship with parents, the better the children's adjustment and well being.

## Rationale

Researchers have established relationships between parental divorce and children's psychological problems and delinquency. However, little data has examined how parental divorce affects children in their romantic relationships at a later stage in their lives. The present study will investigate the relationship between parental divorce and the success of romantic relationships among children of divorced families. Furthermore, it will provide data that will help understand the cycling trend of divorce. Finally, I will examine the relationship between parental closeness after divorce and the success of romantic relationships developed by the children in early adulthood and whether this differs by gender.

Hypothesis 1: That women will report a better relationship with their mothers, whereas men will report a better relationship with their fathers.

Hypothesis 2: Men that are closer to their mothers will be less likely to be in a romantic relationship.

## Abstract

In this study the effects of parental closeness after divorce on the success of romantic relationships were examined. A survey was given to college students in which they provided information about their relationships with their parents and current partners. There was no significant relationship between the closeness of non-divorced parents and their child's relationship success. Also, there was no relationship between divorced parents and their child's relationship success. However, there was a significant positive relationship between how well children got along with their mother and with their father. These non-significant results suggest that it is not the divorce itself, but the attitudes and behavior towards divorce between the parents that may affect the success of the child's romantic relationships.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants in this survey were recruited through Experimentix; a program for General Psychology courses, which allows students to participate in a form of research and it also provides them with the opportunity to earn credit for their respective class. Participants ranged in age, gender and year in school. 56.3% were female students and 43.8% were male students. The average age was 21.33 ( $SD=3.91$ ), with the oldest student being 40 years old and the youngest 18 years old.

### *Materials*

A survey formulated by the author was used in the collection of data for this research. The survey consisting of original questions were pilot tested by the Psychology 321 section 001 students and by the volunteers chosen by the students. After it was pilot tested, the survey was administered to an actual group of undergraduate students from a psychology course. Questions regarding the relationship status of both the students and parents were asked (e.g., I am currently in a romantic relationship, Are your parents divorced?). As well as questions concerning the relationship between parents and students (e.g., My mother and I get along very well) and their opinions on divorce (e.g., If drastic problems arise in your marriage would divorce be an option?).

### *Procedure*

Undergraduate students were given the survey in groups. Each group had an allotted time frame of 50 min. However, the actual time of completion was between 20-40 min.

## Results

Hypothesis 1: Women will report a better relationship with their mothers, whereas men will report a better relationship with their fathers. This hypothesis was not supported.

Hypothesis 2: Men that are closer to their mothers will be less likely to be in a romantic relationship.

Surprisingly, findings showed that divorce affects the relationship between the child and the father. This is quite interesting because it also affects the relationship between the mother and child. Also, that the better the relationship between young adults and their mother the poorer the relationship with their father. In addition, it was found that if there is no divorce among parents then children get along very well with both parents.

## Conclusion

The present study examined the relationship between gender, parental relationships and romantic relationship success. There was no significant correlation between parental divorce and relationship success among their children. Divorce does affect the relationship between the child and the father. This is quite interesting because it also affects the relationship between the mother and child. I have found that the better the relationship between young adults and their mother the poorer the relationship with their father. I also found that if there is no divorce among parents then children get along very well with both parents. Although the hypotheses were not supported in any way by the end results there is still a hope that these non-significant results help narrow down the search of possible influencing factors in the success of romantic relationships.