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THE EFFECT OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON YOUNG ADULT WOMEN'S
MARITAL ATTITUDES

by

Anne Catherine Schmidt

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

Family and Human Development

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ABSTRACT

iii

The Effect of Parental Divorce on Young Adult Women's Marital Attitudes

by

Anne Catherine Schmidt, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2001

Major Professor: Dr. Kathleen W. Piercy
Department: Family and Human Development

This study examines how the experience of a parent's divorce during adolescence affects young adult women's attitudes about relationships, marriage and divorce.

Research questions looked at how participants felt about marriage, their relationship with their parents following the divorce, and how the experience of parental remarriage shapes attitudes about marriage. Fifteen young adult women were interviewed.

The most significant findings were that experiencing a parental divorce leads to feelings of ambivalence about marriage. Religious beliefs and positive role models can alleviate some of the negative feelings about marriage that may be present following a parental divorce. Experiencing parental conflict and acting as a middleman between parents during the divorce process contributed to negative feelings about relationships and marriage. Many of the women had negative experiences with their father's remarriage and yet they wished that their mothers would remarry.

(87 pages)

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I would like to thank all of my friends who listened to my ramblings about this project and reminded me that I could do this. Thanks especially to Dave for making me laugh and to Lori for reminding me of my mantras and letting me cry when I forgot them. Finally, thanks go to my family; without them I would have never been able to do this. My family loved me even when I was having a breakdown, made this dream a financial reality, and made me laugh until the point of tears (there's nothing better). I love you all and thank you for the special part each one of you has played in my life and in the process of my education.

Anne Schmidt

CONTENTS

v

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Overview	1
Rationale	3
Research Questions	5
Summary	6
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	7
Overview	7
Theoretical Framework	7
Analysis of Literature	10
Depression	10
Attachment	11
Parent Substitutes	13
Remarriage	15
Critical Analysis of the Research Methods	16
How the Study Extends Knowledge of Divorce Effects	17
III. METHODS	19
Design	19
Sample	19
Instruments	20
Description of the Instruments	20
Role of the Researcher	21
Data Analysis	22

	Page
IV. RESULTS	26
Overview	26
Research Question One: How Young Adult Women Feel About Marriage	27
Feelings About Marriage	27
Factors That Influence Positive and Negative Feelings	31
Research Question Two: Relationship with Parents	36
Parental Conflict	36
Middleman	39
Research Question Three: Parent's Remarriage	40
Father's Remarriage	41
Mother's Remarriage	44
Summary of Findings	45
V. DISCUSSION	47
Overview	47
Significant Findings	47
Feelings About Marriage	47
Relationship with Parents	51
Remarriage	53
Theoretical Framework	54
Symbolic Interaction	54
Identity Formation	56
Limitations	58
Implications and Recommendations	59
Parents	60
Policy Makers	61
Church Leaders	62
Future Research	62
Conclusion	63

	Page
REFERENCES.....	65
APPENDICES.....	70
Appendix A: Informed Consent and IRB Approval.....	71
Appendix B: Instruments	74

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Factors contributing to feelings on marriage.....	42

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

Every year in the United States approximately one million children experience the divorce of a parent (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995). Because of the large number of children who experience the divorce of a parent, it is important to better understand how parental divorce affects children as they enter young adulthood. How does the experience of a parental divorce, especially during adolescence, shape young adults' attitudes about their own romantic relationships, especially marriage? Studies show that some young adults report that they are terrified of repeating their parent's mistakes, and as a result they choose to avoid or postpone marriage (Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Tasker & Richards, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). Rather than avoiding marriage, other young adults from divorced homes choose to marry at younger ages, thus increasing their risk of divorce because earlier marriages are more likely to end in divorce (Duran-Aydingug, 1997; Kiernan & Cherlin, 1999; Tasker & Richards, 1994).

While it is not clear exactly what the effects of parental divorce are, it is clear that experiencing the divorce of a parent is likely to affect how children view their own relationships as they enter adulthood. Axinn and Thornton (1996) found that children who experienced the divorce of their parents are more likely than children from intact homes to report that they have negative attitudes about marriage and would rather remain single or choose to cohabit. These negative attitudes about marriage often influence how these young adults approach their own relationships (Sprague & Kinney, 1997). Many young adults who experienced the divorce of their parents report that they are fearful of

close relationships and have a difficult time trusting their romantic partners (Duran-Aydintug, 1997; Sprague & Kinney, 1997; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). Young adults from divorced homes also report that they have more sexual encounters and begin dating at younger ages than their counterparts from intact homes (Duran-Aydintug, 1997; Sprague & Kinney, 1997). Even though children of divorce may date and engage in sex at young ages, it does not necessarily mean that they are eager to get into serious relationships leading quickly to marriage. Young adults from divorced homes are more likely to choose to cohabit prior to marriage, yet another behavior that puts them at risk for a later divorce (Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Duran-Aydintug, 1997; Kiernan & Cherlin, 1999; Popenoe & Whitehead, 1999).

Divorce is a pattern that is said to run in families; scholars refer to this phenomenon as the intergenerational transmission of divorce (Kiernan & Cherlin, 1999; Sprague & Kinney, 1997; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). As they enter their own relationships, young adults from divorced homes are more likely to fear repeating their parents' mistakes (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). Young adults from divorced homes report that they have a difficult time forming strong attachments to their romantic partners (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998; Summers, Forehand, Armistead, & Tannenbaum, 1998; Walker & Ehrenberg, 1998). If a person is not able to form a strong attachment with a romantic partner, relationship problems may ensue. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996) found, in their 10-year longitudinal study of children of divorce, that the inability to form close romantic relationships of their own is one of the problems that haunts children of divorce long into their adult years.

With the exception of Wallerstein and Blakeslee's (1996) research, much of the divorce literature that has focused on young adults' reactions to divorce was done using

quantitative methods and gave a very broad picture of how divorce affects this age group. Most of the studies have been conducted using questionnaires with convenience samples of college undergraduates. Little is known about how divorce specifically affects college-age females' attitudes about marriage, particularly when parental divorce occurs between the ages of 10-14. The purpose of this study is to give female young adults whose parents divorced during early adolescence a voice to express in depth how they feel their parents' divorce has shaped their attitudes about marriage and relationships.

Rationale

While the divorce rate is no longer increasing as it once was, it is estimated that by the age of 18, 50% of children in the United States will have experienced parental separation or divorce (Heaven, 1994). Because divorce continues to be an issue facing many American children, it becomes increasingly important to understand the long-term effects of a parental divorce. How does experiencing a parental divorce shape young adult children's attitudes as they face the task of forming their own romantic relationships?

Quantitative studies have provided a broad picture of how young adults' marital attitudes are shaped by their parents' divorces, but few qualitative studies exist that examine attitudes about marriage. The most widely referenced qualitative study of the effect of divorce on children is Wallerstein and Blakeslee's book Second Chances (1996). Much discussion about the negative picture Wallerstein and Blakeslee paint of children from divorced homes has occurred in the field of family relations. The aim of my study

is to take Wallerstein and Blakeslee's work and expand it by looking at college-age females who experienced the divorce of their parents during their early adolescence.

An in-depth study of young adult women is particularly important because Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996) found that girls in their sample had a particularly difficult time forming their own intimate relationships because of their fear of leaving their mothers alone. Because adolescence is traditionally a time when individuals begin to express an interest in forming relationships (Kalter, 1990), and young adulthood is a time when many pursue romantic relationships intensely, I chose to focus on young adult women whose parents divorced during their adolescence. Kalter wrote, "When parents divorce, adolescents face the formidable task of adjusting to two sets of significant changes in their lives: those that normally arise in this period of development, and those accompanying the divorce process" (p. 310). Adolescence is a difficult time even when divorce is not involved, but when divorce occurs, a whole new set of problems is added. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996) found that during their adolescence, girls are more likely to crave structure. This need for structure can be severely disrupted following a divorce and may make the process of adjusting to divorce more difficult. Several of the teenagers in Wallerstein and Blakeslee's study indicated that they felt both emotionally and physically abandoned following their parents' divorce. A fear of abandonment may make it difficult as these adolescents enter their young adult years and attempt to form their own close relationships. Many of these young adults may hold onto this fear and it may permeate their approach to relationships (Wallerstein & Blakeslee).

There is some evidence that marital attitude formation is shaped by the experience of a parental divorce. O'Connor, Thorpe, Dunn, and Golding (1999) reported that as their participants entered adulthood, those people who experienced the divorce of their

parents continued to be less committed to the institution of marriage and indicated that they were more accepting of divorce in general. Some children from divorced homes indicated that they have no desire to marry; they would rather remain single so they do not run the risk of repeating their parents' mistakes (Kozuch & Cooney, 1995; Tasker & Richards, 1994). Other children from divorced homes report that they are no less likely to get married and that even though their parents are divorced, they still feel positively towards marriage (Landis-Kleine, Foley, Nall, Padgett, & Walters-Palmer, 1995). This study will seek to clarify how young adult women whose parents divorced during their adolescence believe their attitudes about marriage and relationships have been shaped by their experiences.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study seek to get at the core of how young adult women form their attitudes about marriage after experiencing the divorce of their parents. The questions for this study are:

1. How do young adult women whose parents divorced during early adolescence (ages 10-14) feel about marriage? What factors contribute to positive feelings? Negative feelings?
2. To what extent does a young woman's relationship with her parents post-divorce shape her attitudes about relationships/marriage?
3. To what extent does the remarriage of one or both parents affect the young women's attitudes about marriage?

The purpose of this study was to get an in-depth look at the effects of parental divorce during adolescence on young female adults' attitudes about marital relationships. The questions for this study have been indicated. The next chapter includes a description of the theoretical framework for the study, a literature review of relevant divorce studies, and a rationale for why this study fills a gap in the current divorce research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This chapter begins with a discussion of symbolic interactionism, the theoretical framework on which this study is based. The second section reviews prior research on the effects of parental divorce on children. The third section discusses the limitations of past research on the effects of divorce. The final section discusses how this study fills a void in the current divorce literature.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic interactionism is a “frame of reference for understanding how humans act in concert with one another, create symbolic worlds, and how these worlds in turn shape human behavior” (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 136). Symbolic interactionism considers the shared meanings that people create to explain a social phenomenon like marriage and divorce (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). There are certain assumptions embedded in symbolic interactionism that work well with the study of the effects of divorce on children. The first assumption is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 143). It is believed that young adults whose parents divorced during their childhood create meanings (or attitudes) about marriage based in part on the experience of parental divorce. The experience of a parental divorce may make some young adults wary of marriage and as a result they may choose to remain single, cohabitate, or merely

postpone forming their own close romantic relationships until they deem themselves “ready.”

The second assumption of symbolic interactionism is that meaning arises in the process of interaction between people (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 143). According to a symbolic interaction framework, young adults’ attitudes about marriage and divorce are shaped as they associate with other people, particularly their family. A young woman may develop a certain attitude about marriage based on her parents’ marital relationship or the experience of her parents’ divorce (Thornton, 1991). Research suggests that young adults whose parents divorce have more negative attitudes about relationships in general because they have not had a parental example of successful relationships (Summers et al., 1998; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). Young adults from divorced homes report that they have less faith in the notion that romantic relationships, especially marriage, really can work out (Summers et al., 1998). Family patterns, especially patterns involving divorce and remarriage, are important mechanisms through which attitudes and behaviors regarding marriage and relationships are shaped. By understanding what kinds of interactions may be associated with certain meanings, we can better understand attitudes young women have towards relationships, marriages, and divorce.

A third assumption of symbolic interactionism is that meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process used by persons in dealing with things he or she encounters (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 143). For example, a young woman may have an attitude about marriage that changes when she is faced with a parental divorce (Kozuch & Cooney, 1995). Particularly if a divorce is preceded by parental fighting, a child is more likely to believe that, in some cases, divorce is a good solution (Tasker & Richards, 1994). As people are faced with different situations such as divorce or

remarriage, the meanings they attach to certain things, like marriage, are subject to change.

The fourth assumption of symbolic interactionism is individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993, p. 144). Currently in the field of family studies there is some discussion that within American culture there has been a decline in the importance of marriage (Barich & Bielby, 1996). Some of the decline in the importance of marriage may have to do with the number of families who have experienced divorce either directly or indirectly. Tasker and Richards (1994) asserted that "in a high divorce rate community, marriage may not be seen as necessary or permanent" (p. 345).

As evidence that Americans may be prone to experience less marital satisfaction now than in the past, Rogers and Amato (1997) examined two marriage cohorts. The first cohort married during 1969-1980 and the second cohort married between 1981-1992. Rogers and Amato (1997) discovered that among the second cohort, "changes in the social context of marriage contributed to a decline in marital quality" (p. 1099). A change in the social context of marriage seems to occur as people begin to expect more from their marriages; higher expectations for marital relationship quality may increase marital dissatisfaction. The group married between 1981-1992 reported lower marital quality than did the first group (Rogers & Amato, 1997). This is an interesting finding considering that the 12-year difference in the cohorts is not a very long time. Rogers and Amato suggested that the second cohort may be dealing with "the inherent difficulties in adapting marriage to a rapidly changing social climate" (p. 1099). Their study showed that the context a person finds herself in can have a great impact on her attitudes and behaviors (Barich & Bielby, 1996).

Research on the effects of parental divorce on children has yielded many mixed results (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). Initially, researchers indicated that the effects of divorce were more detrimental to boys than they were for girls (Tasker & Richards, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). More recent studies have shown that while girls may appear to function better immediately following a divorce, as they enter adolescence and young adulthood a number of problems may arise (McCabe, 1997; Summers et al., 1998; Tasker & Richards, 1994). Problems following parental divorce that consistently appear in the literature are depression, attachment disruption, assuming the role of a substitute parent, and the effects of parental remarriage on children.

Depression

Depression is a phenomenon that many girls (and some boys) experience following the divorce of their parents (McCabe, 1997; O'Connor et al., 1999; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996; Zill et al., 1993). Because depression is manifest internally, it may be one of the reasons that girls outwardly appear to be adjusting better to divorce than their male counterparts (Conger & Chao, 1996). Depression is a factor that can seriously affect a person's quality of life; for this reason, depression needs to be taken seriously by parents and teachers who are dealing with adolescents whose parents have recently divorced (Conger & Chao). Conger and Chao reported that "girls in divorced families are significantly more depressed than those in intact families...girls experience greater depressed mood than boys" (pp. 165-166). Depression that begins in adolescence is likely to continue or resurface during adulthood (Conger & Chao). In her study of the long-term effects of divorce, McCabe (1997) found that young adults in her sample were

more likely than young adults from intact homes to report that they were depressed and having a difficult time forming relationships. Depression was particularly common among the college-age young adult females in her sample who were between the ages of 6-14 when their parents divorced (p. 128). McCabe (1997) wrote, "The developmental tasks of young adulthood either reawaken divorce-related difficulties in females or make these difficulties more apparent" (p. 126). There seems to be something about the experience of parental divorce that is particularly hard on female young adults.

In their study of how parental divorce affects health as people enter adulthood, Tucker et al. (1997) found that the experience of a parental divorce increases the likelihood that people will have, or will rate themselves as having, poorer health during their childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. The women in their sample who had experienced the divorce of their parents prior to turning 21 reported that they had more mental difficulty, less social support, and were more likely to smoke than those women whose parents had not divorced before they turned 21. This study indicates that the effects of parental divorce can last long into adulthood and appear to have an impact on both mental and physical health.

Attachment

During infancy, babies become attached to their parents (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998). Attachments are formed as babies learn that they can depend on their parents to fulfill their physical and emotional needs. Ainsworth and Bowlby classified infants and toddlers as securely attached, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-ambivalent (Crain, 1992; Hayashi & Strickland, 1998). Research has shown that attachment patterns that are formed during infancy are consistent throughout adulthood (Ainsworth, 1989; Hayashi &

Strickland, 1998). In other words, a child with a secure attachment during the toddler years is more likely to have a secure attachment that continues into adulthood.

Attachment is something that one usually forms with a parent or a parent-substitute. As one enters adolescence and young adulthood, one begins to form attachments with romantic partners as well. It appears that adolescents and young adults whose parents divorce may experience more difficulty in maintaining their attachments with their noncustodial parent and in forming attachments with their romantic partners (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998; Tayler, Parker, & Roy 1995; Walker & Ehrenberg, 1998).

Divorces often result in one parent assuming primary custody of a child. Most often, the child's mother becomes the primary caregiver following a divorce (McCabe, 1997; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). In some cases in which a mother has primary custody of her children, a child may be less likely to continue to have a close or "secure" attachment with her father (Johnson & McNeil, 1998; Tayler, et al., 1995).

Unfortunately, lacking a close relationship with a father or a father substitute can create problems in terms of development and attachment formation (Johnson & McNeil, 1998). Young adults who no longer see their noncustodial parent (most often a father) appear to have poorer relationships with both parents and they also have a more difficult time in their peer relationships (Johnson & McNeil). In their study of divorces occurring during adolescence, Summers et al. (1998) found that relationships with fathers continued to be important not only during childhood but also in adulthood. Fathers are important figures in the lives of their children (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996).

In their longitudinal study of the effects of divorce on children, Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996) found a "hungry child" pattern among some girls in their study with respect to their relationships with their fathers. Wallerstein and Blakeslee classified these

“hungry children” as girls who choose to have relationships with older men. In many cases the hungry child appears to be searching for a substitute for the relationship she might have felt she lacked with her father. In some cases these women might have actually had a close relationship with their fathers but, for whatever reason, they are still searching for some “parental closeness” with their older lovers.

In addition to disruption of parent-child attachment, divorce can also disrupt the formation of romantic relationships (Sprecher, Cate, & Levin, 1998; Walker & Ehrenberg, 1998). Sprecher et al. (1998) found that (in comparison to women from intact homes) women from divorced homes reported that they were less secure in their attachments and had less idealism when it came to their beliefs about love. Few of these women continued to subscribe to the romantic notion that a knight in shining armor is going to sweep them off their feet (Sprecher et al.). Hayashi and Strickland (1998) found in their study of attachment following divorce that women from divorced homes reported that they were more jealous in their romantic relationships and had a greater fear of abandonment than those from intact homes. Likewise, Summers et al. (1998) found that young adults whose parents divorced during adolescence had a more difficult time adjusting to their parents' divorce because they had fears that attachments really were not as permanent as they once suspected. If their parents divorced, then maybe they would have the same problems in the future. Parental divorce during adolescence can create a number of attachment problems that seem to last into adulthood.

Parent Substitutes

When parents divorce, one parent is often left alone to be the primary caretaker of the children. Mothers who are used to having another adult in the house to help with the

children often turn to their adolescent daughters for help with the family caregiving (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). The act of becoming a “substitute” parent oftentimes becomes a burden for these young adolescent girls that lasts into young adulthood. Wallerstein and Blakeslee described Ruth, who was 14 when her parents divorced. At the 5-year followup, when Ruth was 18, she spoke very little about her own life as a teenager with her friends; instead she spoke about her concern for her younger siblings and the way they were growing up (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, p. 95). Adolescence is typically a time when children are trying to forge their own identities and to move away from their parents (Kalter, 1990). It appears that in some cases of divorce, the task of forming a separate identity becomes more difficult (Kalter, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). An adaptive identity can be more difficult to achieve if an adolescent daughter gets caught up in co-parental responsibilities.

Another responsibility placed on some children of divorce is becoming their mother’s confidantes. When divorce occurs, often the line between adult and child becomes blurred (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). Parents may start asking their older children for advice regarding family decisions or concerns they have about how the divorce turned out (Wallerstein & Blakeslee). The once clear distinction between the parent role and the child role can become blurred, causing some problems. Specifically, those girls who have come to identify with their mother following a divorce have a difficult time forming their own romantic relationships because they do not want to surpass their mothers or leave them alone (Wallerstein & Blakeslee). The fear of forming romantic relationships as a result of one’s parents’ divorce is a theme that runs through the divorce literature (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998; Walker & Ehrenberg, 1998; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). In fact, research shows that children whose parents

divorce have a more negative attitude about marriage and relationships in general (Amato & Booth, 1991; Tasker & Richards, 1995). It seems evident that the experience of a parental divorce has a major effect on many aspects of a child's relationships and choices that carry into young adulthood and beyond.

Remarriage

Most people who divorce remarry within 2 to 3 years (Kalter, 1990). The stresses of a new marriage are compounded if one or both of the partners bring children into their union (Kalter, 1990). Stepparent relationships can create new problems, or exacerbate problems that linger following a divorce. Research has shown that the introduction of a stepfather into the household can be especially problematic for adolescent daughters (Kalter, 1990; Tasker & Richards, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). Many mother-daughter relationships increase in closeness following a divorce; when a stepfather is introduced, the daughter may begin to feel replaced (Wallerstein & Blakeslee). A daughter may feel threatened by the introduction of this new male into her mother's life and may become hostile towards him (Tasker & Richards, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996).

Another problem that is introduced when a stepfather joins a family with an adolescent daughter is issues surrounding sexuality and incest (Tasker & Richards, 1994; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996). A stepfather may be uncomfortable around his stepdaughter because she is not a person that he raised from birth; rather she is a young girl who is undergoing the physical changes of puberty and he may not know how to act around her (Wallerstein & Blakeslee). Adolescent daughters can be confused by the sexual relationship that they know that their mother and stepfather are having because

daughters are at a point in their lives where they are beginning to think about relationships and sexuality (Kalter, 1990; Tasker & Richards, 1994). For some adolescent girls the addition of a stepfather into the household makes them more likely to engage in earlier sexual behavior (Tasker & Richards).

The age of the child when a parent remarries appears to make a difference with how a child copes with the change. Research indicates that if a parent remarries when a daughter is young she appears to adjust more favorably than if she is in her later school and adolescent years (Zill et al., 1993). Adolescents in stepfamilies are more likely to leave home at earlier ages (Tasker & Richards, 1994). They are also more likely to drop out of high school, especially when they live with a same-sex remarried parent (Tasker & Richards; Zill et al.). Clearly there are risks associated with remarriage. Yet, Axinn and Thornton (1996) found that increased negative attitudes toward marriage are especially prevalent among children whose mothers never remarry. Thus it appears that young adults may have difficulty with their close relationships whether or not their parents remarry.

Critical Analysis of the Research Methods

Most of the studies of the effects of divorce on children have used quantitative methods of data collection and analyses. Most of the studies reviewed here used large convenience samples with college undergraduates (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998; Landis-Kleine et al., 1995; Sprecher et al., 1998). The findings from these studies have contributed a great deal of information about how children are affected by divorce in the long-term and how the divorce experience shapes young adults attitudes about relationships and marriage. While these studies have given researchers a broad picture of

the effects of divorce, no studies have specifically examined young adult women who experienced parental divorce between the ages of 10-14 to find out just how the experience of parental divorce has shaped their lives and attitudes about marriage.

The reason for studying females whose parents divorced when they were between the ages of 10-14 is because they are in a period of time when they are seeking to form their own sense of identity (Heaven, 1994). Between the ages of 10-14, adolescents are starting to become emotionally independent of their parents and their social relationships with peers of both sexes are becoming more important to them (Heaven, 1994). According to Erikson (1959), during this time period adolescents work to successfully establish an identity or they may experience role confusion. It is likely that an adolescent female whose parents divorce during the critical stage of identity formation will have a more difficult time establishing her identity because of the upheaval within her family of origin. Erikson (1959) posited that each stage must be completed before the next stage can be embarked on. Erikson (1959) suggested that persons must know who they are before they can successfully establish a relationship with another person. While few 10- to 14-year-olds have a firm handle on their identity, it is likely that a parental divorce that occurs during early adolescence, when an adolescent is trying to establish an identity that is separate from her family, might create problems as she enters young adulthood and begins to form relationships of her own.

How the Study Extends Knowledge of Divorce Effects

An in-depth study that examines college-age females experience with parental divorce during early adolescence could provide the field of family studies with information that is scarce about this group. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996) described

the “sleeper effect” that occurred among the girls in their study. They found that girls initially appear to have adjusted well to divorces and yet, as they enter young adulthood, many problems begin to arise (Wallerstein & Blakeslee). This study investigated this phenomenon further. In addition, the following ideas will be explored: the perceptions of parental divorce, the effects of parental remarriage, the current parent-child relationship, and overall attitude about marriage. While the sample for this study was small and not representative of a specific population, it gave a voice to young adult women, allowing them to express in-depth how the experience of divorce has affected them personally.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

This study used qualitative methods. Qualitative methods have been underutilized in studies of the effects of divorce on children and young adults. In-depth interviews were conducted with young women who spoke about their parents divorce, their parents remarriage (if applicable), and their own romantic relationships and how these experiences have shaped their attitudes about relationships, marriage, and divorce.

Sample

A sample of 15 female young adults who experienced the divorce of their biological parents when they were between the ages of 10-14 participated in this study. All participants were 18 years of age or older with an average age of 23 ($SD = 1.92$). The average age of the participants at the time of the divorce was 12 ($SD = 1.35$).

The sample was recruited in undergraduate classes at Utah State University in Logan and by word of mouth in Salt Lake City. At Utah State, a description of the study and its purpose was read aloud in undergraduate classes. Those who were interested in the study, or who knew someone that might be interested, were asked to contact the researcher either in person or via email. Participation was voluntary.

In Salt Lake City the researcher relied on snowballing techniques and referrals from friends and family. Once the researcher received the name and number of the person interested in participating, she called her to make sure that she was between the

ages of 10 and 14 when her parents divorced. The sample is not random because in order to participate individuals must meet the study criteria.

All participants are Caucasian. Fourteen of the participants are Latter-day Saints (LDS), and one is an atheist. Thirteen of the participants are single and two of them are married. Nine of the single participants said they were actively dating, while four said they were not.

Six of the young women's mothers have remarried; while nine of the young women's mothers have not remarried. Their average age at the time of their mother's remarriage was 16. Fourteen of the young women's fathers have remarried while one father has not. Their average age at the time of their father's remarriage was 17. The average number of participant's siblings was four.

The average yearly income the young women reported for themselves ranged from under \$6,000 to \$30,000-50,000. The most common income the women reported was \$10,000-20,000. All of the participants were high school graduates. Four of the participants were college graduates. The other 11 participants have completed at least some college.

Instruments

Description of the Instruments

The instruments used for this study were a consent form, a demographic questionnaire, interview questions, and the interviewer. The project was approved by the IRB at Utah State University (Appendix A). Before the interview began each participant was given a consent form (Appendix A) that explained the research project, indicated that their identity would be kept confidential, and identified the benefits and risks of

participating in the research. Interviews were not conducted until informed consent was given by each participant. Each participant also filled out a demographic questionnaire that asked for personal and family information, including their age when their parents divorced, their major in school, and their current marital status (Appendix B).

Interviews were semi-structured with 15 open-ended questions that each participant answered (Appendix B). Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for the participants and were conducted in the researcher's on-campus office, the researcher's house, or the participants' homes. The beginning of the interview was spent building each participant's trust and confidence in the researcher; this was mostly done by identifying common bonds between the researcher and the participant. During the course of each interview, probes were used to encourage participants to answer each question more fully. Interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed for analysis purposes.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research the researcher is viewed as the primary instrument through which all data are filtered. Unlike quantitative research where statistical tests are performed on the data, the qualitative researcher decides what to draw out of the data, what categories are developed, and what themes emerge (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991). In many ways the qualitative researcher's journey is a very emotional one as she mines the data looking for the stories of her participants (Ely et al., 1991).

Much of what the researcher chooses to study and what the researcher chooses to

draw from her research is directly related to her own world view and experiences (Ely et al., 1991). The topic I have chosen is how the experience of parental divorce affects young adult marital attitudes. Many people have asked me if I chose this topic because I experienced the divorce of my parents, but the answer to this question is no. I have multiple reasons for choosing this topic. The first reason is that I feel like my attitudes about relationships have been very much affected by my parents' relationship. My parents have what I perceive to be a very close relationship with one another. In many ways I always grew up thinking that everyone's parents liked each other as much as mine did. I was shocked when I learned that my experiences were very different from many of my friends. As a result, I began to wonder how parental divorce shapes the attitudes of young adults as opposed to my experiences in an intact, happy family.

Throughout the course of the study I have been struck by the fact that this project would be extremely difficult for me if I had experienced the divorce of my parents. While I might be able to relate more to my participants if my parents were divorced, I think it would end up being too close for comfort. I think that one of the strengths I bring to this particular project is more of an outsiders' perspective. I look in on the experiences of my participants but have no comparable experiences of my own. But I have found that when my participants speak about their own relationships that I can relate to their fears and worries. Perhaps every college-age young adult has similar fears about relationships no matter what type of family of origin they come from.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began immediately. After each interview I wrote down my impressions of the participant and the experience of interviewing her. Each interview

was transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis was conducted primarily using the grounded theory method as outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998). According to Creswell (1998), the grounded theory method is used by the researcher to generate a theory about a particular phenomenon, in this case the phenomenon of the effects of parental divorce on young female adults' marital attitudes. Grounded theory allows the researcher to generate hypotheses and explanations based on the participants' responses (Creswell, 1998). The first step in data analysis is open coding. Open coding is used for "naming concepts, defining categories, and developing categories in terms of their properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 103). Transcripts were read and reread in order to get a sense of the overall feel of the interview and to identify categories and themes that help to answer the underlying research questions. Notes were made in the margins as the transcripts were read to identify the concepts that emerge repeatedly.

The next step in data analysis is axial coding. Axial coding is the act of developing categories and subcategories through identification of their properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Identifying categories and subcategories allowed the researcher to begin to answer questions of why and how the research participants responded to the experience of their parents divorce the way they did.

The last step in data analysis using the grounded theory method is selective coding. Selective coding involves actually forming a theory or explaining the story behind young women's experiences with parental divorce (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher offers the bigger picture, a general explanation of the phenomenon of parental divorce, and how it affects romantic relationships in young adulthood.

Data were coded and analyzed using the computer software program QSR NUD*IST. According to Creswell (1998), QSR NUD*IST (Qualitative Solutions & Research, 1995) is a computer program that was designed specifically to analyze grounded theory data. QSR NUD*IST allows researchers to store and organize files, look for themes in the interviews, make diagrams of categories, and create templates (Creswell, 1998). During the coding process, NUD*IST has the capacity to generate reports that show all data coded in a particular category. This feature allowed the researcher to determine the extent to which coded data fit together and under what category they belong.

In qualitative research one of the best ways to ensure reliability is to carefully document all of the decisions surrounding the research process (Kirk & Miller, 1986). For this project the reliability of the data was enhanced by keeping fieldnotes. Fieldnotes allow the researcher to write down and reflect on her experiences while in the field. During this study, fieldnotes were written following each interview. The fieldnotes included observations of nonverbal cues, and the overall impression of the interviewee. Fieldnotes served as a guide for interpretation of the interviews after they were transcribed.

According to Kirk and Miller (1986), "validity is the degree to which the finding is interpreted in the correct way" (p. 20). Validity in qualitative research may pose some problems. How does the researcher assure that her report of what she sees and hears is really what she saw and heard (Kirk & Miller, 1986)? Accuracy of coding and emerging themes was checked by having more than one person read the transcripts and coding schemes independently in order to establish a form of "inter-rater reliability." Validity is also assured by the questions the researcher asks the participants (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

The interview questions for this project were carefully chosen after a review of the divorce literature and have been reviewed by a committee to assure that they cover all the necessary areas. Each participant answered the same questions in the same order.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore how experiencing a parental divorce during early adolescence (ages 10-14) affects female young adults' attitudes about relationships, marriage, and divorce. Research questions explored how these women felt about marriage, their relationship with their parents following the divorce, and their experience with parental remarriage.

An interesting "story-line" emerged from these 15 interviews. Within a qualitative research framework, the researcher seeks to find the participant's story and often asks, What are the participants trying to say? In this study, the participants' stories most often occurred in the following sequence: experiencing parental divorce during adolescence, feeling put in the middle of parents' relationship post-divorce, experiencing a father's remarriage, and feelings of ambivalence about marriage. The participants' stories are presented according to the research questions, beginning with, "How do young adult women whose parents divorced during adolescence feel about marriage?" followed by "To what extent does a young woman's relationship with her parents post-divorce shape her attitudes about relationships and marriage?" and concluding with "To what extent does the remarriage of one or both parents affect the young women's attitudes about marriage." All proper names used in the quotations are pseudonyms.

Research Question One: How Young Adult Women
Feel About Marriage

The first research question looked at how the experience of a parental divorce during adolescence shapes young adult women's feelings about marriage. Questions examined what factors in these women's experiences contributed to positive feelings about marriage, and what factors contributed to negative feelings about marriage.

A pattern of how these women felt about marriage emerged and included the following themes: experiencing feelings of insecurity, lacking trust in dating partners, and fearing commitment. These themes will be presented in the next section in that order. The factors that contributed to positive feelings about marriage are religious beliefs and positive role models; the factors that contribute to negative feelings about marriage are negative role models, parental conflict, and experiences with parental remarriage. The latter two factors will be discussed as part of the results of later research questions.

Feelings About Marriage

Feelings of insecurity. Eleven of the respondents reported that they have a tendency to feel insecure in their dating relationships. Sometimes this insecurity comes from the women's experiences with their parents' failed relationship, and sometimes the women may be insecure about how their partner feels about them. Consistent with Sprecher et al. (1998), who found that women from divorced homes reported feeling less secure in their romantic relationships than women from intact homes, the women in this sample expressed insecurity about their relationships. One respondent, Emma, sums up how most of the respondents felt about security in relationships when she says:

I guess I have always felt that it [a relationship] could end at any time. I don't know whether if I got married to someone if I would start feeling secure then. Maybe I'd still feel insecure. I don't know. I imagine that I would feel secure then. As secure as you can be. Because there are no guarantees.

Emma expressed the difficulty she had reconciling her experience within her family of origin, that relationships are not guaranteed to last, with her desire to feel secure in her own relationships and future marriage.

In these women's experiences, one of their parents was abandoned; thus many women believed that a relationship cannot be guaranteed to last; and if a relationship cannot be guaranteed to last, then it is hard for a person to feel secure in one. While the idea of no guarantees was used to describe marriages, these women also said that they believed there are no guarantees in their relationships with dating partners. In terms of these women's relationships with dating partners, six women said that they did not allow their relationships to last for very long because they each began to fear what their partners really wanted from them. One of the respondents, Jane, put her experience with dating this way, "Like when they [dating partners] make it clear to me that they want to marry me, and I realize if I don't walk out of it, I'll end up marrying this person, and that kind of freaks me out sometimes." Like Jane, other respondents related similar stories of how they would often sabotage a relationship in the early stages because they were afraid or unsure of where they would like the relationship to go. In some cases it is easier for these women to get out a relationship before it gets too "serious" rather than to stay in the relationship and see where it ultimately goes.

Lack of trust. Ten respondents reported that they have a difficult time establishing trusting relationships with potential dating partners. Some women described being unable to trust their parent who left home, then later they described how they do

not trust their own romantic partners. Amber, when talking about her relationship with her dad following the divorce said, "I keep trying to build back this trust and...he keeps doing tiny things that make me not trust him anymore." Later in the interview, when Amber talked about her experiences with dating relationships, she said:

I have a really, really, really hard time trusting guys at all...I think when a guy tells me something or does something for me I always question like why is he doing this? What is his motive behind this?

It would seem that Amber, who could not trust her own father, has transferred this inability to trust men to her own romantic relationships. How do you put your trust in a dating partner when your father, whom you thought you could count on, has become untrustworthy?

Amber is not the only respondent who described her inability to trust current or potential dating partners. While in many of the respondents' cases it was the father who left the family, in a few cases it was the mother who left the family. It appears that it did not matter which parent left the family when it came to the respondents' descriptions of trusting their romantic partner. Angie, whose mother left her family, says of marriage and trust:

You could wake up one day, and the person could decide they didn't want to be married...I felt really nervous that somebody would do what my mom did, and just decide that they didn't want to be married anymore.

Angie reported having a difficult time trusting dating partners because in her experience one person in a relationship, like her mother, can change her mind and decide that she does not want to be together anymore.

Another reason that these women may have a hard time trusting their own romantic partners is because of their father's infidelity. Four respondents cited their father's infidelity as one of the reasons that contributed to their parents' divorce. Karen

noted that she has to know absolutely that the person she is dating will not be looking at any other women. Karen said:

This is one thing that I think probably came from the divorce--was that I know absolutely that there is no way that they [dating partners] are going to be looking at other girls or wanting to be with someone else when they are with me.

Karen's father had an affair and she said that because of this, in order to trust a dating partner, she must be assured by him that he will not be looking at anyone else, or dating anyone else.

Fear of commitment. While the respondents may not have spoken directly about fearing commitment, many of their comments implied that they have a hard time committing themselves romantically to someone. Much of this fear of commitment is likely related to their inability to trust a dating partner as well as their doubt that relationships will last. Ten of the respondents spoke about how scared they are of relationships and how often times they will back out of a relationship. Kim said of backing out of relationships:

Actually always it was me who backed out. I mean it wasn't anything they did that made me back out it was just that I felt like it wasn't right, it wasn't the right person, it wasn't the right time.

Like Kim, other women said that they are unsure of how to know whether or not they have found the "right" person. Many respondents said that they feared that they would find someone who they thought was right and later they would learn that the person was really wrong for them. Of finding someone to have a relationship with, Tanya said, "It scares me to really fall in love with one person and get married because I feel like what if I wake up and go, 'oh I married the wrong person.'" Tanya said that much of her fear that someone she's dating will change, is based on the fact that her father perceived that her mother changed after they were married. In other words, her father thought when he

married Tanya's mother that she was the "right person" for him and yet her mother "changed" and her parents ended up getting divorced. Tanya's afraid that she, like her father, will think that someone is right for her and really he will be wrong. It is hard to commit to someone when you will not allow yourself to get close to anyone because the other person "might" be wrong.

Factors That Influence Positive and Negative Feelings

Religious faith. Fourteen of the respondents in this sample describe their religion as LDS (Mormon). One of the respondents said she was an atheist. Within the LDS religion, members are taught that marriage is a very important and sacred institution. Both men and women are strongly encouraged to marry. Families are central to the doctrines of the LDS faith. Because the majority of the women in this sample were LDS, they have been taught from an early age that getting married is one of the most important things they can do. Unfortunately for many of the women in the sample, they are conflicted about this issue because they know what their church doctrines teach them about the importance of marriage, yet their personal experiences with their parents' divorce has made them cautious about marriage. Maggie said of her religious beliefs: "When I think about marriage from my religious background I have a very positive outlook on it but from my experience it scares me and I just find myself on a ledge all the time." Like Maggie, many of the women are trying to reconcile these two opposing ideas, religion versus experience. One of the solutions some of the women have arrived at is to make sure that they marry someone who is also LDS. Ten of the women perceive that it was religious differences that contributed to their parents' divorce. Five women described their mothers as being regular church-goers and their fathers as not attending

church regularly or at all. It was their parents' different religious priorities that many of the women perceived as a major problem that may have contributed to their parents' marital failure.

The two married respondents described specifically how their number one priority when they were dating was to find someone who was an active member of the LDS church. Now that these two women are married to LDS partners, they noted how they felt that their shared religious beliefs strengthen their marriage because they have the same goals and ideas about how to raise a family. Those respondents who were not married described how they, too, feel that it is very important to find someone to marry who shares their same religious beliefs. Kim said, "I feel like God knows the correct way to have a marriage work, and so if you have him at the center of your life and your partner does too, that everything is going to work out." Kim's belief is that if she marries someone who loves God as much as she does that this common love will provide stability in her future marriage.

One of the things that these women say their religious beliefs do for them is to give them hope that relationships can work out. Many of the women believe that their religious beliefs have been a major force in defining their attitude towards marriage. Religion may be a mediating factor in these women's beliefs about marriage. Although their parents' relationship may have ended in divorce, many of the women are willing to be married themselves because they have the hope and faith through their religion that their marriage will last. Carrie said:

Because in the world's eyes, it's crazy that we get married. It is a huge risk, especially the females. I could go on and have a very financially secure future.... I could launch from there and go further, so to give that up in a sense to get married, it is crazy that we do that. There is a deeper level, a deeper reason why

we do that.... if it weren't for my religious beliefs I don't think I would get married.

This "deeper reason" that Carrie talks about is the conviction of many members of the LDS church that if a higher power (God) asks you to do something, like getting married, that you can have faith and peace that you are following God's direction. Eight of the respondents said that if it were not for their religious beliefs, that they would avoid marriage altogether.

Several respondents also discussed how their religious beliefs guide them in their choices about dating partners. Kim described a situation in which she was dating someone and felt like "it wasn't right" and so she broke it off. Kim described this feeling of the relationship not being right as coming from a higher power. Kim said about the relationship, "So I decided that I liked him and then the next day I came home and I just had the feeling like it wasn't right. So I prayed about it and I just didn't feel like it was right and so I ended it and that was that." This religious prompting for Kim, to end her relationship, is not the same as fear of commitment. Kim described herself as someone who is actively seeking a committed relationship; but if she feels spiritually that a relationship is wrong, she will end it. Within the LDS religion it is believed that members of the church can speak directly to God through prayer, and that God will direct members' lives in the way they should go. So, in Kim's case she felt like God directed her to no longer date the man she was dating, and so she broke the relationship off. Other respondents described similar situations in their own lives in which they felt like God led them to act in a certain way regarding their romantic relationships.

Not too surprisingly, the atheist in the sample had vastly different ideas about marriage. While all of the LDS respondents said that they expected to marry relatively

soon, on the other hand, the atheist does not expect to marry until she is well into her late thirties or early forties. She expects that she will live with someone before she gets married. Also she says that she does not want to have kids. Of marriage and children she said:

I know I don't like kids. So I really don't want them. As far as marriage goes, a lot of people get married because they want to have children and you know have the whole family. I would see myself more as a person living with someone. You know, for a long, long, time, but not necessarily nailed down to them.

Part of the reason that the atheist may not see marriage as necessary is because she is not a member of a religion that prohibits sexual relations outside of marriage. The LDS faith prohibits sexual intimacy outside of marriage and it may be partly for this reason that the LDS respondents say that they will get married. Perhaps if their religion sanctioned living together, or if they no longer practiced a religion, then they, like the atheist, would rather live with someone than get married. In addition to the influence of religious faith on respondents' attitudes about marriage, another component that shaped the respondents' marital attitudes was the presence of "relationship" role models.

Examples and role models. The theme of examples and role models can be used to describe respondents' experiences with both good and bad examples of relationships. Many of the women described their parent's relationship as a bad example for them. Several respondents said that they do not want to repeat the experience their parents had with marriage. They want to "break the cycle" of divorce and avoid becoming another child of divorce who ends up divorced just like her parents. Despite their desire to avoid making their parents' mistakes, many women related that they still fear that relationships cannot really last. This fear that relationships cannot last is not too surprising given their firsthand experience with divorce. These women had no parental model of how to make

relationships work. One respondent, Karen, said about her parents' relationship, "I don't ever remember my parents as being the parents in love. Like going out together and being together." Karen cannot recall a time when her parents appeared to visibly be in love with one another, nor can she remember seeing them engage in social activities with each other. Dana concurred with Karen, saying that "I have seen so many horrible marriages, and I have lived through my parents' horrible marriage, that I really have a negative view of marriage, but I still want to do it." Karen, Dana, and many of the other respondents described themselves as wanting to be married yet having turmoil because most of their experiences with marriage have been negative. Ambivalence about marriage was prevalent in this sample.

Some respondents also described good examples of marriage in their lives. For some, these good examples came from their own siblings who have successfully married, others spoke of their grandparent's marriages, while others spoke of church leaders or friends' parents who have provided them with examples of relationships that work. A number of respondents talked about the experience of watching their siblings marry. One respondent said she is glad that she was not the first sibling to marry because she felt like the first person to marry would be the experiment. In describing sibling relationships, Emma said:

My sister, the one just older than me, has a really good marriage. And before they got married I really hadn't seen hardly any marriages that were what I'd want. Now just watching how their marriage is, I really like how theirs is. And they communicate really well and I am like oh, okay, if both people are trying, then it really can work.

For Emma, her sister's relationship gave her hope and provided her with a model of how to make a relationship work. Many of these women were searching for evidence that relationships can work. They looked to people in their lives who can reassure them that

even though it did not work for their parents, it does work for somebody. For many of the respondents relationships that they perceive as successful give them hope that they could make a relationship work, too.

In summary, these women had difficulty with security, trust, and commitment in their romantic relationships. Not too surprisingly, these women attributed these fears about relationships to their parents' divorce. Yet, these women's religious beliefs acted as a buffer for them when it came to their attitudes about marriage. While their personal experiences have been negative, and they often feel ambivalent, their religious beliefs gave them hope that they can have successful marital relationships. Women who had role models of positive relationships were more likely to report that they felt positive about relationships, while those women who lacked positive relationship role models reported feeling more negative about marriage.

Research Question Two: Relationship with Parents

The second research question asked how young women's relationships with their parents post-divorce have affected their attitudes about relationships and marriage. The biggest influence on the women's attitudes about marriage and relationships was shaped by the parental conflict they were exposed to both before and after the divorce. Another influence was the women's experiences of being put in the middle of their parents' relationship, especially after the divorce.

Parental Conflict

In this sample, 12 of the respondents spoke of the conflict they witnessed between their parents. Some of the conflict between parents was visible before the divorce, while

for other families the conflict between parents did not become evident until after the divorce. Ruth said of her parent's relationship before the divorce, "You know the entire time they were married as far as I can remember I've only seen them kiss once and so basically there was a lot of conflict." One respondent said that her parents had fought her entire life, and she could not remember a time when they were not fighting. Many of the respondents said that they could not really remember much about their parents' relationship before the divorce, but that after the divorce they had a distinct recollection of the fighting.

At least six of the women in the sample cited incidents in which they recall the parent who had custody of them deliberately avoiding the non-custodial parent. In some families this avoidance took the form of the custodial parents dropping the children off for visits with the noncustodial parents at an office building where contact between the parents would be minimal and supervised by others. Other women said that their mothers always checked the telephone caller-identification box and if they saw that it was their father on the phone, they refused to answer it. One woman said that even now, approximately 6 years after the divorce, her parents continue to wage a battle in the courts over child support. Witnessing all the conflict between parents was difficult for these women. As many of the women recalled the relationship between their parents following the divorce, they often used words like "awful, horrible, uneasy, hate, crying, and yelling." Each of these words is laden with a negative connotation and seemed to characterize these women's experiences with their parents' post-divorce relationship.

It would seem that witnessing so much unhappiness between their parents might contribute to a certain amount of trepidation in forming their own romantic relationships among respondents. If their parent's relationship, which these women may have

perceived as good or at least decent before the divorce, can degenerate into the yelling and fighting matches many of these relationship became post-divorce, will this happen to them as well? Kim expresses her insecurity about relationships following her parent's divorce in this way:

It scares me a lot... None of the relationships that I have had have lasted a super long time and so there's that insecurity that I'll never find anyone that I can be with forever...that even when things are going well that nothing is stable, nothing is that consistent.

Kim's perception of her parents' relationships pre-divorce was harmonious, so her parents' divorce came as a shock to her. The unexpected nature of her parents' divorce may be the reason that she noted that even when a relationship seems to be going well it does not mean that the relationship will last or in her words "be stable." In Kim's experience even a relationship that a person perceives as good can end. How do you know you can trust your own perceptions?

Being witness to so much conflict during the divorce process of their parents may act as what Summers et al. (1998) refer to as an attachment disruption. After experiencing the divorce of their parents, some young adult women may begin to fear that attachments are not as permanent as they originally thought they were (Summers et al.). Six of the women in the sample whose mothers had primary custody of them following divorce reported that, after the divorce, and even now, they are no longer close with their fathers. Of her relationship with her father now, Cami said:

Especially with the divorce I hardly ever see him, just every once in a while. He doesn't make any effort. For awhile I tried to make an effort...just because he's my father and I know I need a relationship with him.... You can only go so far with one way, with no response it is just too hard.

Cami does not make an effort to be close to her father anymore because she felt like her efforts to maintain a relationship were not reciprocated by him. Unfortunately, Cami is

not the only respondent whose attachment to her father has dwindled following the divorce. Kim explained that while she used to tell her father about important things in her life, now she does not tell him anything because she said it is not worth the effort. These women explain that while they made an effort to have a relationship with their fathers following the divorce, that in some cases their fathers have not been willing to make any effort to have a relationship with them.

Middleman

When parents divorce, often one parent wants their children to side with him or her against the other parent. In this sample, nine respondents reported feeling like they were put in the middle of their parents' relationship following the divorce. Amy recalled how her mother told her following the divorce that they were involved in a war and Amy needed to choose a side. Choosing between parents is no easy task and many of the women stated that they resented being asked to choose at all. How do you choose between parents?

According to Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996), following a divorce it is not uncommon for a child to become a parent's confidante. The act of becoming a confidante to a parent often puts children in the middle because they are bombarded from both sides with information about the "other" parent. Five women reported that both of their parents said unkind things to them about each other. These women's mothers would say hurtful things about their fathers and then their fathers would say hurtful things about their mothers. One woman said, "Who am I going to be loyal to?" This question of loyalty is very difficult for these women because they do not want to have to choose

between their parents. How should they decide which parent is right or wrong or best to “side with?”

Another problem that some women described was relaying messages back and forth between their parents. At least five women described how they had one parent give them a message to give to their other parent. One woman called this phenomenon being a “message person.” She said of being in the middle, “We thought we were being heroes or something. We thought we were helping them out and we thought we were doing something good but really it ended up squishing us a bit.” This woman felt like she was being squished between her parents as she relayed messages back and forth between the two of them. This woman was not alone in feeling like a middleman; four other women also recall how they had to take messages back and forth between parents. Unfortunately, these women’s parents may have thought it was better that they not speak to their ex-spouses and so for them the obvious solution was to use the children to take messages to each other. Yet, the act of relaying messages back and forth between parents was often described by these women as something they dreaded and something that tested their loyalty to both of their parents.

In summary, these women’s exposure to parental conflict and feelings of being put in the middle of their parents’ relationship was difficult for them. Witnessing parental conflict left these women feeling unsure of relationships. Being asked to choose between parents made many of these women confused and angry.

Research Question Three: Parent’s Remarriage

The third research question asked how parental remarriage shapes young adult women’s attitudes about marriage. In this sample most of the women expressed

unhappiness with their father's remarriage and yet expressed a desire that their mothers would remarry.

Father's Remarriage

In this sample 14 of the women's fathers were remarried. Eleven of these women expressed unhappiness with their father's remarriage. The mean age of these women at the time of their father's remarriage was 17. Some of these women were unhappy with the remarriage, saying that they felt like their father betrayed the family by marrying someone new. Amber said about her father's remarriage, "It really bugged me that he was marrying someone that wasn't my mom.... I didn't even want to go to the wedding." Like Amber, other women reported feeling angry that their father remarried and "officially" replaced their mom. One woman said she refused to go to her father's wedding, and was ridiculed for this decision by her father and her siblings. Yet this woman felt she could not attend the wedding because she disagreed with her father's decision to remarry. Overwhelmingly the women in the sample expressed that in their experience, the remarriage of their father has been a negative experience. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the factors the women have outlined above as contributing to their negative and positive feelings about marriage.

One group of sisters in the study reported that their father's remarriage had been particularly difficult. In this family, the father had custody of all the children when their mother left the family. Subsequently, when this father remarried 4 years ago it was difficult for his daughters because they felt like they were being replaced. This remarriage was even more difficult because, according to the children interviewed, their father's new wife was not very enthusiastic about them. These sisters believe that their

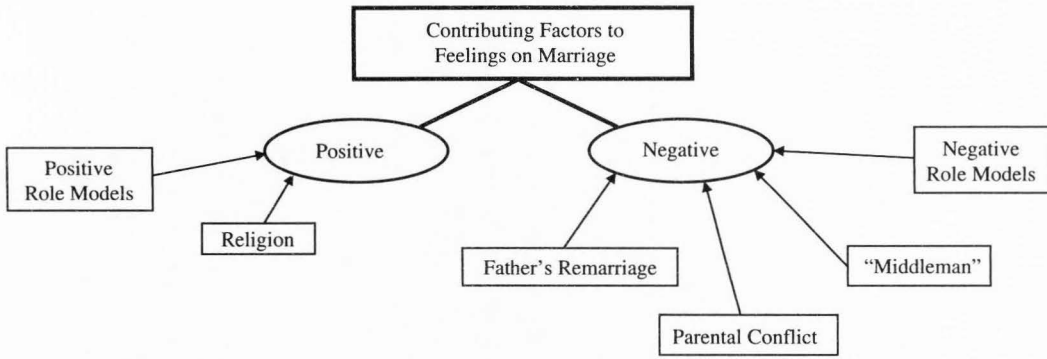


Figure 1. Factors contributing to feelings on marriage.

stepmother did everything she could to alienate herself from her stepchildren. One sister, Kate, said about her stepmother, "She is very possessive of my dad.... In a remarriage you get remarried to this stranger and your kids feel pushed out and neglected." All three sisters explained that for them the remarriage of their father has been extremely difficult because they feel like their father no longer has time for them. According to these sisters, they feel they have lost the only parent they could really rely on. When asked independently how they felt about remarriage, all three answered that based on their experience they believe that remarriages were negative. One of the sisters said that were she ever to get divorced that she would never get remarried, because it is just too hard on children.

Only one of the fathers in the sample has not yet remarried. When asked about her father not being remarried, Denise explained that her father remains single because he is afraid of marriage now that he has been divorced. It is interesting to note that when Denise talks about her own relationships she, like her father, appears to have a certain amount of fear about relationships. She described that none of her relationships have ever really lasted for very long because she breaks up quickly and fears commitment. Denise said:

I'm afraid of dating someone and just thinking they're so neat and so perfect for me and then getting married and finding out that's not who they are at all...so I never really get close to people to find out if they are a totally different person.

For Denise it seems that to a degree her father's fear of committed relationships has been transmitted to her and is one of the things standing in the way of her forming a satisfying relationship. Most often the respondents said that they related best to their parent who had custody of them following the divorce.

Mother's Remarriage

Five of the women in the sample said that while they were unhappy with their father's remarriage, they wished that their mother would get remarried. Angie's father is remarried, but her mother is not. Angie said of her experience with remarriage:

I wish that my mom would get remarried. I think that would be a positive experience for her.... I don't think she really understood what marriage was the first time around, [and] I want her to find someone who makes her happy. But my dad getting remarried wasn't a positive experience.

Angie's response is typical of the women who said that they wished their mothers would remarry.

A common response among these women was the perception that their mothers would no longer be lonely and would "have someone" if they remarried. Many of these women said that while they were unhappy with their father's remarriage, they wished their mother would get remarried soon. Some of these daughters felt a certain level of responsibility for their single mothers. For these women, some responsibility would be lifted from their shoulders if their mothers were to remarry and be able to rely on someone else to take care of them. This feeling of no longer being responsible for her mother was especially evident in Lynn's response. While Lynn said she did not necessarily like her mother's new husband, she said that she felt relieved when her mother remarried because she no longer had to be solely responsible for her mom:

In a way I was happy [about her mother's remarriage] because I didn't feel that responsibility for my mom...that burden, making sure she was financially okay.... She was lonely, so I was happy for her.

Following the divorce, Lynn and her siblings began to help the family out financially. Lynn said that often she would get angry if her younger siblings would ask for money because she knew that money was scarce. When her mother remarried, Lynn realized

that the financial burden that she had borne since the divorce would be alleviated by the presence of her stepfather. Whether the support that remarriage offers is financial or emotional, those women in the sample who wanted their mothers to remarry realized that they may not be able to support their mothers forever.

Summary of Findings

There were many interesting findings in this study. Among the findings was the discovery that the young women in this sample have ambivalent feelings about marriage. These ambivalent feelings about marriage are accompanied by feelings of insecurity, lack of trust, and fear of commitment. In spite of their ambivalence about marriage, many of the women expressed a desire to marry. Much of these women's desire to marry is linked to the fact that they are predominantly LDS. The LDS religion strongly encourages their members to be married. Even though these women have experienced their parents' divorce, their religious beliefs give them hope that relationships can work.

In addition to their religious faith, many of the women have role models in their lives who show them examples of both positive and negative relationships. Some of these women's positive examples came from the successful marriages of their own siblings. Siblings with "good marriages" provide these women with "proof" that a person whose parents are divorced can have successful relationships of their own.

The negative examples of relationships most often come from these women's parents' relationships. Many of the women described the parental conflict they were exposed to both before and after the divorce. Also, some women acted as go-betweens for their parents and were often encouraged to choose sides. The experience of choosing sides influenced these women negatively because they felt torn between their parents.

Paternal remarriage is another area which appears to have a negative influence on these women's attitudes about marriage. All but one of the women's fathers in the sample had remarried. In many cases their father's remarriage has been a negative experience for the respondents. While they may be unhappy with their father's remarriage, some of the women expressed the desire that their mothers will remarry. These women said that they would like their mothers to remarry so that they will no longer be lonely and so that their daughters won't have to be primarily responsible for them. The next chapter explains the key findings of the study and offers directions for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore how experiencing a parental divorce during early adolescence affects young adult women's attitudes about marriage. Participants in the study were very willing to discuss the experience of their parents' divorce and how they felt that experience had shaped their own relationships and attitudes about marriage.

This chapter begins with a review of the significant findings of the study. The theoretical perspective used in the study is explained. Next, the limitations of the study are explored. Finally, suggestions for parents, policy-makers, and church leaders are offered and directions for future research are also discussed.

Significant Findings

Several significant findings emerged from this study. These results are discussed by research question beginning with feelings about marriage, followed by relationship with parents, and concluding with experience with parental remarriage.

Feelings About Marriage

The most significant findings in this area are first, that young adult women whose parents divorced have ambivalent feelings about marriage; second, that religious beliefs can contribute to positive feelings about marriage; and third, that positive role models of successful marriage can buffer the negative effects of divorce.

Ambivalence. While many of the respondents talked about wanting to get married, they also discussed the ambivalence they felt about actually getting married. Sprecher et al. (1998) reported that women from divorced families have less idealism about love than women from intact families. Perhaps this lack of idealism about love contributes to these women's feelings of ambivalence about marriage. Much of this ambivalence is tied to the difficulty these women have with feeling insecure, lacking trust in partners, and fearing commitment.

Feelings of insecurity are especially evident in this sample. One of the main reasons that these women feel insecure in their relationships is that they are always worried that the relationship is going to end. Many of the women used the phrase "there are no guarantees." Going into a relationship thinking that it is not guaranteed to last is not conducive to secure feelings. Because there are no guarantees, several of the respondents explained that they end their relationships quickly before they lasted for too long. Consistent with Hayashi and Strickland (1998), who found that women from divorced homes are more likely to fear abandonment than women from intact homes, some women in this sample said they too fear abandonment. These women described abandoning (or ending) relationships before their partners could abandon them. Sometimes it seemed better for these women to protect themselves from getting close to someone and being left.

Lacking trust in dating partners is another factor that contributed to these women's ambivalence about marriage. In many cases, issues with trust appear to have started with these women's parents who left the family. After the parent left the family, often the women said that they could no longer trust that parent to be there for them. Sometimes this lack of trust was linked to the fact that their father was unfaithful to their

mother. Inability to trust the people you love (like your parents) seemed to create problems as these women sought to establish trusting relationship with dating partners.

Fearing commitment was also evident in these women's discussions about marriage. There appeared to be an underlying fear amongst the respondents about getting too close to someone. Many respondents feared that one day they could wake up and discover that they married the wrong person or should not have married at all. So, if they did not commit themselves to someone, then they would not wake up one day and realize that they married the wrong person. These women were trying to reconcile their desire to be married with their overwhelming fear that they might not succeed at it.

The findings from this study appear to confirm what Duran-Aydintug (1997) found in a qualitative study with 60 participants at a southern university. Similar to this study, Duran-Aydintug (1997) found that most of her respondents expressed "fear about forming a long-lasting bond" with a relationship partner (p. 80). Her participants said that in romantic relationships they would behave in ways that would abruptly end the relationship. One of her respondents said:

I always have feared that I would be dumped...so when things have gotten somewhat serious I would create fights...and we'd break up. But then at least I'd know I have left him, and haven't been left behind. (Duran-Aydintug, 1997, p. 80)

This quote illustrates how many of the respondents in this study feel, a fear of being left behind by someone you love. This fear of being left contributes to these women's ambivalent feelings about marriage, their feelings of insecurity, their inability to trust dating partners, and their underlying fear of committing themselves to a relationship.

Religion. The majority of this sample is LDS. All 14 respondents who identified their religion as LDS said that their religious beliefs have defined their attitude about

marriage. In many cases these women's religious beliefs appear to give them hope that relationships can last and be successful.

Many of the respondents said that they knew that with God's help that their marriages will work out. Several of the women explained that one of the primary things they look for in dating partners is shared religious devotion. The effects of religious beliefs on feelings about marriage, among children of divorce, have been understudied. These results suggest that type and strength of religious belief might strongly affect young adult women's attitudes toward marriage and willingness to marry.

Religion may be a mediating factor in how these women feel about marriage. It appears that a strong religious belief, while it doesn't entirely erase the effects of divorce, does give these women an anchor and hope that their relationships can work out.

Examples and role models. While these women often described their parents' relationships as bad examples of relationships, there were people in these women's lives who provided good examples of relationships. For some, these positive examples came from their grandparents, friends, or church leaders. For the most part the good examples came from their own siblings who had married. Many of these women described the hope it gives them to see that a member of their own family, who experienced the same things they did, could make a marriage work. It seems that the women in this sample believe that if their sister or brother can make their marriage work, then perhaps there is hope that they can too.

The importance of role models in these women's lives has implications for parents. It appears that what these women really want after they have experienced their parents' divorce is a glimpse of relationships that are working out. Amato (1996) found that children from divorced families are exposed to poor models of marital relationships

by their parents and as a result the skills for successful marital relationships must be learned elsewhere. Perhaps parents who are divorcing can seek role models for their children so that children can have an example of how to make relationships work. Parents also need to be aware that their children are watching how they interact with relationship partners.

Relationship with Parents

The most significant findings in this area were the conflict between parents that these women experienced during the divorce process, and the experience several of the women had of being put in the middle of their parent's relationship. These two phenomena, experiencing parental conflict and acting as a middleman between parents, appear to have influenced the women in this sample negatively, and to have contributed to a less satisfying relationship with parents.

Parental conflict. The majority of the sample said that they were exposed to parental conflict. Much of the conflict seems to have peaked following the divorce. Many of these women described the unhappiness they experienced as a result of being exposed to their parents' anger at one another.

Walker and Ehrenberg (1998) found that children who were exposed to blatant displays of anger by their parents during divorce were more likely to report that they had insecure or fearful attachments with dating partners in their college years. Walker and Ehrenberg's findings seem to be consistent with what many of the women in this sample indicated about their own approach to romantic relationships. Several women described the difficulty they had in maintaining their own relationships. Oftentimes these women withdrew from a relationship because they were afraid it would not last. Perhaps these

women were experiencing what Summers et al. (1998) referred to as an attachment disruption. These women's attachments with one parent (usually their father) was disrupted by divorce, and as a result, they may fear that their relationships with dating partners will be disrupted, too. It would seem that in order for parents to help make their children's transition to divorce smoother, they need to eliminate or at least minimize the conflict between them, and they need to make efforts for the noncustodial parent to continue a relationship with the children.

Middleman. Nine of the respondents in this sample said that at one time or another they were put in the middle of their parent's relationship. Many of the respondents recalled how difficult it was for them to relay messages back and forth between their parents. For many of the women their parent's divorce was approximately eleven years ago and yet they still have anger about being put in the middle of their parent's relationship that remains in their adulthood. Such anger may contribute to the fears and lack of trust found in this study.

This finding has implications for parents who are considering a divorce. Parents need to be cautious about the position they put their children in following a divorce. While a parent may not want to speak to an ex-spouse and may feel that it is better to have the children relay messages back and forth, findings from this study indicate that children do not fare well when they are put in the middle. Parents would be well advised to use some other third party to communicate with one another, or learn to communicate with one another, rather than using their children to deliver messages. The findings from this study suggest that these women could have benefited from some form of therapy during or immediately following their parent's divorce. Years after their parent's

divorce, many of these women still expressed anger over their experiences with parental conflict and acting as a middleman.

Remarriage

The most significant findings about remarriage were that while many of them women have a negative view of their father's remarriage, they wish that their mother would remarry.

Father's remarriage. Fourteen of the fathers in this sample were remarried. Most of the women said that the experience of their father's remarriage has been negative for them. These women described feeling like their father betrayed the family by replacing their mother when he remarried.

Mothers most often have custody of children following a divorce (McCabe, 1997; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1996) and so it makes sense that the women in this sample would feel betrayed on their mother's behalf when their fathers remarry. Many of the women discussed how they refused to attend their father's wedding. Because these women often lived with their mother, and felt like they owed their mothers a certain level of loyalty, they were unsure how they could be supportive of their father's new marriage when they knew that it would hurt their mothers. Once again a question of loyalty loomed large for the women in this sample.

Mother's remarriage. One of the most interesting findings in this study was that while five of the respondents described themselves as unhappy with their father's remarriage, they all said that they would like their mother to remarry. Perhaps these women are experiencing what Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996) described as a fear among the daughters of divorced women of surpassing their mothers by forming their

own romantic relationships. In other words, perhaps these women were eager to have their mother find someone to marry, not only because it would relieve daughters of feeling responsible, but also because it would give them “permission” to form their own relationships. It seems that these women may think if their mother has someone then they can find someone for themselves. This finding about mother’s remarriage appears to be very consistent with Josselson’s (1991) finding that mothers and daughters are very interconnected with one another. Josselson suggested that mother’s and daughter’s identities are intertwined with each other and remain so throughout their lives. This finding would suggest that a young woman might not be able to identify herself as an individual with a close relationship of her own until her mother has a close relationship as well.

Based on these women’s experiences it is clear that parents, especially custodial parents, need to be careful about the direct and indirect messages about relationships that they send to their children following a divorce. If a mother encouraged her daughter both directly and indirectly to form satisfying relationships of her own, then it would seem that daughters would feel better about their relationship experiences. Axinn and Thornton (1996) found that women whose mothers never remarried reported negative attitudes about marriage. If a divorced mother never remarries, or appears to be negative about relationships, this may have negative implications for children. The messages that children get from their parents are very important and have long-lasting effects.

Theoretical Framework

Symbolic Interactionism

The theoretical framework used for this study was symbolic interactionism.

Symbolic interactionism seeks to understand how people make sense of the social worlds and experiences that surround them (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). This study examined how young adult women viewed marriage after experiencing the divorce of their parents. In other words, how did the social experience of parental divorce affect these women's attitudes about relationships, marriage, and divorce? Marriage is an attractive, but scary thing for these respondents. While they wanted to marry, serious relationships were fearful undertakings.

A second tenet of symbolic interactionism is that people define their experiences based on their experiences with the people in their social world (LaRoss & Reitzes, 1993). Frequently a person's social world consists of their family especially during the early years. Within these women's families their parents' relationships served as a negative example of how to make relationships work. Yet women who had siblings who have been successful in marriages hoped that they could make relationships work too. Summers et al. (1998) reported that young adults from divorced homes have less faith that marriages can actually work. It appears that those women who have positive examples of marriage, especially within their family, may feel better about marriage for themselves.

Social learning theory can also be used to explain the effect of role models. Bandura's (1986) social learning theory suggests that people learn how to behave in social situations by observing the behavior of those around them. Observing other people's behavior for clues on how to conduct relationships is evident in this sample. Several respondents reported that they often observe the relationships of the people around them (siblings, grandparents) in order to find a pattern whereby they can form their own romantic relationships.

A third assumption of symbolic interactionism is that people modify how they feel about certain situations depending on their own experiences (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Many of the women in the sample reported that their experience with their father's remarriage has been negative. Because the majority of these women have experienced the remarriage of their father, this experience has contributed to the negative view many of them have about remarriages.

Another aspect of symbolic interactionism is the notion that individuals are influenced by the culture and society in which they are a part (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). This aspect of symbolic interactionism is especially important for this group of women. The majority of the women in this sample described themselves as LDS. Within the LDS culture women are strongly encouraged to marry. LDS women tend to marry at younger ages than the national average. Several of the women described that while experiencing the divorce of their parents has been difficult, that they have hope through their religion that they will have successful marriages. For these women their religious culture has shaped their attitudes about marriage and made them feel more positive than they might otherwise.

Identity Formation

In order to be eligible to participate in this study participants had to meet certain age criteria. They were between the ages of 10 and 14 when their parents got divorced. It makes sense that if a crisis, like a divorce, occurred during those critical years that this could have a lasting impact on identity development. Wallerstein and Blakeslee (1996) found that daughters who become too enmeshed in the responsibilities of home during a divorce have a difficult time "developing the emotional independence that allows her to

separate and establish her own identity" (p. 99). These women are often deprived of the chance to enjoy their adolescence and as a result they may be unsure about who they are on their own. These women may be experiencing what Erikson (1959) has referred to as an identity foreclosure. Identity foreclosure occurs when adolescents assume a role, in this case a mothering role, before they are ready to choose a role or identity of their own (Erikson). These women may be unsure of what their role outside of the family really is and as a result they may have a difficulty leaving their family, especially their mother, behind.

Erikson (1959) suggested that at some time or another every person must go through each of Erikson's stages. If a person does not successfully complete Erikson's stage of forming an identity, that makes it all the more difficult to achieve the next stage, which is intimacy versus isolation. Erikson suggested that a person cannot achieve lasting intimacy unless that person has achieved a sense of his/her own identity. Persons cannot give themselves entirely to another unless they are sure about who they really are. If persons do not achieve intimacy, then they are faced with isolation (Erikson). Adams and Archer (1994) also suggested that while a person whose identity is not fully formed may be able to form relationships, these relationships may lack depth and quality. Adams and Archer suggested that for both males and females having a sense of who they are, independent of others, is a key to predicting whether or not a person will be successful in intimate relationships.

Within this sample it does seem that the experience of a divorce during these years has had a lasting effect to one degree or another on each of these women. While two of the women are married, the other 13 are not. Each one of the single participants is at a different place along the path to forming a close relationship with a partner. While

these women may have been at a different place in terms of their relationship formation, each one of them expressed similar feelings about the process.

Overwhelmingly the emotion that was expressed was fear. These women are scared, that they, like their parents, will fail at marriage. They are not sure how to overcome this fear. Unless these women can somehow overcome their fear of relationships and being close to someone, they run the risk of facing isolation (Erikson, 1959). Sadly, it is isolation that many of these women really fear. While they may not have called their fear, a fear of isolation, there is an underlying fear in these women that they will end up alone. What these women appear to want more than anything is to establish a successful relationship of their own. Erikson would suggest that before they can do this they need to evaluate where they are along his stage continuum and go back and complete the stages they have not resolved.

Limitations

The generalizability of this sample to the general population of young women who experienced the divorce of their parents during early adolescence is compromised by the small sample size, its nonrandom selection, and the homogeneity of racial and religious backgrounds. While the sample served the needs of this study, a larger sample with more religious, racial, and ethnic diversity would increase the applicability of the findings to the general population.

One of the main reasons that this sample is not generalizable to the population at large is that all but one of the women in the sample are LDS. The LDS religion encourages their members to be married. The women in this sample said that their desire to be married is directly related to their religious beliefs. It is likely that participants in a

more religiously diverse population may have expressed less of a desire to be married and an increased desire to cohabit. For example, Kozuch and Cooney (1995), whose sample was more religiously diverse, found that young adults from divorced families expressed a desire to wait until they were older to marry, and to cohabit prior to marriage in order to get to know their partner better.

Another limitation of this sample was that these women were asked to reflect on the experience of their parents' divorce. The average age of the participants at the time of divorce was 12 years. The participants' average age at time of the interview was 23 years. It has been approximately 11 years since these women's parents divorced. It is possible that these women's reflections of the divorce process might not be entirely accurate because so much time has passed. It would be useful if a researcher were to ask children about the effects of divorce immediately following the divorce, and at regular intervals thereafter so that the reports are not solely based on retrospective data.

A final limitation to the study is the use of the researcher as an instrument. My perspective as a person who has not experienced the divorce of a parent may have colored the way the data were analyzed. It is possible that other researchers, who had experienced parental divorce themselves, would have chosen to focus on other themes and ideas. On the other hand, my lack of insider status did not allow me the possibility of biasing my analysis with my personal experience of divorce.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this study have implications for parents, policy makers, and church leaders. They are suggested below with recommendations for each area.

Parents

Because approximately one million children in the United States experience parental divorce each year (Amato et al., 1995), it is important for parents to understand the effect their divorce will have on their children. In their most recent book, Wallerstein, Lewis, and Blakeslee (2000) suggested that parents should consider staying together for the sake of their children. Their longitudinal study examined adults 25 years after their parents' divorce. Not too surprisingly, they found that even 25 years after their parents' divorce, some adults were still having difficulty in their romantic relationships (Wallerstein et al., 2000). They focused on one woman, Karen, who described herself as happily married with a daughter. Despite being happy with her marriage, she said that she often is waiting for the "other shoe to drop." Karen keeps waiting for her husband to leave her or to decide he did not really love her and then she will be "alone and abandoned, just like I always knew I would be" (Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, p. 61). Despite the fact that Karen is happy, she is always looking over her shoulder for something bad to happen.

While some parents are uncomfortable with the notion that they should stay together for the sake of their children, it seems that some families should consider whether or not it will be more harmful or helpful to the children if a divorce occurs. Whether or not parents stay together, they should carefully consider how their children are going to handle the divorce--not only while it is going on but for the rest of their lives.

Families who do not stay together should consider seeking professional counseling. A trained counselor could help coach parents through the divorce process and teach them how to be sensitive to the needs of their children during this time. Also, a

counselor could help children involved in a divorce cope with the “loss” of their family and give them skills they can use to form their own romantic relationships.

Policy Makers

Because approximately half of children have experienced the divorce of their parents, policy makers need to be sensitive to the needs of parents and children who are dealing with divorce. There are those who say that America has become a culture of divorce and that divorces are becoming a normal occurrence for families (Wallerstein et al., 2000; Wolfinger, 1999). Because so many people are experiencing divorce, either directly or indirectly, policies need to be in place that will educate people about the effects of divorce. Parents need to be aware as they are going through a divorce of ways that they can help their children to deal with the family transition.

While there are classes for divorcing parents in the state of Utah which, among other things, educate parents who are getting divorced on how to help their children deal with divorce, it would seem that similar classes would be very useful for children. Children need to be educated about the effects their parents’ divorce will have on them. Children need to be aware that it is normal for them to feel confused and angry and that those feelings may come and go throughout their lives.

It would be helpful if young adults who experienced their parents’ divorce were educated about the possibility of premarital counseling. In premarital counseling couples often take tests to determine their compatibility and are given skills to help improve their relationships (Larson, 1999). Premarital counseling would be a way for these young women who are scared of forming relationships to test their compatibility with a potential partner prior to marriage (Larson, 1999). It is possible that premarital counseling would

help to alleviate some of the fears that these women have about being successful in their romantic relationships.

Church Leaders

This sample was primarily LDS, and the LDS religion strongly advocates the importance of marriages and families. It would seem that within church programs that these young women would have benefited from some form of education about the effects of divorce. Support groups within church organizations for parents and children who are dealing with a divorce would be a good way for people to discuss their experiences and feel a greater sense of community. Church leaders need to be educated about how to more effectively counsel and support members of their congregation who are dealing with divorce. Church leaders should also be educated about resources within their community that can help their members cope with divorce.

Future Research

The implications for future research are important. It is clear that in order to truly understand the long-term effects of divorce, longitudinal studies are necessary. Wallerstein and others' (2000) 25-year study of the effects of parental divorce on children has been instrumental in understanding the importance of longitudinal studies in studying divorce effects. More longitudinal studies that deal with divorce are necessary so that researchers can better understand the changes that children of divorce encounter throughout their lives. A follow-up study with the women who participated in this study would be useful in finding out how many of these women marry, and how they feel about those marriages over time.

Research on males who were the same age as the females in this study also would be useful. It would be interesting to discover if men's attitudes following parental divorce during adolescence are similar or different than women whose parents divorced during adolescence. There could possibly be sex differences in how men and women deal with the experience of their parents' divorce as they form relationships of their own.

The results from this study could also be used to design a larger study in order to determine how female young adults' marital attitudes are shaped by parental divorce during adolescence. The categories and themes used in the present studies could be tested on a larger sample for strength and degree of influence.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, one can surmise that parental divorce during adolescence shapes young adult women's marital attitudes. Each of the women interviewed for this study, whether they were married or single, described how their parents' relationship has shaped their own views of relationships and marriages. For some women, their parents' relationship showed them the kind of relationship they did not want to have; for others, their religion and positive role models gave them hope that they will have good relationships of their own. No matter what these women's experience with divorce, they assured me that their fear of relationships would not stop them from having relationships and eventually getting married. The majority of these women expect to marry, and I suspect that they will.

An important contribution of this study is an account by the women themselves of how divorce has shaped their lives. Each woman willingly shared how her experience with divorce shaped her attitudes about marriage. Their willingness to share their stories

of divorce suggests a strong desire on their part to make sense of their own experiences. This study has provided a window into the experiences these women have with forming their own relationships. These women have feelings of doubt about relationships and yet, at the same time, they have a strong desire to have them. Another important contribution this study makes is by showing the importance of religious devotion on buffering the effects of parental divorce. These women explained that their religious beliefs gave them hope about relationships that they would not otherwise have. Also this study showed how positive role models have a buffering effect on the lives of these women. Most importantly this study gives these women, and other women who have had similar experiences, hope that they too can form satisfying relationships even after they have experienced their parents' divorce. While a parental divorce creates many problems, these women can attest that these problems are not insurmountable.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A.

Informed Consent and IRB Approval

The Effect of Parental Divorce on Female Young Adults' Marital Attitudes

I. Introductory Statement

Professor Kathleen Piercy in the Family and Human Development Department at Utah State University is conducting a study to find out more about how the experience of parental divorce during adolescence affects female young adults' marital attitudes. You have been asked to take part in this study because you experienced the divorce of your parents when you were between the ages of 10-14. There will be approximately 20 female young adults who will participate in this study.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. You have the right to ask for further information or clarification at anytime during the research process. Your signature at the end of this consent form indicates that the interviewer has answered all your questions and that you have voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

II. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to better understand how the experience of parental divorce during adolescence affects attitudes about relationships and marriage in young women.

III. Procedures

Approximately 20 female young adults who experienced the divorce of their parents when they were between the ages of 10-14 will be interviewed. The interviews will last approximately an hour. Only one interview will be conducted. At the time of the interview participants will be asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire. The interviews will be audio taped to allow for later data analysis.

IV. Benefits of this Project

Your participation in this project will provide a greater understanding of the possible long-term effects of parental divorce; particularly how parental divorce shapes young adults' marital attitudes.

No benefits have been guaranteed to you in order to encourage you to participate in this study.

When the research is concluded you may receive a summary of the results.

Let the interviewer know if you would be interested in receiving a summary.

V. Discomforts and Risks

The possible risks or discomfort to you while participating in this study is the possibility that some of the information that is discussed may be upsetting to you. You will be asked to recall the circumstances surrounding your parent's divorce.

You are encouraged to speak freely and openly. You may choose to discontinue the interview at any time if you feel like you need to. Also, you may choose not to answer a particular question if you are uncomfortable with it.

VI. Confidentiality

Research records will be kept confidential consistent with federal and state regulations. Your identity will be coded using numbers and your actual identity will not be associated with any of the published results. Tapes and transcripts associated with this project will be kept in a locked file in a room that will be locked whenever the Student Researcher is not there. Audio tapes will be kept for 1 year after the project is completed and then they will be erased.

VII. New Findings

During the course of the study you will be made aware of any significant findings associated with this study.

VIII. Voluntary Nature of Participation

Participation in research is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without consequence.

IX. IRB Approval Statement

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects at Utah State University has reviewed and approved this research project.

I have read and understand the Consent Form and I am willing to participate in this study. Please retain one of the copies of the Consent Form for your records.

The researcher certifies that this study has been explained to the participant and the individual understands the nature and purpose, and the possible risks and benefits associated with participating in this study. Any questions have been answered.

Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Name of Principal Investigator Kathleen W. Piercy

Signature of Principal Investigator _____

Name of Student Researcher Anne C. Schmidt

Signature of Student Researcher _____

Date _____

Appendix B.
Instruments

Demographic Questionnaire

The Effect of Parental Divorce on Female Young Adult Marital Attitudes

This questionnaire will provide me with important information about your background.

Today's Date: _____

Your Name: _____

Birthdate: _____

Age when parents divorced: _____

Age when mother remarried (if applicable) _____

Age when father remarried (if applicable) _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Year in School: _____

Major in school: _____

Religion (check one):

LDS (Mormon)

Catholic

Protestant

Jewish

Other (please specify) _____

Are you solely responsible for your financial stability?

yes

no

If you marked yes, what is your best estimate of your yearly income?

Less than \$6,000

\$6,000-10,000

\$10,000-20,000

- \$20,000-30,000
 \$30,000-50,000
 More than \$50,000

If you marked no, give your best estimate of your parent's/caregivers annual income.

\$ _____

Marital Status (check one):

- single
 married
 separated
 divorced

Are you currently dating?

yes _____

no _____

Number of times you considered yourself engaged _____

Number of siblings _____

Introductory Statement

I'd like you to discuss as thoroughly as you can your experience with your parent's divorce. Answer the questions as completely as you can.. As we go along please feel free to let me know if you are confused by a question.

1. How did you learn about your parent's divorce?

Probe:

Did the divorce come as a shock? Were you relieved, sad, other?

2. What do you perceive to be the reason for your parent's divorce?

Probes:

Lots of parental conflict

Extramarital affairs

Different goals

Children

3. Describe your parents relationship with each other both before and after the divorce. How is their relationship now?

Probes:

Did the fighting increase?

Was there more harmony?

Were you in the middle?

4. Describe your relationship with both of your parents both before and after the divorce. What is your relationship like with both of them now?

Probes:

How often do/did you see your noncustodial parent?

How do/did you feel about that?

5. Has either of your parents remarried? If one or both of them have remarried, how do you feel about this?

Probes:

Do you think the remarriage is positive or negative?

How do you get along with your stepparent?

6. If one or both of your parents have not remarried do either of them date? How often would you estimate that they date?

7. Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship? How long has this relationship/marriage lasted?
8. If you're not in a relationship how long ago was your last relationship...tell me about it, what did you like, not like. How did it end?
9. Tell me about your current or your most recent past romantic relationship, what do you like about it, or not like about it?
10. To what extent do you feel secure in your current romantic relationship(or marriage)? If insecure, please explain why?

Probe:

Secure means valued, lovable, trusting

Does the insecurity come from her or him or both?

11. How has the experience of your parent's divorce made you feel with respect to security in your own romantic relationships?

Probes:

Are you more or less likely to trust your partner?

Do you find issues of trust coming up in your relationship again and again?

12. How do you feel about marriage?
13. Do you expect to marry? Why, or why not?

Probes:

What is your ideal age for marriage?

How old were your parents when they got married?

14. If you do marry, under what circumstances do you think it's okay for a couple to divorce?
15. Are there other persons or life experiences that have affected your attitudes about relationships, marriage and divorce?

Probe:

To what extent have your religious beliefs contributed to your attitudes about marriage?

QUESTIONS 16-17 WILL BE ASKED OF THOSE PARTICIPANTS WHO ARE MARRIED

15. How do think your parent's divorced has influenced your marriage?

Probe:

How similar are your patterns of problem solving? Relating?

16. What is your attitude about divorce?