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How Does the Presence of Divorce Affect Children's Anxiety Surrounding Romantic Relationships?

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Abstract

The past few decades have seen a significant increase in the rates of divorce, with factors such as changing societal norms, economic pressures, and individual desires for personal fulfillment influencing this trend. Children of divorced parents often experience a range of emotional, social, and psychological effects that can have an impact on their well-being. Past literature has found that individuals who experience parental divorce suffer from increased behavioral difficulties, less time with father figures, and feel more hesitant towards relationship commitment than individuals who do not have divorced parents. The current study specifically inspected how parental divorce can affect people and how the social learning theory impacts an individual's thoughts toward divorce and future romantic relationships. This study utilized survey research to collect data for analysis from students at Chapman University to determine the severity of effects on individuals due to parental divorce. Of the four hypotheses proposed, none were supported with statistically significant data. Despite not finding statistically significant results in this study, it is important to have intervention groups/organizations to better support people who have experienced parental divorce. Past studies should prompt therapy interventions to be accessible to any child who experiences parental divorce, with therapy being offered at schools or private therapists to prevent any negative consequences.

How Does the Presence of Divorce Affect Children's Anxiety Surrounding Romantic Relationships?

With divorce no longer being viewed as taboo in some cultures, the number of marriages in the United States resulting in divorce has reached a high of 50 percent, with the average marriage lasting only eight years (Divorce statistics and facts, 2022). Due to these increasing rates, more children are being forced to live with the aftermath of separated families and dealing with the lingering effects of parental divorce. The social learning theory explains some effects parental divorce can have on individuals, as parental relationships serve as early examples of how social relationships are structured (Lee, 2007). This paper specifically inspected how parental divorce affects individuals and how the social learning theory impacts an individual's thoughts toward divorce and future relationships.

Social Learning Theory

As divorce becomes more common within families, it is vital to understand the effect this can have on individuals who grow up and witness this occurring to their parents. Past literature has shed some light on this issue and its impact on future generations. As children grow and develop, they take in information from the surrounding environment to better understand the world around them and how they should act. This includes parental relationships, which children observe during childhood/adolescence (Lee, 2019). Once observed, children then utilize the information (interaction skills and behaviors) they have gathered from those parental relationships to guide their behaviors regarding future relationships. However, if parental divorce occurs, this can cause a rift in this dynamic, with children then observing an unhealthy relationship (Lee, 2019). Through this lens, parental divorce could negatively affect individuals if not addressed or known.

The social learning theory is present throughout psychology and is utilized in different forms of therapy to not just predict individuals' behaviors but also to improve relationships in general. The social learning theory is based on the idea that relationships will improve when positive interpersonal behaviors are supported and negative behaviors are punished (Johnson & Bradbury, 2015). Over time, this perspective has been combined with different interventions to help individuals improve their relationships with others through therapy, whether that be married couples, family members, or friends (Johnson & Bradbury, 2015). As explained, the social learning theory not only describes how children learn from the relationship between their parents but also can explain how a couple could improve their relationship to build a positive relationship that their children can observe.

Past research has found evidence to support the social learning perspective in relation to parental divorce and the quality of romantic relationships for children (Lee, 2007). A study by Lee in 2007 found that relationships between a parent and child can be predictive of the quality of the child's future relationships, more significantly for daughters' relationships. In the study, daughters' relationships with their parents were shown to predict the quality of their future romantic relationships. However, this same finding was not supported for males of parental divorce, with relationships between sons and their parents not being as significantly predictive of the quality of the son's future romantic relationships (Lee, 2007).

In a study by Vonbergen in 2012, eight licensed clinical social workers were interviewed to understand the effects that parental divorce has on individuals. One of the social workers' main findings was the modeling that individuals received while growing up. Although each social worker had a slightly different approach to this topic, each social worker emphasized the importance of the need to address modeling that individuals received from their parents while

growing up and how some might be affected by divorce. As mentioned in the article, some participants had to receive new forms of modeling due to parental divorce in the past and lacking positive role models while they were growing up. According to the social learning theory, modeling is necessary for developing children to make sense of the world, so learning to observe models in their life is essential (Vonbergen, 2012). However, some children grow up without positive modeling due to divorce and the loss of parental figures in a household.

The studies conducted by Vonbergen (2012) and Lee (2007) both explain how the Social Learning Theory work in principle as well as data to show that the concepts contained in this theory do guide the behaviors of children as they grow up observing the world. By understanding the effect that the Social Learning Theory has on the development of individuals, the ideas within this theory can be utilized in therapy to help people improve and change their interpersonal behaviors and the relationships they have with people.

Role of Parental Divorce

One effect of parental divorce that literature has explored is how parental divorce can influence individuals to view relationships differently. A study by Nelson (2009) found that individuals with divorced parents felt more anxious regarding commitment to romantic relationships and less satisfaction in marriage. It was also found that parental divorce also influenced individuals to be less involved in relationships that they were currently in. However, when individuals did have committed relationships, cohabitation rates of non-married couples were higher than rates of married couples living together (Nelson, 2009). As shown, this study collected data to support the stance that parental divorce does correlate with more hesitancy towards marriage and commitment among individuals who grow up observing parental divorce.

Similar to the previous study, Booth et al. (1984) also analyzed parental divorce's effects on individuals, specifically the courtship of offspring in later romantic relationships. However, contradictory to Nelson (2009), this study found that parental divorce was predictive of higher levels of courtship in offspring. This differed from the study conducted by Nelson (2009) because it showed increased levels of involvement for individuals who had experienced parental divorce. To explain this finding, the study stated that a possible reason behind the increased levels of courtship in offspring could be the motivation that the offspring had not to replicate their parents' relationship, which resulted in divorce (Booth et al., 1984). For this reason, the participants may have put more effort into courtship to ensure that their romantic relationship would not end in divorce like their parents.

Past research contains mixed results regarding this topic, with some studies finding that people have positive reactions toward their parents' divorce, contradicting the results of studies such as Nelson (2009). Amato and Booth (1991) found that individuals of divorced parents had positive attitudes toward divorce in general compared to individuals from parents who remained married. However, as explained by Amato and Booth this happened because the participants reported that they favored divorce compared to the continuation of conflict between their parents. This was also similar for individuals who reported their parents' marriage to be filled with unhappiness. These participants also held positive attitudes toward the alternative of divorce if needed in their own life (Amato & Booth, 1991). Furthermore, the study by Amato and Booth also reported that individuals from divorced parents were more likely to experience divorce within their own romantic relationships than individuals from married parents.

Building on the findings in the previous study, another study found similar results indicating that individuals who witnessed more marital violence and conflict would be more

likely to accept divorce as a favorable outcome in the long run (Mitchell et al., 2021). The study by Mitchell et al. (2021) explained how individuals who had experienced parental divorce that consisted of violence/conflict were more favorable of divorce because the conflict itself was reason enough for the divorce to occur. This finding might be different for individuals who experienced parental divorce that was calmer or more respectful because there would not be as much reason for the divorce to occur. Furthermore, because the children did not have to experience as much conflict, they might not be able to comprehend why their parents decided to divorce (Mitchell et al., 2021).

As shown, people have mixed views and reactions toward divorce after experiencing or witnessing their parents go through a divorce. Studies such as Nelson (2009) found that parental divorce increased hesitancy toward future romantic relationships. Other studies, such as Amato and Booth (1991) and Mitchell et al. (2021), found contradictory data showing that some people had positive views towards divorce. The results of these studies could be explained to support the fact that individuals might have higher anxiety levels after parental divorce. This could be the case because many of the participants from the studies by Amato and Booth (1991) and Mitchell et al. (2021) reported favoring divorce as an alternative to marital violence or conflict, which demonstrates their desire to lower familial conflict that might worry them within their parents' marriage.

Hypothesis 1: Individuals with divorced parents will have higher anxiety levels regarding their own romantic relationships compared to individuals with married parents.

Participants with divorced vs married parents: The participant will self-report this variable.

Anxiety: Low anxiety will be a score of 0 - 21 on the Beck Anxiety Inventory. Moderate anxiety will be a score of 22 - 35 on the Beck Anxiety Inventory. Potentially concerning levels of anxiety will be a score of 36 or higher on the Beck Anxiety Inventory.

Gender and Romantic Relationships

Due to gender norms and expectations, gender is a factor that could impact individuals regarding parental divorce. Gender expectations and differences in lived experiences between the genders could explain why some people feel differently about given topics, parental divorce being one. Despite this, a study by Brewer (2010) found that gender does not seem to cause a significant difference in how much depression men versus women feel after experiencing parental divorce. However, the rate of depression was markedly high, with about 60% of men and women from families with divorced parents suffering from depression later in life. In this instance, gender did not seem to impact how much depression men versus women felt, with both genders feeling similar levels of depression (Brewer, 2010).

Attachment styles between individuals within a relationship can be another way of analyzing gender differences and how they react due to parental divorce. A study by Sprecher et al. in 1998 gathered data on this topic from 1,000 participants, with about 250 participants having divorced parents. There existed no significant difference in attachment styles for males with divorced parents and married parents (Sprecher et al., 1998). However, there was a significant difference in attachment styles between women with divorced parents and women with married parents. Women with married parents were more likely to have a secure attachment style than those with divorced parents, who were more likely to have an avoidant attachment style (Sprecher et al., 1998). This is relevant because attachment styles can influence how much anxiety an individual feels toward a relationship. If women who experience parental divorce are

more likely to have avoidant attachment styles, this may cause them more anxiety with such relationships. This could then translate into anxiety towards their romantic relationships.

Aggression levels between females and males in romantic relationships and friends have also been researched. Although not a study concerning divorce, Goldstein (2011) found that participants felt more aggression towards their romantic relationship partners than friends. This was explained due to the increased importance that was put on companionship and intimacy needs within romantic relationships compared to relationships with friends, which can strain the relationship and cause aggression when not met (Goldstein, 2011). Additionally, when looking further into romantic relationships, it was found that females reported higher levels of aggression compared to males regarding romantic relationships. Goldstein discussed possible causes of this, including the possibility that females might report more aggression because they notice social transgressions more from their romantic partner, resulting in aggressive feelings (Goldstein, 2011).

Looking at romantic relationships without parental divorce being explicitly studied, Muetzelfeld et al. (2020) found that couples who had high levels of attachment insecurity reported these levels due to two causes: problems in communication and distress resulting from family-of-origin and financial issues (Muetzelfeld et al., 2020). Specifically, females felt higher levels of attachment insecurity due to distress from family-of-origin, whereas males felt higher levels of attachment insecurity due to financial conflicts. This is interesting to note because the distress from family-of-origin that the females reported could be connected to issues such as parental divorce or separation.

As shown, gender can impact some aspects of an individual (attachment styles and aggression levels) while not affecting other elements of a person (depression levels). There

appears to be a lack of research that analyzes how gender affects the amount of anxiety individuals feel towards romantic relationships, specifically after observing parental divorce. Due to this, anxiety levels in females and males after parental divorce will be an area of research within this paper.

Hypothesis 2: Women with divorced parents will experience higher anxiety levels regarding their own romantic relationships compared to men with divorced parents.

Gender of participant: The participant will self-report this variable.

Anxiety: Low anxiety will be a score of 0 - 21 on the Beck Anxiety Inventory. Moderate anxiety will be a score of 22 - 35 on the Beck Anxiety Inventory. Potentially concerning levels of anxiety will be a score of 36 or higher on the Beck Anxiety Inventory.

Parent-Child Relationships

Gender is also a factor to consider when it comes to the effect of parental divorce and the types of relationships that are fostered between children and parents after divorce has occurred. A study by Cooney found that it was less likely for both male and female children to live with their father compared to their mother after the divorce, even if the family did not have to undergo custody battles. This led to decreased contact between fathers and their children, most significantly between fathers and their sons (Cooney, 1994). The reduced contact between fathers and children after parental divorce is essential to acknowledge, especially regarding custody battles and the reality that fathers might face in these situations.

Taking a closer look at relationships between fathers and children, Kalmijn conducted a study in 2013 to analyze relationships that children had with their fathers following parental divorce. This study analyzed the variables of contact, support, and quality of relationships between individuals and their fathers. After collecting data, Kalmjin (2013) found that contact,

support, and quality of relationships between individuals and their fathers after parental divorce were significantly more negative than the variables between individuals and their mothers.

Although the specific gender of the children was not analyzed, it supports previous findings that children generally have stronger relationships with their mothers than fathers after parental divorce occurs (Kalmjin, 2013).

Adding to the research about parent-child relationships, a study by White et al. (1985) found that daughters and sons of married couples reported equal attachment to fathers after divorce, so long as the father remained the custodial parent after the divorce. However, they found that the reported parent-child attachment rates for noncustodial mothers and fathers were significantly lower than for married parents. Furthermore, it was reported that attachment levels between children and their noncustodial mothers were higher than those between children and their noncustodial fathers. This demonstrates that the gender of a parent can affect parent-child relationship closeness (White et al., 1985). This information shows the effect of divorce and custody of children on parent-child relationships, supporting the stance that divorce can negatively affect the children's relationship with their parents.

Relationships between individuals and their parents after parental divorce are complicated due to custodial situations and the addition of stepparents. Ivanova and Kalmjin conducted a study in 2020 that found that participants from divorced parents had lower closeness levels with biological fathers who had gotten divorced compared to stepfathers. Despite the additional frequency of involvement or co-residence of birth fathers, this gap in closeness levels between children and their biological fathers versus children and their stepfathers remained (Ivanova & Kalmjin, 2020).

These studies demonstrate the impact that divorce can have on familial relationships, including how custody of a child can affect the levels of closeness and quality of relationships between children and their mothers and fathers. Although this past research sheds light on parent-child relationships, there is one aspect of parent-child relationships that still needs more analysis: the relationship between the two genders of children and the reported quality of their relationship with their fathers following parental divorce.

Hypothesis 3: Daughters will report higher quality relationships with custodial or non-custodial fathers after parental divorce compared to quality relationship levels between sons and their custodial or non-custodial fathers after parental divorce.

Gender of participant: The participant will self-report this variable.

Quality of relationship: Higher scores on the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory will be representative of higher quality of relationships, while lower scores will be representative of lower quality of relationships.

Reactions Towards Parental Divorce

The gender of an individual is another area to study regarding how people react to parental divorce and its outcomes. Research has found that following recent parental divorce/separation, higher levels of hyperactivity were found in sons compared to daughters when reported by their mothers (Mitchell et al., 2021). This was a significant finding, with more than double the number of boys than girls being within the borderline/abnormal range of hyperactivity (Mitchell et al., 2021). This means that after experiencing parental divorce, boys are more likely than girls to externalize their behaviors, whether that be positive or negative. Although attention deficit hyperactivity disorder is more commonly diagnosed in men than women, this is still an interesting finding.

Brewer (2010) conducted an additional study to analyze individuals' reactions to parental divorce, looking this time at depression levels reported by daughters and sons. This study utilized the Carroll Depression Scale-Revised (CDS-R) to measure depression symptoms among participants. After collecting data, Brewer (2010) found that an equal number of men and women (60.6 % men and 60.0 % women) reported feeling symptoms of depression following parental divorce. From this study alone, depression levels did not vary much between men and women (Brewer, 2010).

One study by Block et al. in 1986 looked at children's behaviors prior to parental divorce and the differences in how boys versus girls behaved. The data from this study gave an interesting insight into how children behaved before parental divorce when conflict and parental issues were arising, eventually leading to the divorce. It was found that prior to parental divorce, boys' behavior was best characterized as actions fueled by impulse and aggression (Block et al., 1986). On the other hand, girls' behavior was best described as less affected by environmental stressors and more reflective of their parent's stress (Block et al., 1986). Block et al. stated that the data collected was similar to reported data on the behaviors of children post-divorce. Taken from the data, boys were shown to be more affected emotionally and physically leading up to parental divorce compared to girls.

Looking specifically at boys' and girls' emotional reactions to stress without the study being related explicitly to parental divorce can also give an insight into how gender can affect differences in responses. One study analyzed this topic and found that female adolescents reported higher levels of anger, depressive symptoms, and irritation within the last week compared to male adolescents (Sigfusdottir & Silver, 2009). They also had higher levels of anger outbursts. One reason to explain this could be that the female adolescents also reported

experiencing more negative life events during the study, including parental separation, losing a friend, or an accident (Sigfusdottir & Silver, 2009).

Despite the results from Sigfusdottir and Silver (2009), most studies have collected data demonstrating that boys tend to be more affected emotionally by parental divorce compared to girls during and after divorce. Both Block et al. (1986) and Mitchell et al. (2021) also found that boys were more likely to externalize their emotions when experiencing parental divorce than girls.

Hypothesis 4: Males will experience higher anxiety rates towards their parents' divorce compared to females.

Gender of participant: The participant will self-report this variable.

Anxiety: Low anxiety will be a score of 0 - 21 on the Beck Anxiety Inventory. Moderate anxiety will be a score of 22 - 35 on the Beck Anxiety Inventory. Potentially concerning levels of anxiety will be a score of 36 or higher on the Beck Anxiety Inventory.

Method

Participants

One hundred and one undergraduate students from Chapman University were randomly selected from the undergraduate psychology participant pool to participate in this study. Before analyzing the data, fifteen participants were taken out of the survey. Eight of these participants were taken out at the end due to not completing the survey fully and the seven other participants were taken out because they did not pass the validity check that was put into the survey. Of the remaining eighty-five participants, there were 7 males (8%) and 77 females (91%). One individual did not report what their gender was. The mean age was 19.4 (s.d. = 2.2) years with a range of 18 to 37 years. The race/ethnic breakdown was as follows:

- 53 (62.4%) self-identified as White/European American
- 25 (29.4%) self-identified as Hispanic/Latino
- 3 (3.5%) self-identified as Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 1 (1.2%) self-identified as Black/African American
- 14 (16.5%) self-identified as other races not listed
- 2 (2.4%) preferred not to answer

Measures

This study used the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) (Beck et al., 1988) and the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory: Form DW-64 (BLRI) (Barrett-Lennard, 2014). The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) was utilized to measure anxiety levels of the participants. The BAI was created by Beck et al. (1988) and has a mean score of 15.75; however, a score above 36 indicates potentially concerning levels of anxiety. The test-retest reliability was found to be 0.75 and the validity of the survey is 0.78 (Beck et al., 1988). The survey is 21 questions long and is estimated to take 10 minutes or less to complete. The survey uses a Likert-type response format. Examples of statements in the survey include:

- I have been bothered by numbness or tingling
- I have been bothered by feeling hot
- I have been bothered by wobbliness in legs

Response categories for each statement include 0 = “Not at all”, 1 = “Mildly but it didn’t bother me much”, 2 = “Moderately – it wasn’t pleasant at times”, and 3 = “Severely – it bothered me a lot”. The complete Beck Anxiety Inventory survey is in Appendix A.

In this study, low anxiety is operationally defined as a score between 0-21 on the Beck Anxiety scale. Moderate anxiety is operationally defined as a score between 22-35 on the Beck

Anxiety scale. Lastly, potentially concerning levels of anxiety is operationally defined as a score between 36 and above on the Beck Anxiety Inventory.

For statistical purposes of the survey, the response categories were altered to be 1 = “Not at all”, 2 = “Mildly but it didn’t bother me much”, 3 = “Moderately – it wasn’t pleasant at times”, and 4 = “Severely – it bothered me a lot”. The new range of the survey was from 21 to 84. After making this change to the response categories, low anxiety was operationally defined as a score between 21-42 on the Beck Anxiety scale. Moderate anxiety was operationally defined as a score between 43-56 and potentially concerning levels of anxiety was operationally defined as a score of 57 or more on the Beck Anxiety Inventory.

The Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory: Form DW-64 (BLRI) (Barrett-Lennard, 2014) measured the qualities of a participant’s relationship (empathy, regard, and congruence) with another individual (their father). The survey has a range of -192 to 192, with higher scores indicating higher quality of relationship. The test-retest reliability of the survey is 0.90 and the predictive validity of the survey is 0.65 (Ganley, 1989). The survey is 64 questions long and is estimated to take 25 minutes to complete. Examples of statements in the survey include:

- We respect each other as people.
- We feel at ease together.
- I feel that we put on a role or act with one another.

The survey uses a Likert-type response format (-3 to +3) with a “-3” representing “No, I strongly feel that it is not true” and “+3” representing “Yes, I strongly feel that it is true”. The complete Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory Survey is in Appendix B.

The response format was changed for this survey for statistical purposes. The survey used an updated Likert-type response format (1 – 6) with “1” representing “Yes, I strongly feel that it

is true” to “6” representing “No, I strongly feel that it is not true”. The new range for the survey was 0 to 384.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from the psychology participant pool (SONA). Once logged into the SONA system, the participants were able to choose to take this survey from a variety of other surveys online. There were no other recruitment procedures. After they chose to partake in this survey online, the participants were told to read the informed consent carefully and to provide their electronic signature before starting the study. The consent form stated that the study was confidential and that the participants would remain anonymous throughout the study. It also stated that the study posed no more than minimal risk to the participants and that no compensation would be given to the participants. Following the consent form, the participants were asked if they wished to participate in the survey and if they were 18 years of age or older. If they answered yes, then they would be allowed to proceed to the survey questions and if they answered no then they would not be allowed to complete the survey.

To begin, the participants were asked if their biological parents remained married with each other until the present, or if their biological parents had been separated or divorced in the past (self-reported variable). The participants were also asked other sociodemographic questions such as their gender, sexual preferences, and their race/ethnicity (self-reported variables). Participants were then asked to fill out the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) (Beck et al., 1988) to measure the anxiety levels of participants regarding how they felt about their parents’ marriage or separation/divorce. Following this, participants were asked to fill out the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory: Form DW-64 (BLRI) (Barrett-Lennard, 2014) to measure the qualities of a participant’s relationship (empathy, regard, and congruence) with their father. They were then

asked to fill out the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) (Beck et al., 1988) again to measure the anxiety levels of participants regarding how they felt towards their own future romantic relationships.

Results

Hypothesis 1 stated that individuals with divorced parents would have higher anxiety levels regarding their own romantic relationships compared to individuals with married parents. A t-test was utilized to examine the differences between the divorced parents' group and the married parents' group on a measure of anxiety. The possible range on the anxiety measure was 21-84. A score of 21-42 on the Beck Anxiety Inventory would be classified as low anxiety, while a score of 43-56 would be classified as moderate anxiety. Potentially concerning levels of anxiety would be a score of 57 or higher on the Beck Anxiety Inventory. The obtained range was 21-62. The mean score on the anxiety measure for the divorced parents' group was 31.3 (SD = 12.6), whereas the married parents' group scored an average of 27.2 (SD = 8.3). There was not a significant difference between the divorced parents' group and married parents' group in terms of score on the anxiety measure, $t(70) = -1.4, p = .08$. Thus hypothesis 1 was not supported.

According to hypothesis 2, women with divorced parents would experience higher anxiety levels regarding their own romantic relationships compared to men with divorced parents. A t-test was used to examine the differences between women with divorced parents and men with divorced parents on a measure of anxiety. The possible range on the anxiety measure was 21-84. A score of 21-42 on the Beck Anxiety Inventory would be classified as low anxiety, while a score of 43-56 would be classified as moderate anxiety. Potentially concerning levels of anxiety would be a score of 57 or higher on the Beck Anxiety Inventory. The obtained range was 21-62. The mean score on the anxiety measure for women with divorced parents was 30.8 (SD =

13.1), whereas men with divorced parents scored an average of 37.0. No standard deviation could be found as only one male participant reported having divorced parents. There was not a significant difference between women with divorced parents and men with divorced parents in terms of score on the anxiety measure, $t(10) = .5, p = .331$. Thus hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 stated that daughters would report higher quality relationships with custodial or non-custodial fathers after parental divorce compared to quality of relationship levels between sons and their custodial or non-custodial fathers after parental divorce. A t-test was run to examine the differences between women and men on a measure of quality of relationship. The possible range on the quality of relationship measure was 0-384, with higher scores on the quality of relationship measure being representative of lower quality of relationships. The obtained range was 95-309. The mean score on the quality of relationship measure for women was 205.0 (SD = 64.9), whereas men scored an average of 284.0. No standard deviation could be found as only one male participant reported having divorced parents. There was not a significant difference between women and men in terms of reported quality of relationship, $t(10) = 1.2, p = .135$. Thus hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Lastly, hypothesis 4 stated that males would experience higher anxiety rates towards their parents' divorce compared to females. A t-test was utilized to examine the differences between men with divorced parents and women with divorced parents on a measure of anxiety. The possible range on the anxiety measure was 21-84. A score of 21-42 on the Beck Anxiety Inventory would be classified as low anxiety, while a score of 43-56 would be classified as moderate anxiety. Potentially concerning levels of anxiety would be a score of 57 or higher on the Beck Anxiety Inventory. The obtained range was 21-72. The mean score on the anxiety measure for men with divorced parents was 72.0 (SD = NA), whereas women with divorced

parents scored an average of 35.9 (SD = 15.2). There was a significant difference between the men with divorced parents and women with divorced parents in terms of score on the anxiety measure, $t(10) = 2.3, p = .023$. However, although statistically significant, the single male participant did not allow for the conclusion to be made that the hypothesis was supported.

Discussion

With the national percentage of divorce increasing, it is important to look at the consequences that divorce can have. This study aimed to look at the effects that divorce can have on children by asking college-aged participants from Chapman University to reflect on their parents' divorce. A sample of eighty-five participants was ultimately analyzed to test four hypotheses that attempted to look at variables such as anxiety, gender, parental divorce, and quality of relationship. After running four t-tests, it was found that all four of the hypotheses were not supported by the data. Evidence from the survey found that participants with married parents and participants with divorced parents did not report statistically significant differences in anxiety levels towards their own romantic relationships (hypothesis 1). There was also no statistically significant difference between anxiety levels from women versus men with divorced parents regarding how they felt about their romantic relationships (hypothesis 2). Hypothesis 3, which stated that females would report higher quality relationships with fathers after parental divorce compared to males was also not statistically significant. The fourth hypothesis was found to be statistically significant, however, the single male participant did not allow for the conclusion to be made that the hypothesis was supported. Out of the eighty-five participants, only twelve reported having divorced parents, and only one identified as a male. Due to the small number of individuals with divorced parents and the single male, it took significance away from the results for this fourth hypothesis. These results could have occurred for a variety of reasons,

one reason being the small sample of participants that reported having divorced parents compared to married parents and the small sample of males who took the survey. If the number of males and individuals with divorced parents increased, this could contribute to more significant results.

Despite not getting statistically significant results, some important connections to past research need to be discussed in relation to this study. With respect to hypothesis 1, mean levels of anxiety for how people felt about their romantic relationships for participants with divorced parents was 31.3, while participants with married parents reported a mean score of 27.2. This was similar to a study by Nelson (2009), who found that participants with divorced parents felt more anxious about their romantic relationships compared to participants with married parents. Past studies have found varying levels of different emotions in men and women after parental divorce. In this current study, mean levels of anxiety for how people felt about their romantic relationships for men was 37.0 and women 30.8. There was a limitation in this, however, as only one male reported having divorced parents. Due to there not being a significant difference in anxiety felt between men and women, it matched results present in a study by Brewer (2010). Brewer (2010) found that there were no differences in levels of depression felt by men and women after parental divorce. Results from the present study also show that males reported higher quality of relationship with fathers than females did. This contradicts previous research completed by Cooney (1994), who found that males reported lower quality of relationships with fathers than females. The conflicting data between the two studies could be due to the current study only having one male participant who reported about his quality of relationship with his father, which does not provide enough evidence to be generalizable to a larger population of men. Lastly, the study found that males reported feeling more anxious about their parents'

divorce compared to females, confirming past research that males are more emotionally affected by parental divorce compared to females (Block et al., 1986; Mitchell et al., 2021).

There were multiple limitations present within this study that could have affected the results and the generalizability of the research. One of the major limitations was the time restriction that was placed on this study. This study had to be completed within two college semesters, about 9 months. Additionally, the data collection itself had to be conducted over a one-month span. Having a restriction on the time that could be spent on this study could have limited the initial research done for the literature review, survey tools, and the creation of the survey. It also limited the amount of data that was collected. If more time was permitted, then more participants could have taken the survey and provided additional data. A second limitation was the small sample size that the data was collected from. This was a big limitation of the study as out of the eighty-five participants, only 12 participants reported having divorced parents, one of these being a male participant. However, because a majority of the hypotheses for this study were attempting to look at individuals with divorced parents, both male and female, this did not provide a big enough sample to find statistically significant results. Furthermore, a third limitation of the study was a lack of diversity. There existed a lack of diversity regarding race/ethnicity within the sample as more than half of the participants identified as White, with small percentages of participants identifying with other races/ethnicities. This means that the results of the study are not generalizable and cannot be used to represent a multitude of races/ethnicities within society. Diversity within the study was also limited regarding gender, as the number of males in this study was much smaller than the number of females, with 7 males (8%) to 77 females (91%). Similar to the limitation of race/ethnicity within this study, the results also cannot be generalizable to the male population outside the study. Lastly, all the participants

who took the survey were students from Chapman University, adding to the lack of diversity as it is only collecting data from college students who are a population of people that cannot represent older or younger individuals in society. As shown, there were numerous limitations that existed that could be improved upon in future research to get more accurate and statistically significant results.

As research continues, determining future directions for studies is essential to advance society's understanding of topics such as divorce and the effects it can have on people. To improve the research conducted within this study it would be beneficial to increase the sample size in future studies. This would allow for the results of the study to be generalizable to more people in society. Having more males and participants with divorced parents would also allow the study to get a better understanding of what is happening to these groups of people, which the current study failed to do. Collecting data from more races/ethnicities would also be helpful to increase generalizability. Another area of this study that could be improved upon would be reducing the number of questions within the survey to decrease respondent fatigue. Many participants within the study did not answer all the possible questions, which could be due to the length of the total survey. With several improvements and alterations to the original study, more relevant and statistically significant data might be attainable.

Despite not finding statistically significant results in this study, it is important to have intervention groups/organizations available to better support people who have experienced parental divorce. Past studies should prompt therapy interventions to be accessible to any child who experiences parental divorce, with therapy being offered at schools and daycares to prevent the negative consequences of parental divorce.

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Tables and Figures

Appendix A

Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)

About: This scale is a self-report measure of anxiety.

Items: 21

Reliability:

Internal consistency for the BAI = (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.92$)
 Test-retest reliability (1 week) for the BAI = 0.75 (Beck, Epstein, Brown, & Steer, 1988).

Validity:

The BAI was moderately correlated with the revised Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (.51), and mildly correlated with the Hamilton Depression Rating Scale (.25) (Beck et al., 1988)

Scoring:

	Not At All	Mildly but it didn't bother me much	Moderately - it wasn't pleasant at times	Severely – it bothered me a lot
All questions	0	1	2	3

The total score is calculated by finding the sum of the 21 items.

Score of 0 – 21 = low anxiety

Score of 22 – 35 = moderate anxiety

Score of 36 and above = potentially concerning levels of anxiety

References:

Beck, A. T., Epstein, N., Brown, G., Steer, R. A. (1988). [An inventory for measuring clinical anxiety: Psychometric properties.](#) *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 56, 893-897.

Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)

Below is a list of common symptoms of anxiety. Please carefully read each item in the list. Indicate how much you have been bothered by that symptom during the past month, including today, by circling the number in the corresponding space in the column next to each symptom.

	Not At All	Mildly but it didn't bother me much	Moderately - it wasn't pleasant at times	Severely – it bothered me a lot
Numbness or tingling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling hot	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wobbliness in legs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unable to relax	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fear of worst happening	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dizzy or lightheaded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Heart pounding/racing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unsteady	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Terrified or afraid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nervous	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feeling of choking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hands trembling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Shaky / unsteady	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fear of losing control	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difficulty in breathing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fear of dying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scared	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Indigestion	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Faint / lightheaded	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Face flushed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hot/cold sweats	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix B

Name or code

Date answered

Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory: Form DW-64 (version 4)

Developed by Godfrey T. Barrett-Lennard, PhD

Listed below are various ways that a whole relationship may be experienced from the inside. The listed statements (numbers 1–64) point to qualities of a particular relationship as perceived by a member of that relationship. It is understood that one partner or member would not give exactly the same picture as the other one and that either person's view could change.

Please describe the way it is now in your relationship with _____. While answering, think of actual situations and of the atmosphere of feelings and attitudes between you. Try to bring pictures to mind from your everyday worlds together. You might also think of unusual times that have stayed in your memory. The 'right' answer in each case is how *you* truly feel and see this *whole relationship 'we' or 'us'* as of now.

Mark each statement in the left margin, according to how strongly you feel that it is true, or not true, of this relationship. *Please mark every one.* Write in plus numbers (+3, +2, +1) or minus numbers (–1, –2, or –3) to stand for the following answers:

- | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| +3: YES, I strongly feel that it is true | –1: (No) I feel that it is probably untrue, or more untrue than true |
| +2: Yes, I feel it is true | –2: No, I feel it is not true |
| +1: (Yes) I feel that it is probably true, or more true than untrue | –3: NO, I strongly feel that it is not true |

-
- _____ 1. We respect each other as people.
 - _____ 2. We want to know and understand how the other one sees things.
 - _____ 3. The interest we feel together depends on each one's actions and words.
 - _____ 4. We feel at ease together.
 - _____ 5. We like and enjoy one another.
 - _____ 6. We may hear each other's words but we don't see how the other feels inside.
 - _____ 7. Either one of us can be 'up' or 'down' in our mood without this changing the other one's attitude toward us.
 - _____ 8. I feel that we put on a role or act with one another.
 - _____ 9. We are impatient with each other.
 - _____ 10. We generally know exactly what the other one means.
 - _____ 11. Our opinion of the other one goes up or down, according to their behavior and the light they show themselves in.
 - _____ 12. I feel that we are our real and genuine selves with one another.
 - _____ 13. We appreciate each other.
 - _____ 14. We both look at what the other does, from our individual points of view.
 - _____ 15. How we feel toward the other one doesn't change with swings in their self-feeling or mood. [If it does change, choose one of the "no" answers.]
 - _____ 16. We get uneasy when the other asks or talks about certain 'sensitive' things.
 - _____ 17. We are mostly indifferent to each other.

- _____ 18. We usually sense or realize what the other is feeling.
- _____ 19. We each want the other to be a particular kind of person.
- _____ 20. We speak openly to each other, expressing what we are thinking and feeling as we say it.
- _____ 21. We tend to find each other dull and uninteresting.
- _____ 22. Our attitudes toward certain things the other one says or does get in the way of understanding them.
- _____ 23. Either of us can express something that bothers us *or* that pleases us in the other, without changing their feeling toward us.
- _____ 24. We want the other one to think that we like them or understand them more than we really do.
- _____ 25. We care for one another.
- _____ 26. At times we think that the other feels a certain way, because that's the way we feel ourselves.
- _____ 27. We like some things about one another, and there are other things we do not like.
- _____ 28. We don't avoid or go round things that are important for our relationship.
- _____ 29. We disapprove of one another.
- _____ 30. We realize and know each other's meaning even when something is hard to say or find words for.
- _____ 31. Our attitude toward each other stays about the same: we are not pleased with the other one sometimes and critical or disappointed at other times.
- _____ 32. Sometimes one or other of us is not at all comfortable but we go on, outwardly ignoring it.
- _____ 33. We just tolerate each other.
- _____ 34. We listen to each other, and usually understand each other's whole meaning.
- _____ 35. If one of us shows anger with the other they become hurt or angry too.
- _____ 36. Each of us is able to express his/her honest impressions and actual feelings with or toward the other.
- _____ 37. There is a friendly warmth in our relationship.
- _____ 38. We just take no notice of some things the other one thinks or feels.
- _____ 39. How much we like or dislike each other is not altered by particular things we reveal or show about ourselves.
- _____ 40. At times we can sense something in the other's feelings that they deny or don't seem to be aware of.
- _____ 41. I feel that each of us really values the other person.
- _____ 42. We can each appreciate exactly how the other one's experiences feel to them.
- _____ 43. Sometimes or in some ways we approve of the other one and there other times or different aspects where we distinctly disapprove.
- _____ 44. We can express to each other whatever is actually in our minds, including any feelings about ourselves or about them.
- _____ 45. We don't like the other one for themselves, as they are.
- _____ 46. We sometimes get things wrong by assuming or imagining that the other feels much more strongly about a particular thing than it turns out they really do.
- _____ 47. One of us can be in good spirits, or feeling upset, without causing the other one to feel differently toward us.
- _____ 48. We are openly and freely ourselves in our relationship.
- _____ 49. We seem to irritate and bother each other – get on each other's nerves.
- _____ 50. We often don't realize (at the time) how sensitive or touchy the other is about things that are said or done.

- _____ 51. Either of us is can express “good” thoughts or feelings, or “bad” ones, without changing the other person’s feeling toward us. [If it does change their feeling, answer ‘no.’]
- _____ 52. At times our outward response to one another is quite different from the way we actually feel underneath.
- _____ 53. We feel a kind of contempt for each other.
- _____ 54. We understand one another.
- _____ 55. We are inclined to judge each other; with a more positive (or negative) estimation sometimes than at other times.
- _____ 56. We *don’t* avoid or tiptoe around real feelings in our relationship. [If you feel this is wrong because ‘we *do* avoid or tiptoe around real feelings,’ choose a ‘no’ answer.]
- _____ 57. We are truly interested in each other.
- _____ 58. Our response to each other is so fixed and automatic that often we don’t get through to them, or take in what the other has said.
- _____ 59. I *don’t think* that particular things either of us says or does really alter the way the other one feels toward us. (Answer ‘no’ if it does alter their feeling.)
- _____ 60. What one or other of us says often covers up and gives a wrong impression of his/her actual thought or feeling at the time.
- _____ 61. We feel real affection for one another.
- _____ 62. When one of us is upset or hurting, the other one is able to tune in and recognize the other’s feeling exactly without getting really upset.
- _____ 63. What *other people* think of either of us – when we know about it – does affect or rub off on what we think of each other.
- _____ 64. I believe there are feelings that we don’t talk about together that are causing difficulty in our relationship.

Have you entered an answer for every single item? Please check and make sure. (Thank you.)

Please also provide the following information about yourself and the other person*

Yourself

Age (years) _____

Sex (M or F) _____

Occupation or vocation _____

Kind or context of relationship (e.g., partners, son and father or other family relation, personal friends, client-therapist, colleagues, student and trainee. Please be specific.)

Other person

_____ age (known or estimated)

_____ (M or F)

Duration/length of the relationship _____ years

Has the relationship always or for a long time been the way you have described it?

If the relationship has changed, how did this happen and/or how long ago?

* The information section *following item 64* is not part of the Relationship Inventory proper, and can be varied by other users.

Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory: Scoring Key 64-item forms

Developed by Godfrey T. Barrett-Lennard, PhD

Type of relationship Code
 Respondent (e.g., spouse, client) Referent person(s)

BASIC 64-ITEM FORMS

<i>Level of Regard</i>		<i>Empathy</i>		<i>Unconditionality</i>		<i>Congruence</i>	
<i>Positive items</i>	<i>Answer example</i>	<i>Positive items</i>	<i>Answer</i>	<i>Positive items</i>	<i>Answer</i>	<i>Positive items</i>	<i>Answer</i>
1	3	2		7		4	
5	2	10		15		12	
13	2	18		23		20	
25	1	30		31		28	
37	2	34		39		36	
41	-3	42		47		44	
57	1	54		51		48	
61	2	62		59		56	
Sum: Subtotal 1							

<i>Level of Regard</i>		<i>Empathy</i>		<i>Unconditionality</i>		<i>Congruence</i>	
<i>Negative items</i>	<i>Answer example</i>	<i>Negative items</i>	<i>Answer</i>	<i>Negative items</i>	<i>Answer</i>	<i>Negative items</i>	<i>Answer</i>
9	-2	6		3		8	
17	-3	14		11		16	
21	-3	22		19		24	
29	-2	26		27		32	
33	1	38		35		40	
45	-2	46		43		52	
49	1	50		55		60	
53	-3	58		63		64	
Sum (neg. items)							
Subtotal 2 (-1 × Sum)							
Subtotals 1 + 2: <i>Scale Score</i>							