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College Intimate Relationships and Parents' Marital Status

Jessica Baynes⁷

This study looks specifically at college students' intimate relationships and if there are correlations regarding their parents' marital status and/or perceived happiness of their parents' marriage and the participants' intimate relationships. The findings reported in the literature are mixed as to whether parents' marital status is an indicator for their offspring's intimate relationships. I strictly focused on the participants views on their relationships with their parents (if it is negative or positive), if the participants' parents are perceived to be happy in their relationships, and if they feel successful about their intimate relationships. Originally, I felt there was a discrepancy in relationship length and parents' marital status. I thought children of divorced parents' would have shorter relationships. I asked questions concerning students' intimate relationship length. The results of this study showed there is a statistically significant correlation between parents' marital status and peoples' relationship with their father or father figure. Furthermore, I found statistically different responses between participants whose parents are divorced and those whose parents are not in their views on future marriage, the effort both parents make to be involved in the participants' life, and the need to constantly be in a relationship.

I have always been interested in the correlation between parents' relationship attitudes and their children's beliefs about relationships. In the present study, I am looking to see if there is a correlation between the parents' intimate relationship status, the parent child relationship, and the child's relationship status to see if there is any statistically significant relationship between the variables. Studies that have been conducted concerning parental divorce have mixed

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results. There are so many relationship attributes and personality differences that affect each result; it is hard to come to a blanket result.

For instance, Knox (2004) stated that strong parental relationships whether divorced or re-married are crucial for success in the children. He researched not only the relationship between parent relationships, but also in how parent's choices such as withholding visitation from a parent and how the child might react. If children are deprived of seeing a parent, they have more difficulties with connecting to others, peers especially. This concept is coined as parental alienation syndrome which was developed by (Bone & Walsh 1999).

Other researchers focused on if the parents were more invested in their intimate relationships. The children reported having a more negative relationship with their parent if the parent put more effort into their new relationships, (Orbuch, Thornton, & Cancio, 2000). To be more in-depth about this concept, some researchers I found talked in detail about relationship attributes reported by college adults such as mutual love, kindness, and commitment. Usually, college women with poor relationships with their father's report having a stressful intimate relationship, (Jacquet & Surra 2001; Nielsen, 2007).

A study in New Orleans looked into many different categories such as personality attributes, specifically, trust, sexual behaviors and neediness, recognition of divorce as an option, cohabitation, and gender to how it relates to healthy adult relationships. In the group of adults

with divorced parents, they were more likely to experience hardship in intimate relationships due mainly to fear of abandonment, (Christensen & Brooks, 2001). Men and Women who experience fear of abandonment do not attach in a healthy way and may be seen as clingy or needy. It is important to my research, that this study looked into the early intimate relationships of those with divorced parents and found these men and women lost their virginity at much younger ages than those with parents who are intact, (Christensen & Brooks 2001).

Some sources report most children of divorced parents are likely to report lower satisfaction in marriage and more likely to end up divorced within three to five years of marriage (Ottaway, 2008; Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman 2010;). As according to one source, divorce is a cycle that families can get stuck in if they do not seek professional help to deal with the uneasy feelings of abandonment and distrust, (Amato & DeBoer 2001).

Parenting styles are also an important factor for their children's view of healthy relationships. Parents that convey a healthy co-parenting style has positive effects on the children's intimate relationships later on. (Amato & Booth 2001). Long-term effects are hard to determine based solely on parents' marital status. Other major factors include personality traits, personal confidence, and education level (Christensen & Brooks 2001).

Since my study does not have a set hypothesis, I am looking for different correlations between satisfaction with the participants themselves and how that may connect to their intimate

relationships. I also am looking for correlations including relationships with participants and their parents and the parents' intimate relationships to see if there is significance there as well.

This study was conducted with an online survey through the website SurveyGizmo. The survey has different parts to it depending on how the participant answers the questions regarding their parents' marital status.

Method

Participants

I had 73 participants to begin with. 11 participants were omitted for whatever reason. My participants were 23 male and 39 female participants. After getting rid of the incomplete data, I was left with 62 complete surveys. All of the participants were able to voluntarily take this survey through my Facebook page. The URL to the survey was posted on my Facebook page so that people who could view my posts. I also posted the survey on the LU marketplace. This is where students specific to Lindenwood University are able to share information about material items as well as conceptual items like ideas about classes or help for a math test. The ages ranged from 18-25 and all of my participants were college students.

Materials and Procedure

The participants took an online survey with 27 content questions and 1 demographic question (see Appendix A). I created the survey using an online survey platform SurveyGizmo. My demographic question asks about gender identity. The content questions differed depending

on how the participants answered the questions about their parents' marital status. If the participants' parents were divorced, the survey would shift them to a different set of questions than for the participants who indicated their parents were married. The content questions were a variety of Likert scale, open-ended, and closed ended questions. This survey could take anywhere from 15-20 min. After collecting all of my data, I coded my answers numerically to conduct statistical analysis.

Results

I had 57.1% participants with married parents and 32.1% with divorced parents. I did add a third category, which 10.7% participants reported other. The mean age of entering into intimate relationships was 15.8 years old. The different analysis I conducted were frequencies for my descriptive statistics like my demographic question, and my questions pertaining to the individual categories like married vs. divorced parents' questions. I performed Chi-square analysis to compare the married vs. divorced parents on questions about how they feel about relationships and closeness with their parents. There was a significant difference between parents' marital status and relationship with their father, $\chi^2(1) = 9.212, p = .002$. Do you want to get married eventually as compared to parents' marital status, $\chi^2(1) = 5.504, p = .019$. The last statistically significant finding was if both parents make an effort to be in the child's life compared with parents' marital status $\chi^2(1) = 7.907, p = .005$.

Discussion

I expected to have significant findings from the different marital status groups. I was surprised there were no significant findings for intimate relationship differences. The children of different marital groups according to past research would view intimate relationships differently. My sample size was relatively small. If I were to further this research, I would look at college and non-college young adults to compare not only marital status of their parents' and sex, but also education level.

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Appendix A

Jessica Baynes: College Students Intimate Relationships

INFORMED CONSENT

Page exit logic: Page Logic**IF:** **THEN:** Disqualify and display: "Thank you for your time, this survey is for college students ages 18-25. "

Page exit logic: Page Logic**IF:** QUESTION NOT FOUND! is one of the following answers [NO OPTIONS SET] **THEN:** Disqualify and display: "Thank you for your time and patience, this survey is for college aged students from ages 18-25."

Page exit logic: Page Logic**IF:** QUESTION NOT FOUND! is one of the following answers [NO OPTIONS SET] **THEN:** Disqualify and display: "Thank you for your time "

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Jessica Baynes for a class project in the department of Psychology at Lindenwood University, under the guidance of Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair. The purpose of this research is to see if there is a relationship between parents' marital status of college students and the intimate relationships students have.

2. Your participation will involve completing this anonymous online survey. The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 15-20 minutes. Approximately 99 participants will be involved in this research.

3. Taking this survey could result in some distressing feelings, like guilt, confusion, frustration, or sadness for some participants, but these feelings are not expected to exceed what one experiences in everyday life. If you find taking the survey causes you significant discomfort and you would like assistance, please stop participating and contact the Lindenwood Student Counseling and Resource Center at 636-949-4889. If you are not a Lindenwood student, contact the course instructor, Dr. Nohara-LeClair, for community counseling referrals at 636-949-4317.

4. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. However, your participation will contribute to the knowledge about intimate relationships in college and their parents' marital status which may help society.

5. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

6. Your responses will be anonymous. No information that identifies you personally will be collected, not even your IP address. The primary investigator will not be able to identify your answers as belonging to you; data will be examined at the group level only.

7. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, or if any problems arise, you may call the Investigator, (Jessica Baynes, 636-293-0641) or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Michiko Nohara-LeClair, at 636-949-4317. You may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation to the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Dr. Marilyn Abbott, Interim Provost at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Choosing to participate indicates that: • You have read the above information. • You voluntarily agree to participate. • You are at least 18 years of age.

*1) If you are not between the ages of 18-25 or do not wish to participate in this survey please select the "I choose not to participate" button. **

I choose to participate.

I choose not to participate.

RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS

*2) Are you currently enrolled in college?**

Yes

No

Logic: Show/hide trigger exists.

3) What is your biological parents' marital status?

Married

Divorced

Single

Widowed

Other

4) Do you feel you have a close relationship with your mother or mother figure?

Yes

No

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Married")

5) If your biological parents are married, are they happy in their relationship?

- Yes
- No
- N/A

6) Do you feel you have a close relationship with your father or father figure?

- Yes
- No

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Married")

7) If your biological parents are married, do you want a relationship like theirs?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Divorced")

8) If your parents have divorced, has your mother re-married?

- Yes
- No

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Divorced")

9) If your parents are divorced, is your father re-married?

Yes

No

Logic: Show/hide trigger exists.

10) Are you currently involved in an intimate relationship of 6 months or longer?

Yes

No

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "Are you currently involved in an intimate relationship of 6 months or longer?" #10 is one of the following answers ("Yes")

11) How often do you feel the need to consistently be in long term relationships (defined as 6 months or longer)?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Frequently

Always

12) Do you fear being without a significant other?

Yes

No

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "Are you currently involved in an intimate relationship of 6 months or longer?" #10 is one of the following answers ("No")

13) If you are not in a committed relationship at the moment, how do you feel about not be in a committed relationship?

- I'm grateful to be without the commitment
- I could be interested in a relationship but I'm fine if that doesn't happen soon
- I really wish I was in a committed relationship

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Married")

14) Do your parents argue constantly?

- Yes
- No

15) Do both of your parents' make an effort to be in your life if they are able to?

- Yes
- No

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Divorced")

16) If your biological parents are divorced, how many years have your parents been divorced?

17) Do you want to get married eventually?

- Yes

No

18) Are you interested in having children someday?

Yes

No

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Divorced")

19) If your parents are divorced, how do you feel about it?

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Divorced")

20) If you have a step-mom do you have a communicative relationship with her?

Yes

No

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "Are you currently involved in an intimate relationship of 6 months or longer?" #10 is one of the following answers ("Yes")

21) If you are in a committed relationship of 6 months or longer, how satisfied do you feel with the relationship?

Satisfied

Somewhat Satisfied

Not Satisfied

N/A

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Divorced")

22) If you have a step-dad do you have a communicative relationship with him?

Yes

No

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Divorced")

23) Do you feel your parents' divorce has an effect on your intimate relationships?

Yes

Maybe

No

24) Have you been in an intimate relationship?

Yes

No

25) At what age did you first enter into an intimate relationship?

Logic: Hidden unless: Question "What is your biological parents' marital status?" #3 is one of the following answers ("Divorced")

26) How often do your biological parents fight?

Never

Rarely

- Sometimes
- Frequently
- Always

27) Do you prefer to be in committed relationships of 6 months or longer, or shorter-term relationships?

- Committed Relationships
- Shorter term relationships
- No Relationships

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

28) What is your gender identity?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Other - please specify: _____

THANK YOU!

Thank you for taking time out of your day to complete this survey constructed for my Advanced Research Methods class at Lindenwood University. Research has mixed findings about whether there is a connection between young adults' relationship quality and their parents' marital status. There is no hypothesis for my research; I am simply surveying students to see if there is an connection.

If you found that taking the survey caused you emotional distress and you would like assistance, please contact the Lindenwood Student Counseling and Resource Center at 636-949-4889. If you are not a Lindenwood student, contact the course instructor, Dr. Nohara-LeClair, for community counseling referrals at 636-949-4317.

If you would like to see the results of my survey after May 13, 2016 please feel free to contact me using the contact information below. Again, thank you very much for your time and effort!

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