

Family Structural and Process Variables in Emerging Adults'

Romantic Relationship Quality

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By

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## Family Structure and Romantic Relationships IV

### Abstract

Prior research has indicated that family experiences, including parental divorce, interparental conflict, and the parent-child relationship, play an important role in adult children's romantic relationships (e.g., Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998; Mahl, 2001; Harvey & Fine, 2004). Research on how these variables may work in combination and on how these family experiences affect romantic relationships during the developmental period of emerging adulthood is lacking. The current study investigated the impact that family divorce has on features of emerging adults' romantic relationships. It also examined whether these relationships are mediated by parent-child relationship, are moderated by interparental conflict, and vary with gender and age at the time of divorce

A total of 310 students between the ages of 18-25 from University of Saskatchewan participated in this study. Contrary to the hypothesis, the findings showed that in their romantic relationships emerging adults from divorced families, compared to emerging adults from intact families, had a higher degree of three romantic features: care, commitment, and maintenance. Partly in line with the hypothesis, only retrospective interparental conflict moderated the link between family structure and romantic conflict. Finally, differences, regardless of family structure, were found between males and females, where females indicated having higher levels of intimacy and males indicated having higher levels of coercion in their romantic relationships. Possible explanations for the findings and implications for future research are discussed.

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## Introduction

American journalist Jane Howard (2005) once said, “Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.” Families contain both fragility and resilience and, nonetheless, are central to individuals’ lives. When one faces conflict, families may serve both as a source of support and abiding pain (Harvey & Fine, 2004). Over the past several decades, families in the West experienced considerable changes, as divorce and remarriage have become more common. In 2002, the Canadian national average for single parent families was 16.6%, while the Saskatchewan provincial average was 18.2% and in Saskatoon in particular it was 31% (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2005). For this reason, research into the pivotal role of the family and its impact on later life is necessary.

Due to the prevalence of divorce over the past several decades, there has been a great deal of research on the effects that divorce has on children and adults (e.g., Harvey & Fine, 2004; Amato & Booth, 1996), but not on emerging adults in particular (Arnett, 2000). Most research indicates that, compared to children and adults from intact families, individuals from divorced families function at a lower level on various psychological, social, and cognitive measures (Amato & Keith, 1991). Less research has examined the impact of family divorce on romantic relationships.

Family divorce has been shown to play a significant role in adult children’s romantic relationships (e.g., Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998; Mahl, 2001; Harvey & Fine, 2004; Amato & Deboer, 2001). Research shows that adult children of divorce tend to feel uncertain about decisions in matters of love (Staal, 2000) and are more prone to break-up or, if married, divorce themselves (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). The majority of young adults from divorced families

describe the experience of their family divorce as having a negative impact on their everyday functioning in general and on their romantic relationships in particular. For instance, in Cartwright's (2006) qualitative study, young adults (between the ages of 19 and 29 years) from divorced families reported having more problems in their intimate relationships such as more hesitancy about entering relationships, greater doubt about their ability to sustain a relationship, and less trust in their partner. Moreover, these young adults linked the experience of their parents' divorce to difficulties in their romantic relationships. Similarly, in Mahl's (2001) qualitative study, many young adults spontaneously identified a connection between their parents' divorce and their own romantic relationship beliefs such as fear of trusting others in relationships.

Research has also shown that the negative effects of divorce may be buffered by parent-child relationships (Wolchik et al., 1993), age at the time of divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999), interparental conflict, and gender of child (Amato & Keith, 1991). These findings illustrate that divorce may be full of complex processes some of which may mediate or moderate children's adjustment and adult children's romantic relationships. Current research has begun to explore factors that may mediate or moderate the short- and long-term effects of family divorce on children. For instance, Amato and Keith (1991) in their meta-analysis found that if parents in high-conflict marriages divorced, rather than stayed married, their children were better off. Yet, it appears that only a minority of divorces are preceded by a high level of chronic marital conflict (Amato & Booth, 1997). Research is lacking, however, in exploring the possible mediating and moderating role of family process variables in romantic relationships.

Much of the past research has focused on the effects of divorce on romantic relationships in adulthood as a broad age period (varying anywhere from adolescence to middle-age to older

adulthood). Research is lacking, however, in the implications that family divorce may have on romantic relationships of emerging adults, a newly described (Arnett, 2000) and affirmed (Arnett, 2003) developmental stage that falls between the period of adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This period is important to examine since it is posed as a developmental stage in its own right. However, there is a lack of a clear conception of development in this age group. Researchers in general have not considered the period between 18-25 years of age to be a unique period of development. Thus, researchers have not examined the context of romantic relationships and family divorce in the distinct developmental period of emerging adulthood (i.e., ages between 18-25 years old) (Arnett, 2000).

Romantic relationships take on a special quality during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000) and, thus, warrant separate study. The study of emerging adults' romantic relationships is important not only because romantic relationships are a central aspect of most emerging adults' social worlds (Arnett, 2000), but also because during emerging adulthood, the interactions learned in romantic relationships may influence the nature of subsequent romantic relationships including marriages (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006). Therefore, there is a need to determine whether the differences in family structure and romantic relationships found in broader age periods are reflective of emerging adults' romantic experiences.

Importantly, as will later be reviewed, the existent studies on mediating and moderating family process variables have grouped young adults within a larger age range and have not focused on emerging adulthood as a unique developmental period within this context. Additionally, while researchers have examined some of these family variables in relation to romantic relationships, researchers have not generally looked in one study at how all of these family variables may contribute to romantic relationships.

It should be noted that there are some studies that suggest that divorce also has positive consequences for some children and adults of divorce. Gately and Schwebel (1992), for instance, found that children of divorce show more maturity, higher self-esteem, empathy, and androgyny. As well, there are many critics of the simplistic conclusion that “divorce is harmful to children,” indicating that this view is exaggerated and that it is only a minority of children from divorced families that experience long-term harmful effects of divorce. While the critics maintain that many young adults may still have painful memories of their parents’ divorce, they also argue that this does not mean that the memories will negatively affect these young adults’ romantic relationships or their lives in general (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Indeed, researchers have found that some young adults are determined not to repeat the same mistakes as did their parents and accordingly engage in successful intimate relationships (Mahl, 2001; Harvey & Fine, 2004). Thus, research evidence has not been consistent in regards to the influence that divorce has on adult children’s romantic relationships; hence, some researchers argue that divorce has some positive effects while others argue that divorce leads to some negative effects. However, the majority of studies show that divorce leads to negative romantic effects rather than positive effects.

The present study in a large Western Canadian University setting examined the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality in emerging adults in order to determine whether the past findings on children’s social functioning and adults’ romantic relationships apply to this particular developmental period and to determine whether the relationship is the same for young men and women. As well, it was important to explore whether the family process variables, particularly interparental conflict and parent-child

relationship, operate in the same way during emerging adulthood as they did in studies of their effects during childhood and adulthood.

What follows is a (1) discussion of theoretical perspectives, (2) review of relevant literature on age periods surrounding emerging adulthood, which includes the effects of family divorce, parent-child relationship, interparental conflict, timing of divorce, and gender differences on romantic relationships, and (3) the details of the present study.

### Theoretical Perspectives

Theories which propose to explain the relationship between family divorce and romantic relationship quality are lacking. However, various explanations have been proposed to explain why divorce may or may not have negative effects on children's lives. Of these, the three theoretical perspectives relevant to the current study on the relationship between family structure and emerging adults' romantic relationship quality are (1) the parental absence perspective, (2) the family process perspective, and (3) the cognitive-developmental perspective. There is also a need for an explanation of the concept of emerging adulthood. In the sections to follow, a discussion of emerging adulthood is followed by arguments as to how the three theoretical perspectives inform the understanding of the impact of divorce on romantic relationship quality.

### *Emerging Adulthood*

Emerging adulthood is a distinct period for young people in industrialized societies between the ages of 18-25 years (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2006b) proposed the concept of emerging adulthood as a new stage of development as a way to conceptualize the development of young people in the current industrialized society. During this period, the emerging adults have left childhood and adolescent dependency but have not yet entered into adult roles and responsibilities, particularly marriage and parenthood. Marriage and parenthood are events that lead to settling down into long-term adult roles



and responsibilities. Indeed, while emerging adults do not consider themselves to be adolescents, many of them also do not see themselves entirely as adults and therefore the term young adulthood does not apply (Arnett, 2000).

The median age of marriage and parenthood has greatly risen in every industrialized society between 1960 to the present day (Arnett, 2006b). For instance, while the median marriage age for males in United States was 24.7 in 1980, it jumped to 27.0 in 2000. Similarly for females, the average age jumped from 22.0 in 1980 to 25.2 in 2000. This pattern was also observed in other industrialized countries, including Austria, France, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (Arnett, 2006a). Childbirth has followed a similar pattern, and while some women still have their first child in their late teens or early 20s, it is more common for a woman's first birth to take place in her 30s (Arnett, 2006b).

One reason many people currently marry and have children later in life is due to the higher percentage of young people pursuing post-secondary education. College enrolment has risen greatly over the past 50 years, moving from approximately 20% in 1950 to 63% in 2000 (Arnett, 2006b). In this way, it may be seen that in the past half century the age period from 18 through mid-20s has greatly changed from being a time of settling down into adult roles of marriage, parenthood, and long-term work, to a period of exploration and instability.

The period of emerging adulthood is highly unstructured and unsettled while individuals explore different life directions in love, work, and worldviews to the greatest extent (Arnett, 2006a). These individuals learn what they desire in their romantic relationships and establish ways of interacting in these relationships. Thus, romantic relationships during emerging adulthood tend to be more serious and long-lasting. Emerging adults explore romantic

relationships at a deep level of intimacy and try to answer the identity-focused question of commitment and companionship (Arnett, 2000).

Emerging adults are able to transform themselves and make their own choices and life paths (Arnett, 2004). They develop new interests, abilities, transitions, and behaviors, which lead to new styles of relating to parents. Importantly, while emerging adults spend most of their time with friends and romantic partners, they turn to their parents for advice and support. The dual dynamic of individual and family change, however, creates one of the unique challenges that differentiate emerging adulthood from other developmental periods (Aquilino, 2006).

Emerging adulthood is distinguished by the characteristic of being unsettling and changing. Since individuals during this period explore and experiment with new roles, their life is fast-paced and frequent life-courses change frequently (Aquilino, 2006). Additionally, emerging adults have the highest rates of residential change of any age group. For instance, Goldscheider and Goldscheider (1994, as cited in Arnett, 2000) found that about 40% of emerging adults move back into their parents' home and then move out again at least once in the course of their late teens and twenties. As another example, school attendance also greatly fluctuates during emerging adulthood. Emerging adults pursue college education in a nonlinear way; they often work in-between school attendance (Arnett, 2000). As well, many emerging adults enter the labor force and change jobs. Finally, emerging adults move into and out of dating, cohabiting, and marital relationships (Aquilino, 2006). Thus, these frequent changes also illustrate the exploratory nature of this period.

Arnett (2000) claimed that emerging adulthood is a period that both college and non-college students experience. However, much of the existent research on emerging adulthood period has involved a wide range of participants from college settings (Arnett, 2000). Thus, there are

researchers (Gore et al., 1997, as cited in Tanner, 2006) who question whether post-secondary education plays a contextual role for emerging adulthood. If these critics are correct and emerging adulthood is linked to college student experiences but not to individuals outside of college, also referred to as the “forgotten half” (Arnett, 2000), then, it is argued by the critics, the concept of emerging adulthood adds little to our knowledge of development between the ages of 18 and 25 years.

Although much research has been conducted on emerging adults within college contexts only, there is existent research comparing college and noncollege emerging adults. This research indicates that, regardless whether or not the emerging adults pursued post-secondary education, all emerging adults experience a period of transition where they go through multiple jobs (Klerman & Karoly, 1994, as cited in Tanner, 2006). Moreover, both emerging adults who attend college and those who do not attend college indicate that it is essential for them to decide on their own beliefs and values in attaining adult status (Arnett, 2000). As well, both emerging adults attending college and emerging adults working have been found to progress toward self-mastery. In particular, increases in self-mastery have been shown to be significantly higher in emerging adults that either work or attend college full-time, in comparison to emerging adults who work or attend college part-time (Gore et al., 1997, as cited in Tanner, 2006). These findings show that both the financial independence of work and the geographical distance of college can encourage independence and self-sufficiency in emerging adults.

While some research supports Arnett’s claim that emerging adulthood exists in both college and non-college settings, other research also shows that the context of college may influence the development of emerging adulthood. The College experience provides students with many opportunities to explore career options and lifestyles. Consequently, emerging adults who attend

college do not settle on self-definition as early as emerging adults who work after high school (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). It follows, then, that post-secondary attendance delays transitions to marriage and parenthood, thus protracting the period of exploration (Tanner, 2006). Moreover, college students have been found to have a higher level of ego development than non-college students (Tanner, 2006).

Although there is empirical evidence that college provides some opportunities that work does not, Tanner (2006) argued that it is possible that both early factors and contextual factors in development, such as parent-child interactions, ego development, and parent socioeconomic status, can predict who becomes “forgotten” during emerging adulthood. Individual differences in how prepared an individual is for emerging adulthood may explain some variation in the pathways that emerging adults take from adolescence to adulthood. Both developmental and financial resources play an important role in how prepared these individuals are for emerging adulthood and influence whether development is supported by an emerging adult’s context. Thus, emerging adulthood may just accentuate the differences in starting points prior to emerging adulthood and the experiences during emerging adulthood between those who go into emerging adulthood more or less advantaged. Overall, Tanner’s (2006) perspective focuses on emerging adulthood as a developmental stage and college as a context of emerging adulthood that plays a modifier role for emerging adults’ development, rather than a defining feature of emerging adulthood.

Development over the years of emerging adulthood is also linked to relationships in the family of origin. All emerging adults carry their family influences with them even when they leave home. Emerging adults who come from families that they consider to be relatively happy and healthy have opportunities to explore and make independent decisions about who they want

to be and with what kind of person they want to be romantically (Arnett, 2004). The impact that families have had on children may become clearer during emerging adulthood, when many emerging adults begin to live outside of their family home and begin to have more long-term, committed romantic relationships (Arnett, 2000).

In sum, an important impact of a family divorce on romantic relationships is likely to appear during emerging adulthood. It is during this period that individuals' views and beliefs about relationships are not only explored but are played out in real contexts. Individuals have an opportunity to live outside of their family environment (Aquilino, 2006) and it is important to see what family influences they carry forward.

#### *Parental Absence Perspective*

The role that family divorce may play in emerging adults' romantic relationships may be illuminated by the parental absence perspective. According to the parental absence perspective, parents serve as important resources for children's development; they provide their children with emotional support, guidance, education, and supervision (Amato & Keith, 1991). Theoretically, a two-parent family, in which there is minimal conflict and good parent-child relations, provides a better environment for children's development than either a single-parent family, which is likely to have fewer resources to meet the children's needs or a high conflicted family in which potential resources are likely to be undermined by the conflict (Amato & Keith, 1991).

Family divorce is assumed to have negative effects on children due to socialization deficits that come from living with one parent rather than two. In most cases, there is a loss of contact with the noncustodial parent, typically the father, following the divorce. As well, children from divorced families experience a decrease in parental attention, assistance, direction, and supervision (Amato & Keith, 1991). Paternal absence has been associated with children's poor

self-concept, personal insecurity, poor peer relations, and poor social competencies in general. In contrast, involved fathers play a crucial role in supporting their children's capacity for positive intimacy (Biller, 1993). By extension, according to this theoretical perspective, one can expect difficulties with intimacy in children of divorce, which likely follow them into emerging adulthood.

It is important to note that, while it may help to elucidate children's adjustment and later relationships in single-parent families after divorce, the parental-absence perspective may not explain adjustment and relationships in other possible family structures after divorce, such as step-parent families. Indeed, research indicates that, overall, children in step-parent families are not better off than children from single-parent families (Amato & Keith, 1991). Thus, the addition of a second adult to the household does not necessarily improve the functioning of children of divorce. Moreover, research does not necessarily show that a continued contact with the noncustodial parent improves children's well-being (Amato & Keith, 1991). Overall, these findings suggest that although parental absence may be one factor in children's reaction to divorce, it is not the only factor, since having two adults in a parenting capacity does not necessarily make a difference in children's adjustment following a divorce.

Moreover, adult children from single-parent families vary in their adjustment and romantic relationship development. Research has found that while some young adults who have experienced family divorce have lower romantic relationship quality (e.g., Summers et al., 1998), others were able to adapt after the family divorce and become more successful in their romantic relationships (Harvey & Fine, 2004). Thus, it appears that if emerging adults also exhibit these same positive patterns after divorce, then the development of healthy romantic relationships would appear to depend on the resolution of the sense of loss from the divorce, not necessarily

the presence or absence of a parent. Therefore, while the parental absence perspective provides researchers with guidance and educated guesses about what the relationship between family structure and emerging adults' romantic relationships quality is, researchers need to look to additional factors before making definite hypotheses in regards to family divorce and offspring's relationships. An important factor may be the family process.

### *Family Process Perspective*

While family divorce itself has been found to be an important factor in adult children's romantic relationship quality, family process variables, such as interparental conflict and parent-child relationship, have been shown to also be important factors in these adult children's adjustment and romantic development (e.g., Amato & Keith, 1991; Mahl, 2001). Hence, these processes are likely to be significant in the lives of emerging adults.

The family process perspective has been supported by various studies in research on divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Amato & Keith, 1991; Amato & Booth, 2001). In support of interparental conflict, research indicates that the family conflict explanation may be better supported than the family structure in contributing to children's well-being. In fact, children in divorced families have been found to have a higher level of well-being than children who were in intact families but experienced high family conflict (Amato & Keith, 1991). Similarly, research also indicates that if interparental conflict at home is high, then children fare better in adulthood if their parents divorced than if they did not (Amato & Afifi, 2006). These findings support the notion that conflict itself may be just as or possibly more important than family structure.

Conflict between parents creates an aversive environment in the home where children experience stress, unhappiness, and insecurity (Amato & Keith, 1991). Research shows that conflict tends to stress parents to the extent that they are less effective in parenting their children

(Hetherington et al., 1982). For instance, parents who experience conflict may use stricter discipline (Buehler & Gerard, 2002), may be distracted by the conflict to the extent that their supervision would be inadequate (Fauber et al., 1990), may provide less support for their children (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001), or may develop a more conflictual relationship with their children (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Thus, there is likely to be more turbulence in the development of children of divorce. Exactly what the impact is on emerging adults is unknown.

Other research explains that interparental conflict may have long-term detrimental effects on children due to social modeling. From this socialization perspective, children learn many of their behaviors through observation of their parents. Moreover, parents represent the most important source from which children learn about how to behave in romantic relationships (Turner & Kopiec, 2006). Research supports this idea, since various studies have found that relational discord is transmitted across generations (Booth & Edwards, 1990). The specific patterns of family communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution experienced while growing up in the family make it more likely that these patterns will persist as children become young adults (Aquilino, 2006). Hence, children who experience interparental conflict may model their parents' conflictive behavior in their own relationships and, as such, parental conflict may impact adult children's own romantic relationship quality (Turner & Kopiec, 2006). In this way, interparental conflict may have developmental effects on children that are seen later on, when these children become involved in romantic relationships (Wallerstein, 1991).

The relationship between the emerging adults and their parents is also an important variable. In fact, while younger children tend to have difficulties adjusting to a family divorce, parent-child relationship quality has been found to be the most significant determinant of these children's adjustment (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Thus, from this perspective the child will be



protected against long-term problems if continued contact and high quality relationship with both parents is ensured.

The parent-child relationship is a model for the child's future relationships, since it is this primary relationship that the child uses as a template to develop future relationships. The child gains information about the nature of self, relational partners, and the social world through the relationship with the parent (Burns & Dunlop, 1998). Indeed, research indicates that the quality of parent-child relationship serves as a predictor of the child's later relationship success (Burns & Dunlop, 1998). Thus, young adults who have a close relationship with their parents have been found to develop romantic relationships which stress characteristics found in their relationships with the parents, such as intimacy, open communication, and nurturing (Mahl, 2001). Moreover, a positive parent-child relationship can serve as a buffer against the impact of family divorce and parental conflict on emerging adults' psychological and social adjustment (e.g., Burns & Dunlop, 1998).

Importantly research shows that the parent-child relationship tends to be lowered at the time of the divorce (Amato & Booth, 1991; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Aquilino, 2006). Moreover, this strained parent-child relationship does not necessarily improve when the child reaches adulthood. In comparison to adults from intact families, adults from divorced families have less frequent contact with their parents, exchange less assistance with their parents, feel less affection for their parents, perceive a lower relationship quality with their parents (Amato & Booth, 1991), have difficulties relating to, respecting or trusting parents, and feel a sense of loss of the family (Cartwright, 2006). Some researchers have found that children from divorced families have less affection for their parents than children from intact families where their parents were happily or unhappily married (Amato, 1999). As well, young adults have been found to attribute some of

the characteristics of their current relationships with parents to the problems caused by the parental divorce (Amato & Booth, 1991). All of these findings provide further support for the notion that adult children from divorced families are more likely to have a lower relationship quality with their parents than adult children from intact families.

Parent-child relationships during emerging adulthood are in part a function of the parent-child relationship growing up. Emerging adults' capacity for healthy interpersonal relationships is influenced by how much involvement, warmth, support, and acceptance emerging adults feel from the parent-child relationship. Thus, parental acceptance, empathy, and support continue to be important for emerging adults (Aquilino, 2006). As well, emerging adults experience many transitions, such as leaving home, completing their education, and developing committed romantic relationships that may lead into marriage. During these critical years, emerging adults may greatly benefit from their parents' emotional support, companionship, advice, and assistance (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Consistent with this reasoning, research shows that emotional closeness between emerging adults and their parents is positively associated with psychological adjustment (Amato, 1994).

Since it is essential for emerging adults' positive development, a good parent-child relationship, as expected, has been found to mediate the effects of divorce on children's adjustment. This mediation is such that divorce weakens parent-child relations, and since parent-child relationship has been found to promote psychological well-being, the quality of parent-child relations may explain the association between parental divorce and offspring's well-being and adjustment (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). As children get older, adjustment includes success in friendships and in intimate relationships. Hence, both the current and past relationship

between the parent and the child may be important in mediating between family structure and romantic relationships during emerging adulthood as well.

Although many researchers have found family process variables to play an important role in adult children's romantic relationships, some researchers found that family divorce is more important than any of the family process variables. In particular, Amato and DeBoer (2001) conducted a longitudinal study on two generations to assess whether there is an intergenerational transmission of divorce. These researchers found that it is the actual termination of marriage, rather than the disturbed family relationships, that affect children. That is, divorce, not conflict or poor relationships, was found to undermine children's faith in the commitment of marriage such that parental divorce almost doubled the odds that adult children would have their marriage end in divorce. In this study, controlling for parents' pre-divorce conflict did not reduce the estimated effect of parental divorce on children. Moreover, this effect of adult children experiencing their own marital divorces was more likely when parents experienced a low, rather than a high, level of conflict prior to marital dissolution (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

Although Amato's and DeBoer's (2001) study examined intergenerational transmission of divorce in particular, it may be speculated that parental divorce plays a more important role than family process variables in emerging adults' romantic relationship quality as well. Despite some counter evidence, however, much of the existent research shows that family process variables such as interparental conflict and parent-child relationship quality play a significant part in adult children's romantic development and by extension downward, it should be important for emerging adults as well.

Interestingly, contrary to the common perception that children from divorced families have experienced more interparental conflict, research does not necessarily show this link. In fact,

some researchers have found that while some adult children from divorced families described their families as fighting a lot, others described their families as conflict-free (Mahl, 2001). Thus, it appears that the impact of divorce is complex. Since huge amounts of interparental conflict is not necessarily caused by divorce, it is reasonable to examine further whether research on emerging adults will support the speculation that interparental conflict may moderate the link between family structure and romantic relationship quality.

Another piece of the complexity seems to be the parent-child relationship as has been argued above. Since it has been found to be lower for children and adults from divorced families, compared to those from intact families (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004), and has been found to be a mediator between family structure and offspring's well-being, parent-child relationship quality is posed as a significant variable for emerging adults as well. Consequently, it is reasonable to speculate that further research will suggest that parent-child relationship quality mediates the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality.

The great advantage of the family process perspective is that it takes a dynamic view of the relationship of family structure and romantic relationship quality. If research can consistently show that family processes play an important role in children's development, then intervention, prevention, and education may be developed to improve these family processes since relationships can be reshaped and redirected. If this re-shaping occurs, the impact on romantic relationship quality in emerging adults should wane. However, family processes may change throughout the child's development. As such, it is important to consider both retrospective and current family processes.

At the same time, the effects of divorce should not be minimized. Researchers argue that the stresses people experience during and following divorce may be pervasive and persistent. The few existent systematic studies of interventions for divorced parents and their children suggest that when these adverse outcomes occur they may be difficult to modify through educational or therapeutic interventions (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

### *Cognitive-Developmental Perspective*

As may be seen from the above reviewed perspectives, research proposes a variety of divorce-related factors that may explain the effects of divorce on children. However, it is apparent that current research lacks a broader conceptual model that demonstrates how these divorce-related factors influence romantic relationships. Furman and Simon (1999) propose a cognitive-developmental model which suggests a potential path through which these divorce characteristics may influence romantic relationships. The cognitive-developmental model holds that people develop cognitive representations, or organized knowledge structures, from their relational experiences and these cognitive representations are activated in relevant social situations. These cognitive representations consist of autobiographical memories of past relational experiences, such as parental divorce, as well as beliefs, attitudes, and expectations about the self and others (Furman & Simon, 1999). When cognitive representations are activated, one is likely to behave, appraise and explain relationship experiences in ways that are consistent with the individual's existing representations (Furman & Simon, 1999). After they are formed, cognitive representations tend to be resistant to change.

Although cognitive representations tend to be more rigid once formed, the development of these representations is continuous. There are three hierarchically organized types of cognitive representations that develop over time and influence romantic relationships. The first type of

these representations is a general representation of close relationships. The second type is a representation of specific types of close relationships, such as parent-child or romantic relationships. Finally, the third type is a representation of specific relationships, such as an individual's relationship with one's partner. Usually, representations of relationships with parents are first to develop, with higher order representations about the nature of this type of relationship and relationships in general developing over time out of these early experiences. Importantly, general representations then form the basis for representations of all other close relationships. However, these different layers of the hierarchy are interdependent. As such, views of close relationships in general are based on an integration of representations and experiences in different relationships, but the general views of relationships also influence the particular relationships (Furman & Simon, 1999).

New experiences that are inconsistent with existing expectations may change the existing representations. Research has found that new experiences either strengthen existing representations or trigger change in representations. At the same time, experiences that are more relevant to a specific type of relationship are more influential in strengthening or changing representations than other experiences that are not as relevant. Thus, in representation of one's romantic relationships, one may be more influenced from observing parents' marital relationship than from relationships with siblings (Furman & Simon, 1999).

It follows, then, that how one makes sense of a significant life process, such as a family divorce, should play an important role in how this experience influences one's life. For instance, Duran-Aydintug's (1997) qualitative study of young adults' retrospective accounts of their parents' divorce and their attitudes about romantic relationships showed that while most young adults initially blamed at least one of their parents for the divorce, over time many of these

participants developed a more well-balanced understanding of divorce and resolved their emotions about it, developing a successful relationship with both of their parents. Thus, this study showed that appraisal and successful resolution of the divorce is, at the very least, important to the quality of parent-child relationship after the divorce.

Other research also seems to indicate that romantic relationship quality is dependent on how individuals from divorced families make sense of the divorce. Mahl (2001), for instance, found that individuals who report having healthy romantic relationships tend to see their family divorce as a learning experience, an experience that would help them identify characteristics of healthy and unhealthy relationships. In contrast, in Cartwright's (2006) research, young adults linked their family experiences with their problematic negative beliefs, such as "no one stays around forever," "you are on your own in life," "relationships are short-lived," and "everyone goes their own way sooner or later." Hence, it appears that healthy romantic relationships are associated with individuals' appraisal of family divorce as a learning experience, rather than purely emotional responses to the divorce.

The cognitive-developmental perspective has evolved to the point where many factors have been found to affect romantic representations, including attachment, confidence, different expectations at different levels of cognitive development, dyadic relationships, and the role of appraisal. Hence, these aspects highlight the importance of considering other factors that may influence cognitive development and romantic representations. It is very difficult to manage all of these many aspects of cognition in one study. Nevertheless, awareness of example research in each of these areas illuminates the pathways from parental divorce to romantic relationship quality.

Research indicates that individuals with insecure attachments tend to be less open to new experiences than those with secure attachment (Bowlby, 1988, as cited in Furman & Simon, 1999). Hence, young adults with insecure attachment may also be less able to use their acquired cognitive skills to develop their expectations and views of romantic relationships (Bowlby, 1988, as cited in Furman & Simon, 1999). Importantly, research also shows that individuals from distressed and divorced families tend to develop more insecure attachments (Amato & Booth, 2001). This development of insecure attachment may mean that it is not the modeling of parental relationships that affects the cognitive representations of relationships of emerging adults from divorced families, but, rather, it may be that emerging adults from divorced families may not be at the same level of processing relational information that emerging adults from intact families have. That is, individuals from divorced families may be processing relational information in a different, perhaps, more insecure way than do individuals from intact families.

Further support for this possibility may be seen in emerging adults' confidence levels. Emotional factors, such as disturbances in affective relationships, can cause low self-esteem and reduce children's cognitive abilities (Jacobsen et al., 1994). Children from divorced families have been found to have lower levels of confidence than children from intact families (Amato & Keith, 1991). Youths who are fearful or worried about how others judge them and who lack self-confidence may also engage in significantly less explorations and may be prone to experience difficulties in cognitive regulations (Jacobsen et al., 1994). As such, emerging adults from divorced families may develop different relational cognitive representations as compared to emerging adults from intact families.

Additionally, research using this cognitive-developmental perspective is lacking in knowledge of whether the effects of divorce differ at different phases of development (Bartell,



2006). For instance, since romantic relationships become salient during late adolescence and young adulthood (Furman & Simon, 1999), it may be that observations about parental marital relationships particularly parents' romantic relationships or lack thereof also become most influential during this period. Thus, research is needed to examine whether thoughts and experiences of parental divorce is more or less influential at other phases of development.

Another important factor that needs further research is the dyadic nature of romantic relationships. Interaction with romantic partners are said to influence the development of cognitive representations of close relationships (Bartell, 2006). A better understanding of the influence of family divorce on romantic relationships requires a consideration of the role that both partners play. Existent research indicates that this dyadic perspective plays an important role in romantic relationships. For instance, Amato (1996) found that couples are more likely to divorce if both partners' parents had divorced, compared to one partners' parents being divorced. Thus, future research needs to consider how these cognitive representations are developed in the dyadic context of romantic relationships.

Finally, it is also important to consider the role of appraisal of parental divorce on romantic relationships. Research indicates that an important factor in successful resolution of parental divorce is the knowledge of why the divorce occurred. Young adults who perceived having less information about why the divorce occurred have been found to have more problems and stress in dealing with the parental divorce than young adults who perceived having sufficient information about why the divorce happened (Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Research using this perspective thus needs to take into account whether the perceived amount of knowledge about the divorce influences young adults' resolution of divorce and their cognitive representations of romantic relationships.

Overall, these theoretical perspectives indicate that parental divorce is best conceptualized as a process that is linked with a variety of experiences that have the potential to influence romantic relationships in emerging adulthood. Although the event of parental divorce itself is related to various attitudes about and behaviors in romantic relationships, it is also apparent that family process variables, such as parent-child relationship and exposure to parental marital interactions and conflict, play a central role in the relationship between parental divorce and romantic relationships. The cognitive-developmental perspective may help conceptualize divorce-related characteristics that are likely to influence romantic relationships and explain why these experiences are influential to romantic relationships. For instance, using this perspective, researchers can examine whether different parent-child relationship qualities operate through different pathways in their influence on romantic relationships. Moreover, this perspective may also help to understand the variability that is seen in the effects of parental divorce on romantic relationships.

### Literature Review

#### *Family Divorce*

Research indicates that family divorce plays an important role in children's relationships, and particularly in their romantic relationship development. Wallerstein et al., (2000), for instance, claimed that sixty percent of children from divorced families have trouble with social relationships. Moreover, recent research investigating the long-term consequences of parental divorce has found that negative effects appear when romantic relationships become a central feature during adolescence and young adulthood. Aspects such as intimacy, security, commitment, and trust in romantic relationships are often threatened if the child had experienced a parental divorce (Amato & Deboer, 2001; Gabardi & Rosen, 1992; Duran-Aydintug, 1997).

What follows is a detailed and comprehensive analysis of research findings on family divorce and other family experiences in their relation to young adults' romantic relationships. The analysis has led to the specific methods chosen for the present study.

One of the longest major studies looking at the long-term effects of parental divorce on adult children's adjustment and relationships was conducted by Wallerstein and Lewis (1998). They conducted a 25-year study of 130 children and their parents from divorced families. The researchers aimed to explore these children's' inner experiences as they grew to adulthood. At the 25-year mark, when the participants were between 28 and 43 years old, these adult children from divorced families were compared to adult children from intact families who were of same age and from the same neighborhoods. Participants were recruited through the support of the local family court judge, who encouraged attorneys to refer divorcing families with minor children for the study. The children who were selected for participation in this study were required to have achieved appropriate academic and developmental norms and to have never been referred to counseling for emotional problems. These children ranged in age from 3 to 18.

Through in-depth interviews, these researchers found that adult children from divorced families developed more fears of intimacy than adult children from intact families. During young adulthood, these adult children from divorced families reported fearing that the same fate as their parents experienced in their break-up would await them. Many of these respondents also indicated being afraid of having children for fear of condemning their children to the same difficult childhood experiences they had been through. These fears were equally present for both participants who experienced a bitter divorce and the participants who experienced a civil divorce.

Moreover, many of the respondents feared being abandoned - more than the respondents from intact families – and were not interested in marriage. Thus, even if these individuals were in a stable, satisfactory relationship or marriage, they felt uneasy and felt that their happiness may not last as they somehow did not deserve it. It is not surprising, then, that these respondents also indicated that any conflict or disagreement in their relationship was perceived as a danger to the relationship. Their first response to romantic conflict was panic and an urge to flee, which they frequently did. The respondents explained that the happier they felt in their relationships, the more panic they felt about suddenly losing that relationship (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). Thus, conflict appears to be an important feature of romantic relationship quality.

There have been various critiques of Wallerstein's and Lewis' (1998) study. One of the main critiques of this study has been the small, selective sample. The sample consisted of 130 children of 80 California families, which is a small sample of the 1 million children who experience parental divorce each year (Harvey & Fine, 2004). Moreover, since the children who were recruited to participate in this study were, at the outset, checked to have been a psychologically healthy group, this study excluded consideration for children who may have been worse off at the time of divorce. Since children experience and cope with divorce in different ways (Harvey & Fine, 2004), this study was limited by the homogeneity of the psychologically healthy sample of children from divorced families. As well, this sample of children from divorced families was not compared to a randomly sampled control group but, rather, they were compared to 44 young adults from intact families who were recruited mainly from alumni networks at the high schools that the participants from divorced families attended. Further, 80% of the families recruited in the study were Caucasian, with 72% of fathers and 38% of mothers being college graduates and the socioeconomic status being predominantly middle class (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004). Thus,

the sample in this study was not as representative of individuals of other ethnicities and socioeconomic status.

Despite the small and non-random sample, this study provided valuable insight into how children from divorced families experience and think about romantic relationships. As well, an important strength of this study was that there was a high retention rate over the 25 year duration of the study, with 73% of the original sample present at the 25-year follow-up period (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004).

Although Wallerstein's and Lewis' (1998) study provided an important contribution to research on the impact that family divorce may have on young adults' romantic relationships other research, has also found that adult children of divorce tend to be remarkably compassionate and attuned to others' feelings and, while wary of commitment and falling in love, still value love, marriage, and parenthood (Harvey & Fine, 2004).

In recognizing that adult children of divorce vary in their adjustment, Harvey and Fine (2004), wrote a book, *Children of Divorce: Stories of Loss and Growth*, where they reported over 900 narratives that they collected from undergraduate students at the University of Iowa between the 1990s until 2002. In making sense of all these narratives, four main categories were identified: (1) individuals that emphasized negative themes, (2) individuals that emphasized positive themes, (3) individuals that emphasized "missing a parent," and (4) individuals that emphasized family dysfunction and adaptation. Importantly, while the narratives contained these themes, there were overlaps in these categories, illustrating the complex nature of experiencing and adjusting to family divorce. A major theme of the narratives was the resiliency of many children of divorce. While individuals reported that the divorce was painful, their narratives also depicted themes of hope and resiliency, as well as a willingness to try to have stronger romantic

relationships in their own adult lives. A number of participants also indicated having learned from their parents' mistakes. One individual, for instance, reported, "Although the divorce was very painful for me I also learned a lot about relationships and what it takes to make them work. One of the most important things I learned was communicate with one another. You need to confront the problems when they occur, not years down the road" (p. 79). As such, while the participants did not dissuade the pain that parental divorce brought them, there were also clear indications of positive growth and resilience. Success, enjoyment, care, commitment and maintenance appear to be important features of romantic relationship quality.

It is important to note that while this narrative study was important in giving voice to adult children of divorce, one limitation, which is relevant to the present study, was that there was no consideration given to the developmental period of the participants. Thus, although the researchers used young adults in University, they did not consider these participants as experiencing the unique period of emerging adulthood. This is a limitation since, as previously mentioned, there are many important changes and explorations that take place during emerging adulthood. Thus, it is important to examine this population of young adults as they likely experience a unique set of changes appropriate for their developmental period.

Quantitative research findings support the reviewed qualitative findings regarding the negative effects that divorce may have on adult children's romantic relationships. A recent study by Segrin and Taylor (2006), for instance, examined the role of efficacy beliefs in the association between observation of parental divorce and relational communication skills. These researchers used a sample of 111 heterosexual premarital couples, where one member of each couple was a university student recruited from undergraduate courses for extra credit. These couples participated in a laboratory problem-solving interaction from which communication skills were

assessed and were also asked to complete a questionnaire that included measures of demographics, communication skills, relationship efficacy, and beliefs in lifelong marriage.

The results of this study indicated that while there was no relationship found between parental divorce and lower communication skills or relational self-efficacy, parental divorce was predictive of diminished beliefs in the feasibility of lifelong marriage for men and women. This shows that parental divorce significantly affects individuals' romantic beliefs. These findings are supportive of past investigations that are indicative of increased negative attitudes toward marriage among individuals from divorced families (e.g., Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

There are several limitations of the above study that should be considered. First, in terms of the laboratory portion where participant couples were observed in their interactions, these participants were given only 10 minutes to discuss the areas of conflict. Thus, as Segrin and Taylor (2006) acknowledge, it is possible that this short time frame did not allow participants to fully demonstrate their conflict resolution skills. As well, similar to other studies, the above study did not consider other possible family influences in these participants' communication and beliefs in romantic relationships. It may be that interparental conflict or parent-child relationship quality, for instance, played a role in these couples' communication skills as well as their beliefs in marriage. Finally, it is also important to consider other romantic features in addition to beliefs and communication, such as care, trust, and commitment, which the present study examines.

As is evident from the existent investigations, research findings on many relational features, including trust, commitment (Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998), communication (Harvey & Fine, 2004; Segrin & Taylor, 2006), and beliefs (Segrin & Taylor, 2006) contain mixed results. While much of the variability in research findings may be due to different methodologies, some of this variability may also be explained by researchers' tendency to treat divorce as a uniform

experience. There are many differences in the types of experiences associated with family divorce, such as the amount of family conflict experienced within the family, and the changes in parent-child relationships at the time of the divorce and subsequent to the divorce. These family process variables may play a key role in how resilient children of divorce become. Hence, taking into account specific aspects of family experiences may help to better understand the impact different family structures may have on romantic relationships. Since research continues to be unclear regarding the impact that family divorce has on children's later romantic relationships, further exploration is necessary in this area.

### *Interparental Conflict*

While much of the research has focused on the effects of family structure on adult children's romantic relationships, it has become apparent that romantic relationships are affected by more than the physical properties of divorce. Examination of divorce alone provides insufficient evidence to explain adult children's romantic relationship quality. A review of research (e.g., Amato & Booth, 2001; Toomey & Nelson, 2001) indicates that there is a high level of agreement that interparental conflict plays an important role in adult children's romantic relationships. Interparental conflict creates an aversive home environment that is less than optimal for children's development (Amato & Keith, 1991). Family conflict over time during children's development has been found to have a strong impact on adult children's relationships in general, and romantic relationships in particular (Gabardi & Rosen, 1992; Amato & Booth, 2001). Moreover, research indicates that there is a relationship between interparental conflict and romantic relationships regardless of family structure (Mahl, 2001). Hence, it is important to examine the existent literature on the independent role of interparental conflict in adult children's



romantic relationships and the possible moderating role of interparental conflict between family structure and adult children's romantic relationships.

One of the more recent studies focusing on interparental conflict and its impact on children's relationships was conducted by Amato and Booth (2001). In their national 17-year longitudinal study, Amato and Booth (2001) examined whether interparental conflict was predictive of offspring's marital quality. The researchers recruited 2,033 married people (not couples) who were 55 years old or younger in 1980 through random-digit-dialing procedure. The husband or wife in each marriage was interviewed. Each respondent had children under the age of 18 living in the household at the time of the first interview. These respondents were interviewed again in 1983, 1988, 1992, and 1997, with response rates being quite high: 78%, 66%, 58%, and 53% respectively. As well, in 1992 and 1997 a sample of offspring who were 19 years of age or older were also interviewed. Overall, the researchers interviewed 471 offspring in 1992 and an additional 220 in 1997. The analyses for this study, however, were conducted with 274 offspring who were married at the time of the 1997 interview. At the time of the interview, these married offspring ranged between 19 and 44 years of age.

The researchers found that high interparental conflict led to lower parent-child relationships over time. Moreover, interparental conflict during children's development was negatively related to the offspring's marital harmony and positively related to the offspring's discord in the marriage.

While this study contributes to the growing support for interparental conflict and its relation to children's adjustment and later relationships, there are several weaknesses that should be noted. First, by obtaining parental reports of conflict and its impact on their children, the researchers did not have an opportunity to hear the voices of the children themselves and how

they perceived the conflict and its impact on their relationships growing up. As well, as the authors note, data for this study originally came from a study focusing on marital instability over the life course. As such, none of the data sets used in this study were designed specifically to examine pre- and post-divorce differences in interparental conflict and its impact on children. Thus, the measures of problems in parent-child relationship, for instance, were limited in number and were retrospective (Amato & Booth, 2001). These types of measures may have provided biased results. Nonetheless, the study contains many important advantages, including the fact that it is based on a nationally representative sample of married individuals in 1980 and runs for a 12-year time period (Amato & Booth, 2001).

Research conducted at one point in time has also found interparental conflict to be an important factor for adult children's romantic relationships. Toomey and Nelson (2001), for instance, conducted a questionnaire study with 317 college students. They hypothesized that (1) young adults from high-conflict families would have less intimacy in their relationships than young adults from low-conflict families, (2) young adults from high-conflict families would have more sexual partners than young adults from low-conflict families, (3) females from high-conflict families would have more pleasant dating experiences overall than males from high-conflict families, and (4) young adults from high-conflict families would have higher levels of relationship dependency than young adults from low-conflict families. The researchers found that only the fourth hypothesis was supported, where there was a significant link between relationship dependency and high-conflict families. The researchers attributed these results to the findings that these young adults from high-conflict families also exhibited insecurity or low self-efficacy in intimate relationships. Importantly, since this study did not find any other differences

in interparental conflict and its relation to young adults' romantic relationships, this, once again, suggests that there may be other factors that play a role in young adults' romantic relationships.

It should be noted that an important limitation of this study is that there were 78 male and 238 female participants (Toomey & Nelson, 2001). Therefore, the results of the study may have been gender-biased. As well, this study did not take into account other family variables that may play an important role in interparental conflict, such as family structure. As such, perhaps the results of this study were not supportive of the other hypotheses because these other family factors may have been confounds in this study.

As is evident from the above literature review, while some researchers have found that interparental conflict impacts young adults' romantic relationships, this research is lacking in examining interparental conflict as a moderating variable between family structure and romantic relationships. Since children from divorced families have not necessarily experienced more interparental conflict than children from intact families (Mahl, 2001), emerging adults may experience problems in their romantic relationships due to experiences of family conflict, not family structure. It may then be predicted that the more family conflict that emerging adults have experienced during the developing years, the lower their romantic relationship quality, regardless of family structure. It is also important to note that research indicates that young adults' ability to overcome the effects of divorce is affected by both past and present parental conflict (Shulman et al., 2001). The effects of interparental conflict should be examined both while growing up and currently to determine the impact on the adult children's romantic relationships.

#### *Parent-Child Relationship*

In addition to interparental conflict, research also indicates that parent-child relationship quality is an important resource for children's development of attachment (Simon & Furman,

1999) and later romantic relationship quality (King, 2002). Since parent-child relationship has been found to decrease following the divorce (e.g., Amato & Booth, 1991), it is important to examine the literature on the mediational role that parent-child relationship plays between family structure and romantic relationships.

One of the few existent studies examining this association between parental divorce, parent-child relationships, and romantic relationships was conducted by King (2002). In her study, King used national 17-year longitudinal data from the Marital Instability Over the Life Course Study by Amato and Booth (2001) to understand the influence of parental divorce on several types of trust, including trust in parents, intimate partners, and others. The sample in this study consisted of 2,033 married people (not couples) who were 55 years old or younger and the husband or wife in each marriage were interviewed by telephone in 1980, 1983, 1988, 1992, and 1997. In addition, in 1992 and 1997 the researcher also included a sample of children who were 19 years of age or older and resided in the parental household in 1980. Overall, 471 young adult children were interviewed in 1992 and an additional 220 who reached 19 years by 1997 were also interviewed. The researcher used a number of regression models to explore whether parent-child relationship quality mediated between family structure and young adults' trust in relationships.

The results of this study showed that poor parent-child relationships that have been disrupted by the divorce result in children's tendency to become less trusting of their parents as well as less likely to trust other relational partners. The quality of parent-child relationships while growing up not only mediated the relationship between divorce and trusting others, but also it was found to stand on its own as an important main effect in explaining trust in parents and intimate partners during adulthood. Additionally, both parents' and adult children's reports of the parent-child relationships were similar and consistent with these results.

While there was no mention of gender, ethnicity, or socioeconomic breakdown for the participants, the researcher did note that interviews were less likely to be obtained if the parents were male, young, poorly educated, non-White, and living in rented accommodations (King, 2002). While this study used a national sample, this sample may have been more biased towards female, White and middle-class individuals. As well, the study focused on trust, only one aspect of relationships. Thus, the present study made up for this limitation by examining other relationship features in addition to trust, such as intimacy, care, and commitment. Moreover, King's (2002) study considered young adults to be 19 years, while the present study took into account how these familial variables play out during emerging adulthood. Nevertheless, using a national longitudinal sample of parents and their children, this study made important contributions about the way in which parental divorce and parent-child relationships affect young adult children's trust in relationships.

Another longitudinal study which focused on family's impact on various romantic relationship quality features - not just trust – was conducted by Conger and colleagues (2000). The researchers hypothesized that family interactions would be predictive of youths' interpersonal skills, which would also be positively related to the early adult couple's relationship quality.

To investigate this hypothesis, the study followed 193 youth from age 12 to age 21 between 1989 and 1997. In 1997, these participants' romantic partners were also recruited to participate in the study. The participants were recruited from eight counties in North Central Iowa. As such, these participants came from small towns and, since there were no minority families living in rural Iowa, all of the participants were of European descent. The procedure for this study included annual interviews and questionnaires, which focused on individual family member

characteristics, quality of family relationships and interactions, and family economic circumstances. Additionally, the family members were videotaped engaging in four different structured interaction tasks which were designed to stimulate family interactions involving social skills and emotional expression. When the participants' romantic partners were recruited, interactions between participants and their romantic partners were also videotaped. All of the videos were coded and scored by trained observers.

The researchers found that parent-child relationship quality was predictive of the young adults' behaviors towards romantic partners. In particular, nurturing and involved parents were predictive of the youths' warm, supportive, and low in hostility behavior towards their romantic partner. Thus, these findings show that family interactions affect children's development of interpersonal skills, which in turn affect the quality of romantic relationships.

This study was not without limitations, however. First, although the study was longitudinal in nature, the participants' romantic relationships were only examined at one point in time. As such, this study did not clarify whether these romantic relationships would consistently be characterized by these qualitative traits. Second, the sample in this study was limited in ethnicity (Caucasian) and geographic location (rural) (Conger et al., 2000). Future research would need to examine these differences across more diverse groups. Despite the limitations, however, this study also overcame many limitations in earlier research, such as being (a) prospective and longitudinal, (b) based on observed interactions, (c) included evaluations of various possible family influences, (d) included a direct measure of interpersonal competence in romantic relationships as a possible mechanism for transmission of family influences, and (e) directly tested the link between competence and young adult relationship quality (Conger et al., 2000).

The above study provides support for the usefulness of the developmental approach in understanding how family relationships predict young adults' romantic relationships. Particularly relevant to the present study, the above study provided support for the role that good parent-child relationship quality plays in young adults' romantic relationship quality. Based on this research, it may be predicted that a good parent-child relationship quality may mediate between family structure and emerging adults' romantic relationship features such as care and intimacy.

The reviewed research makes it clear that it is important to examine the parent-child relationship during the childhood years as these relationships shape the child's own interactions. It is also important, however, to examine the years during which children are shifting from being dependent on their parents to becoming increasingly independent adults.

### *Individual Differences*

Research indicates that adult children cope with family divorce differently, in that some may overcome their sense of loss after the divorce and enter committed relationships, whereas others may struggle with the fear that their romantic relationships will fail, like their parents' (as reviewed in Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). How can these different individual outcomes be explained? Since researchers have found both vulnerability and resilience in children of divorce, these findings have led researchers to examine the influence of children's own characteristics in coping with divorce. The most frequently studied characteristics in relation to the impact of divorce are age at the time of divorce and gender (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

*Timing of Divorce.* Research shows that an important variable that may contribute to the resolution of the sense of loss from the divorce is timing of the divorce. Earlier timing of family divorce has been found to have more detrimental effects on children, such as more behavioral and psychological problems (Zill et al., 1993). Younger children, who experience family divorce

before 12-years-old, tend to react to divorce with fear, sadness, and anger that is manifested by regression, emotional neediness, dependency, clinging, and increased aggression (Guttman, 1993). These children blame one parent for the divorce and for the other parent's suffering and lash out (Wallerstein, 1983).

Based on this research, Shulman and colleagues (2001) hypothesized that a less integrative perception of divorce would be reported by young adults who were younger when their parents divorced than by those who were older. These researchers collected data from 51 Israeli college students (30 females and 21 males) from divorced families ranging between 19 and 29 years. Participants were interviewed about their experiences of divorce as well as asked to fill out a five-point rating scales on their perception of divorce, sense of loss in the past and present, their anger, and the extent to which they remember the details of the divorce. The findings of this study showed that those adults who experienced a family divorce before 12 years old reported a greater sense of loss in the past and present than the adults who experienced a family divorce after they were 12 years old (Shulman et al., 2001).

An important limitation of the above study, however, is the lack of participants from an intact family as a comparison group. Thus, the differences found between children who experienced divorce at a younger age and those who experienced divorce at an older age may be due to some other variables and not necessarily as a result of the timing of divorce. However, this study also shows that these differences in timing of divorce may exist in other cultures. As well, this study provided further support to the existent research on differences between children who experience divorce earlier or later.

According to developmental psychologists, the reason that younger children react in these ways is because they have limited cognitive abilities that leave them more vulnerable to family



divorce than older children who are able to understand more about the situation (Zill et al., 1993). Although children who experienced divorce after 12-years-old also feel sorrow, sadness, or fear when their parents divorce or separate, these children have greater awareness of their parents' problems and are able to better understand the separation. As well, older children are more independent of their parents and are increasingly more involved with their peers and issues of self identity (Clarke-Stewart & Brentano, 2006).

In looking at the long-term effects of age at divorce, Zill and his colleagues (1993) conducted a longitudinal study based on the National Survey of Children. These researchers surveyed individuals from divorced families at three wave periods, where the first wave was conducted in 1976-1977, when the participants were between 7 to 11 years, the second wave was conducted in 1981, when the participants were between 12 to 16 years, and the third wave was conducted in 1987, when the participants were between 18 to 22 years. There were in total 1,147 participants who were surveyed in this study. The researchers found that the participants who experienced family divorce at a younger age, compared to those who experienced the divorce at an older age, showed poorer relationships with their parents, particularly fathers, had more high school dropout, more behavior problems in adolescence and adulthood, and received more psychological help.

An important strength of this study is that it examined these participants over many years to see the effects of divorce. Thus, this study provides some evidence that parental divorce has more negative socio-emotional long-term developmental effects on younger children than older children. One limitation of this study that should be noted, however, is that the overall sample included in the study consisted of children whose parents divorced before or during the study, children whose parents remained married as of 1987, and children born outside of marriage.

There may be some differences between the individuals from these different households and, as such, it would have been helpful to control for these possible differences.

In relation to romantic relationship difficulties and timing of divorce, existent research is unclear whether timing of divorce plays a role in young adults' romantic relationships. Wallerstein and Lewis (1998), as reviewed earlier, found that when these children from early divorced families reached adolescence, they expressed a sense of powerlessness and feared disappointment in romantic relationships. Similarly, Gabardi and Rosen (1992) found that adult children who experienced divorce at a younger age were at a greater risk of developing unrealistic beliefs about relationships in general. For instance, these adult children may interpret disagreements as precursors to divorce and may have misperceptions about needing a perfect partner to be happy. These findings are consistent with Amato and DeBoer's (2001) study which found that when adult children marry, they are more likely to think about divorce if they experienced a parental divorce earlier in life (i.e. before mid-teen years). When divorce occurred later in life, however, the percentage of adult children thinking about divorce declined from 40% (for those from earlier divorces) to 20% or less. Thus, these results suggest that younger children are more influenced by parental divorce than older children.

On the other hand, other researchers did not find any differences in romantic relationship beliefs between individuals who experienced a divorce at a younger age compared to those that experienced a divorce at an older age. Mahl (2001), for instance, conducted a qualitative study, in which he interviewed 28 college students at the University of Texas between the ages of 19 and 26 about their romantic relationships and their experiences related to parental divorce. In looking at the age at divorce and its relation to young adults' romantic relationships, the age at which these participants experienced family divorce did not make a difference in these

participants' beliefs about romantic relationships. However, an important limitation in this study was the small number of participants, since a larger sample may have shown a difference in age and romantic beliefs. As well, romantic beliefs may differ from actual behaviors in romantic relationships and may be affected by various other factors, such as the media and observation of friends' relationships (Mahl, 2001). As such, further research is needed to examine specifically quality of romantic relationships in young adults and its relation to timing of divorce.

In an effort to address this discrepancy in findings on age at divorce and its impact on children's development, Amato and Keith (1991) conducted a meta-analysis of 92 studies comparing children from divorced and intact families on measures of well-being. These researchers found that age was significantly associated with effect sizes for psychological adjustment, social adjustment, mother-child relations, and father-child relations. More specifically, these researchers found that effect sizes were strongest for children in the middle age group (primary school and high school). Thus, these results further complicate other findings on timing of divorce since the age group that was negatively affected by divorce in this study was not consistently under 12 years of age, and was rather varied.

An important limitation that Amato and Keith (1991) note is that the results of studies on children's adjustment and age at divorce may be inconsistent due to the fact that researchers generally do not separate the age of the child at the time of divorce from the time elapsed since the divorce. This lack of information makes the picture even more complex and confusing, making it impossible to conclude whether age at divorce plays an important role in adult children's adjustment and relationships.

Since research is generally indicating adjustment differences in timing of divorce, and since research is unclear on whether these differences also translate to romantic relationship

difficulties, it is important to further explore this research area. The timing of divorce may play an important role in emerging adults' romantic relationship quality since those individuals who have experienced this divorce after 12 years may have been able to process and work through the divorce, unlike the individuals who experienced a divorce prior to being 12 years.

*Gender Differences.* The gender of the adult child from divorced family is another important characteristic that has been investigated and has been shown to play an important role in romantic relationships. Research generally indicates that there are gender differences in how young adults interact in and view romantic relationships. For instance, females, compared to males, have been found to be more relationship oriented and invested in developing intimate romantic relationships (Block, 1983), emphasize more care and attachment in their relationships (Shulman & Scharf, 2000), as well as put more effort in maintaining their romantic relationships (Wood, 2000). Thus, in general studies suggest that females may be more motivated to have higher romantic relationship quality than males.

Research also shows a gender difference in how children from within divorced families interact in their relationships. In relation to timing of divorce, while younger children have been found to have lower adjustment to divorce than older children, boys have shown greater of these developmental disruptions and more difficulties with social adjustment (Amato & Keith, 1991) than girls. However, more recent studies have failed to find significant differences between boys and girls in terms of their psychological and social adjustment (Amato, 2001).

One explanation for these contradictory findings has been that while boys and girls may be affected by divorce similarly, they express their feelings differently. That is, since it is well-known that boys are more prone to behavioral problems than girls, divorce may exacerbate this difference (Amato, 2001). Research seems to support this explanation. Amato (2001), for

instance, conducted a meta-analysis to update the meta-analytic review of Amato and Keith (1991). Amato (2001) reviewed 67 studies from the 1990s. Since gender differences were of great interest within the reviewed literature, Amato explored how effect sizes in the 1990s varied with children's gender.

In general, the methods used in the analysis of these reviewed studies were identical to those reported by Amato and Keith (1991). Thus, the researcher selected studies through computerized data bases, such as PsycInfo, and reference sections of review articles. The reviewed studies had to meet two criteria: (1) studies had to include a sample of children from single-parent divorced families and a sample of children from intact families, and (2) studies had to report data on at least one child outcome that could be represented as an effect size. Although studies on adult children of divorce were excluded, studies on college student samples were included. The results of this meta-analytic study were that boys from divorced families had more conduct problems compared to girls from divorced families.

It is necessary to point out some limitations of the above study, however. Firstly, this meta-analysis did not consider many important characteristics of studies, such as direct observation of children and longitudinal designs. It is important to consider these variables since they may provide a more in-depth view of the impact that divorce may have on males and females. As well, as Amato (2001) noted, pooling the results of multiple studies is not the ideal method of establishing trends in effect sizes over time. He noted that the studies reviewed in the meta-analysis differed in many ways that could not be controlled. Thus, a better strategy not conducted would have been to conduct the same comparisons, using the same sampling strategy, instruments, and analytic techniques, on repeated cross-sections of children in different decades. Nevertheless, despite these limitations, this study provided partial support for the notion that

boys from divorced families may be more likely to externalize their distress while girls from divorced families may tend to internalize it.

While research is lacking in whether these gender differences exist in emerging adults' romantic relationships, there is some existent research that supports these gender differences in young adults' romantic relationships. In Wallerstein's and Lewis' (1998) qualitative study, while both males and females reported having fears in romantic relationships, as previously mentioned, there were gender differences in how they expressed these fears. While males indicated avoiding involvement in romantic relationships, females generally reported "jumping into relationships," often with men they hardly knew (Wallerstein, 2005). Thus, the general pattern seen in males was avoidance while in females it was rushing into relationships. These findings seem to support research on gender differences found in childhood, showing that while men were externally showing their distress by avoiding relationships altogether, the women seemed to repress their fears and prematurely committed to relationships that may not have been satisfactory to them.

As previously mentioned in the *Family Divorce* section, however, the sample in this study is representative of Caucasian, middle-class adult children living in the States. It is important for future research to investigate whether these gender differences are also present in young adults from other socioeconomic classes and geographic locations. Nevertheless, this study provided insight into how children of divorce adjust and develop romantically. As well, an important strength of this study was the breakdown of gender, which was fairly equal, with 52% female and 48% male participants (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004).

Other researchers have specifically found that females from divorced families experience more negative effects in their romantic relationships than males from divorced families. Mullet and Stolberg (2002), for instance, surveyed 136 18-30 year-old undergraduate students on the

impact that divorce has had on their intimate relationships. The sample consisted of 110 females (81%) and 26 males (19%). These researchers found that females who have experienced parental divorce reported significantly lower levels of intimacy and mutually constructive communication and higher levels of demand-withdrawal patterns and mutual avoidance of conflict. In comparison, divorce did not have an effect on the intimacy and communication patterns of males. Thus, it may be that females may experience delayed consequences from the divorce when romantic relationships become prominent in their lives.

A major limitation of this study, however, is that it did not take into account other family variables that may play a role in both females' and males' communication in romantic relationships. Factors such as the relationship between the parent and child and interparental conflict may play an important role in how these young adults communicate in their relationships. Thus, the present study made up for this limitation by considering these family process variables in their relation to divorce and romantic relationships.

Consistent with Mullet's and Stolberg's (2002) findings, Sprecher et al., (1998) conducted a study comparing college students from intact and divorced families on their beliefs and attitudes about love and romantic relationships. The sample in this study consisted of 1,043 young adults (389 males and 654 females) between the ages of 18 and 21 from several universities and colleges in the United States. The participants completed questionnaires on their attachment, love styles, romantic beliefs, and status of their parents' marriage. The researchers predicted that (1) a secure attachment type would be linked with participants coming from intact families while an insecure attachment would be linked with participants coming from divorced families, (2) participants who experienced parental divorce would have more carefree and sexual attitudes, (3) participants from intact families would have more romantic and idealistic attitudes than

participants from divorced families, and (4) all of these differences will be more pronounced when comparing the young adults from divorced families with the specific group of participants coming from homes where their parents are together and happily married.

The researchers found partial support for these hypotheses, since these results differed for males and females. The women in this study who experienced a family divorce, compared to the women from intact families, were less likely to have a secure attachment style and more likely to have an avoidant attachment style, and were less idealistic in their romantic beliefs. Men from divorced families, compared to men from intact families, were not found to have these relationship difficulties (Sprecher et al., 1998).

Since the data for the above study came from a larger study with multiple purposes, the participants were asked only one question about their parents' marital status and whether they would characterize their parents as happily married or unhappily married (for those from intact families). Thus, similar to Mullet's and Stolberg's (2002) study, the limitation in this study was the lack of consideration for family process variables such as parent-child relationship and interparental conflict, which were examined in the present study. Overall, though, this study provided further support for women from divorced families having lower romantic relationship quality than men from divorced families.

In contrast to this research, other research indicates that females from divorced families have better romantic relationship quality than males from divorced families. Mahl (2001), for instance, as reviewed in *Timing of Divorce* section of the literature review, interviewed 28 college students about their romantic relationships and their experiences related to parental divorce. In this study, Mahl (2001) found that while gender differences were absent in how the participants experienced their parents' divorce, men and women reacted differently to how this



divorce affected their conceptualization of romantic relationships. Thus, Mahl (2001) found that women tend to strive to develop their relationships gradually and put forth more effort to maintain their relationships than men.

Importantly, other studies have not found any gender differences between divorce and relationships (e.g., Amato & Keith, 1991). Amato's and Keith's (1991) meta-analysis indicated that males and females did not significantly differ in the extent to which parental divorce affected their psychosocial adjustment or their relationship with mother and father. However, Amato and Keith (1991) did not look at the impact of divorce on romantic relationships of males and females in particular; perhaps gender differences for children of divorce exist for certain variables but not for others. Therefore, it is unclear whether these gender differences would not exist if the participants' romantic relationships were examined in this context.

In brief, the inconsistent findings reviewed above on the impact that family divorce has on males' and females' romantic relationships point to the need for further research. As such, researchers should continue to examine gender differences in how divorce may impact romantic relationships.

### The Present Study

The present study examined the impact family divorce has on romantic relationships during the recently described period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). This study also tested one mediation model and one moderation model of how other family variables, such as parent-child relationship and interparental conflict, combine to explain variance in romantic relationship quality. Finally, in examining the individual variables (age at the time of divorce and gender), this study provides a more in-depth view of how various family and individual variables affect emerging adults' romantic relationship quality.

Based upon the theoretical perspectives reviewed and previous findings, it was predicted that (1) emerging adults from divorced families, compared to emerging adults from intact families, would have a lower quality of romantic relationship. It was also predicted that (2) this effect of divorce on emerging adults' romantic relationship quality would be mediated by parent-child relationship quality, both retrospectively and presently. Parent-child relationship quality was predicted to be a mediator variable because research suggests that parent-child relationship quality is mostly negatively changed following a family divorce. At the same time, high quality parent-child relationship has been found to be conducive to high quality romantic relationships. Thus, this effect was predicted to be such that parental divorce would lower the parent-child relationship quality, both retrospectively and currently, and, it follows that it would lower emerging adults' romantic relationship quality.

In contrast, since research does not show a necessary change in interparental conflict in divorced families, this variable was hypothesized as a moderating variable. Hence, it was predicted that (3) interparental conflict, both retrospective and current, would moderate the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality. This effect was predicted to be such that the strength of the relationship between family structure and emerging adults' romantic relationship quality would depend on interparental conflict, where the higher the interparental conflict experienced growing up or currently, the lower romantic relationship quality of the emerging adults. That is, family structure would have a negative impact on emerging adults' romantic relationships when there has been a high level of interparental conflict growing up or currently. Thus, the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality will be strong in the situation of higher levels of interparental conflict.

Further, a hypothesis for emerging adults within divorced families was also developed. It was predicted that (4) emerging adults who had experienced a family divorce prior to 12 years of age would have a lower romantic relationship quality than the emerging adults who had experienced a family divorce after 12 years of age. Since findings on gender differences in how family divorce may impact romantic relationships are unclear, gender differences were explored within all of these hypotheses and no specific hypotheses were made. As well, gender differences were explored within the sample of emerging adults from divorced families since research findings are unclear whether divorce has more effect on males or females.

## Method

### *Participants*

Following data screening, the sample consisted of 310 University of Saskatchewan students (189 women and 121 men, mean age = 19.39 years,  $SD = 1.72$  years) from intact ( $N = 261$ ) and divorced ( $N = 47$ ) families. There were in total 4 (2 from intact family and 2 from divorced family) married participants and 306 unmarried participants. The participants were selected based on the following criteria: (a) they were currently involved or had previously (between the ages of 18-25 years) been involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship; (b) they came from intact or divorced families (as defined in the next paragraph); and (c) they were between the ages of 18-25 years, consistent with the emerging adulthood life period. Participants were recruited through the undergraduate psychology participant pool as well as through posted advertisements around the University campus. A demographic questionnaire was included in the research study and participants were asked about the ethnicity or race with which they identify, family structure, current living arrangements and distance from home (if not living at home), and the type of romantic relationship they have (exclusive, open, or “friends with benefits”). These sample

characteristics are portrayed in Table 1 separately for both males and females according to family structure. The length of time in their current romantic relationships was a bit higher (though not significantly) for emerging adults from divorced families ( $M = 21.16$ ,  $SD = 20.28$ ) than for emerging adults from intact families ( $M = 18.42$ ,  $SD = 14.71$ ). Overall, 114 (41.9%) of the participants reported living at home and 158 (58.1%) of the participants reported living outside the home. However, there were no significant differences between the participants living at home or outside the home and family structure, gender, or romantic relationships. As well, participants from within divorced families were asked how frequently they see their mother and father, the percentages and numbers for this frequency of contact may be seen in Table 2. It should be noted that for these questions there were some individuals who declined to answer some of these questions.

### *Operational Definitions*

Romantic relationships were defined as those in which the participants were in a heterosexual romantic relationship with someone, forming a couple unit. While participants were asked to categorize their relationship as “exclusive” (e.g., a romantic couple relationship, not seeing anyone else), “open” (e.g., a romantic relationship but also seeing other people), or “friends with benefits” (e.g., friends engaging in sexual acts without commitment), for the purposes of this study romantic relationships were considered as those that are exclusive relationships.

Family structure was divided into intact families and divorced families. Intact families were considered those that consist of married or partnered heterosexual parents residing together. Divorced families consisted of divorced or separated families consisting of either single-parent

Table 1

*Percentages and Total Numbers for Current Living Arrangements, Distance from Home, Relationship Type, and Ethnicity*

Demographics	Intact Family				Divorced Family			
	Males		Females		Males		Females	
	(N=103)		(N=157)		(N=17)		(N=30)	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
<b>Current Living Arrangements</b>								
Both Biological Parents	40.8%	42	34.2%	54	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Mother and step-father	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	5.9%	1	6.7%	2
Father and step-mother	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0%	0	6.7%	2
Mother only	1.9%	2	2.5%	4	5.9%	1	20.0%	6
Father only	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0
Self	7.8%	9	4.4%	7	35.3%	6	13.3%	4
Roommate(s)	41.7%	43	46.2%	73	41.2%	7	30.0%	9
Other	7.8%	8	12.7%	20	11.8%	2	23.3%	7
<b>Distance from Home</b>								
Within the same city	4.1%	4	5.1%	8	29.4%	5	10.7%	7
Within 100km from home	5.2%	5	7.1%	11	0%	0	14.3%	4
Within 100-200 km from home	18.6%	18	17.9%	28	17.6%	3	14.3%	4
More than 200km from home	30.9%	30	34.0%	53	35.3%	6	32.1%	9
Not applicable	41.2%	40	35.9%	56	17.6%	3	28.6%	8
<b>Romantic Relationship Type</b>								

Family Structure and Romantic Relationships 51

Exclusive	90.4%	94	89.0%	154	94.1%	16	90.3%	28
Open	8.7%	9	8.7%	15	5.9%	1	6.5%	2
“Friends with benefits”	1.0%	1	2.3%	4	0%	0	3.2%	1
Ethnocultural background								
European Canadian	86.9%	86	91.1%	143	52.9%	9	82.8%	24
Asian Canadian	2.0%	2	4.5%	7	11.8%	2	0%	0
Native Canadian	0%	0	1.3%	2	17.6%	3	6.9%	2
South Asian Canadian	5.1%	5	1.3%	2	5.9%	1	0%	0
Caribbean Canadian	1.0%	1	0.6%	1	0%	0	6.9%	2
Latin Canadian	1.0%	1	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0
Other	4.0%	4	1.3%	2	11.8%	2	3.4%	1

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*Note.* Some participants declined to answer some of the questions. Thus, some columns may have more or less N, according to the number of participants who answered the questions.

Table 2

*Percentages and Total Numbers for How Often Participants from Within Divorced Families See their Mother and Father*

Demographics	%	N
<b>See Mother</b>		
At least once a week	50%	20
At least once a month	15%	6
Every few months	7.5%	3
Every once in a while	12.5%	5
Never	0%	0
Other	15%	6
<b>See Father</b>		
At least once a week	14%	6
At least once a month	20.9%	9
Every few months	18.6%	8
Every once in a while	25.6%	11
Never	20.9%	9
Other	0%	0

*Note.* Some participants declined to answer some of the questions. Thus, while the total N for frequency of seeing mother was 40, the total N for frequency of seeing father was 43.

family or step-parent family. Thus, the analyses were run using 2 groups: intact (coded as 1) and divorced (coded as 2).

### *Measures*

Participants completed five on-line questionnaires in this study. The questionnaires assessed the participants' romantic relationship quality, timing of the divorce, gender, past and current interparental conflict, and past and current parent-child relationship. Informed consent was obtained from the participants prior to their participation through the initial consent form. As well, a short form of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability scale (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972) was used in this study to assess participants' social desirability. In the following sections, a brief summary of the scales that were utilized in this study is provided.

*Romantic Relationship Quality.* To assess romantic relationship quality the Relationship Rating Form (RRF) (Davis, 2001) was used. This scale consists of seven global characteristics and a total of 20 facets of romantic relationships. As well, there are three other stand alone scales because they have not been consistently clustered with any of the seven global scales. All of the questions are based on a 9-point ordinal rating scale, where 1 = Not at all and 9 = completely or extremely. The global characteristics and the three stand-alone scales were used in the analyses.

The first global scale is Viability, which consists of the acceptance, respect, and trust subscales. An example of acceptance is "Do you accept this person as s/he is?" An example of respect is "Do you respect this person?" An example of trust is "Do you trust this person?" The total sum of scores for this scale in the current study ranged between 19 and 108 where higher scores are indicative of greater viability.

Intimacy is the second global scale and consists of the confiding and understanding subscales. Example questions for this scale include "Do you and this person openly discuss



personal matters?” (confiding) and “Do you know what kind of person s/he is?” (understanding). The total sum of scores for this scale in the current study ranged between 19 and 72, where higher scores are indicative of greater intimacy.

The third global scale, Care, consists of the giving, championing, and assistance subscales. Example questions for this scale include “Are you prepared to make a significant sacrifice on this person’s behalf?” (giving), “Can you count on this person to let you know how others feel about you?” (championing), and “Can you count on this person to come to your aid when you need help?” (assistance). The total sum of scores for this scale in the current study ranged between 28 and 99, where higher scores are indicative of greater care.

Passion, the fourth global scale, consists of the fascination, exclusiveness, and sexual intimacy subscales. Example questions for this scale include “Does this person dominate your thoughts?” (fascination), “Are there things that you do only with this person?” (exclusiveness), and “Are you sexually intimate with this person?” (sexual intimacy). The total sum of scores for this scale in the current study ranged between 10 and 90, where higher scores are indicative of greater passion.

The fifth global scale, called Global Satisfaction, consists of the success, enjoyment, reciprocity, and esteem subscales. Example questions for this scale include “Are you happy in your relationship with this person?” (success), “Do you enjoy doing things with this person more than with others?” (enjoyment), “Does your partner share the same feeling for you that you have for him/her?” (reciprocity), and “Does your partner make you feel worthwhile and special?” (esteem). The total sum of scores for this scale in the current study ranged between 15 and 99, where higher scores are indicative of greater global satisfaction.

Commitment, the sixth global scale, is a 4-item scale of its own. Example questions for this scale include “Are you committed to staying in your relationship?” and “Does this person measure up to your ideals for a life partner?” The total sum of scores for this scale in the current study ranged between 4 and 36, where higher scores are indicative of greater commitment.

Conflict/Ambivalence is the seventh global scale, consisting of conflict and ambivalence subscales. Example questions for this scale include “Do you fight and argue with this person?” (conflict) and “Are you confused or unsure of your feelings toward this person?” (ambivalence). The total sum of scores for this scale in the current study ranged between 6 and 50, where higher scores are indicative of greater conflict or ambivalence.

The three stand alone scales are: Maintenance, which consists of 3 items and asks about trying to work out difficulties to maintain the relationship, such as “Do you talk with this person about your relationship?” The total sum of scores for this scale in the current study ranged between 3 and 27, where higher scores are indicative of greater maintenance; Coercion, which consists of 2 questions which explore both forcing the partner and being forced by the partner to do something one does not want to do. The total sum of scores for this scale in the current study ranged between 2 and 17, where higher scores are indicative of greater coercion; and Equality, which consists of a single item asking “Is your relationship one of equals?” The total sum of scores for this scale in the current study ranged between 1 and 9, where higher scores are indicative of greater equality.

The advantage of using this measure with university students is that it was developed with college students as well, who were either in romantic relationships or in friendships. Both the internal consistency and test-retest stability have been established for this measure. Internal consistency ranges from .73 to .97 for the global scales and from .64 to .91 for the three stand

alone scales. Test-retest stabilities average .76 with a range from .68 to .82 for this measure. Moreover, there have been studies (e.g., Davis et al., 1994, as cited in Davis, 2001; Davis et al., 1988, as cited in Davis, 2001) that found that the global scales are predictive of longitudinal satisfaction and relationship stability. Please see Appendix A for this measure.

*Social Desirability.* The short form of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability (M-C SDS) scale (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972) was utilized to assess the degree of participants' social desirability. This scale consists of 10 items on a true or false scale. An example question from this scale is "I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake." The correlations between this short version and the original Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) have been found to be in the .90s. As well, this scales' reliability ranges from .66 to .70 in University students (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972). Scores on this scale range from -5 to 5 (half of the items are reversed), with higher scores representing higher need for approval. Please see Appendix A for this measure.

*Family Conflict.* To assess interparental conflict, the Perceptions of Interparental Conflict-Intensity/Frequency Scale (PIC-I/F) (Kline et al., 2003) was used, which is a short version of the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale. This scale contains 13 items on a 6-point Likert scale, where 1 is definitely false and 6 is definitely true. This scale measures the intensity and frequency dimensions of conflict between the parents. An example question from this scale is "My parents get really mad when they argue." The internal consistency for this scale is .83 for young adults. Test-retest correlations are high for the PIC-IF, .93 (Kline et al., 2003). Importantly, this measure has been found to discriminate between young adults from divorced and intact families, where those individuals who come from divorced families report higher current interparental conflict on average than those from intact families. In this study, the

participants were asked to fill the questions out once for their past experiences of interparental conflict growing up and another time for their current experiences of interparental conflict. Participants from divorced families were given the following instructions: “If your parents are divorced or separated, please answer these questions as they apply around the time of your parents’ divorce or separation.”

Since the PIC-IF scale has only been used to examine current interparental conflict in young adults, this study was exploratory here in terms of using this measure to examine past interparental conflict. Since this scale has been found to be effective in measuring current interparental conflict, this study also explored the possibility of its effectiveness measuring interparental conflict growing up. The mean score for all of the items was calculated as an overall score for this frequency/intensity of interparental conflict measure. Thus, the scores may range from 1 to 6, with higher scores representing higher interparental conflict. Please see Appendix A for this measure.

*Parent-Child Relationship.* The Parent-Child Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ) (Kenny, 1987) was used to assess the parent-child relationship. This scale consists of 55 items on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 is not at all and 5 is very much. The PAQ measures perceived parental availability, understanding, acceptance, respect for autonomy, participants’ interest in interaction with parents, participants’ affect toward parents during visits, participants’ help-seeking behavior in situations of stress, and participants’ satisfaction with help they obtain from parents. There are 3 subscales in this measure, including Affective Quality of Attachment, Parental Fostering of Autonomy, and Parental Role in Providing Emotional Support. This scale asks questions that refer to both parents together, rather than providing separate ratings for mother and father. Kenny (1987) has found no significant differences between late adolescent

college students' ratings of their mothers and their fathers on this questionnaire. These results were consistent for individuals from divorced and intact homes. This overall rating of relationship with parents also allowed for this questionnaire to be shorter. Example questions from this measure are "In general, my parents are persons I can count on to provide emotional support when I feel troubled," (Affective Quality of Attachment), "In general, my parents respect my privacy" (Parents as Facilitators of Independence) and "In general, my parents live in a different world" (Parents as a Source of Support).

The internal consistency reliability of this scale is .93 for male college students and .95 for female college students. Test-retest reliability over a 2-week interval has been found to be .92 for this measure overall, and ranged from .82 to .91 for the three scales (Kenny, 1987). In the present study, the participants were asked to fill the questions out once while growing up and currently for their parent-child relationship. Since the mean score was calculated for each participant to be used as an overall score for each of the three subscales (Affective Quality of Attachment, Parental Fostering of Autonomy, and Parental Role in Providing Emotional Support), the scores may range from 1 to 5, with higher scores representing better parent-child relationship quality. An overall score for parent-child relationship quality that consisted of the three subscales was used. Please see Appendix A for this measure.

*Demographics.* A demographics questionnaire was used to obtain background information about the participants. The information that was used to differentiate between participants included gender, parental marital status, and participant's age when the family divorce occurred. The information that was used to test if there were other systematic differences among the classified variables and, thus, plausible competing hypotheses, included the total number of divorces or remarriages of parents, frequency of contact with mother and father, and ethnicity.

The frequency of contact with mother and father provided an idea of how much interaction the emerging adults have with their parents. The participants' ethnicity was asked to see what ethnic background the emerging adults predominantly have. Please see Appendix A for this measure.

### *Procedure*

Data were collected through on-line questionnaires during the 2007-2008 Fall and Winter school semesters, following the approval of the Institution Ethics Review Board. The questionnaires were provided in the same order to all participants. Participation in this study was voluntary and anonymous. Course credit for participation in this study was given to the participants from the psychology participant pool, and a raffle to win \$100 was used as an incentive for advertisement recruitment on campus. The questionnaire packet was posted on-line and took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

### *Design and Planned Statistical Analyses*

Prior to reporting the results, this section provides an overview of the overall plan for conducting statistical analyses. The yield from the plan is reported presently. All of the statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS for Windows version 15.0 software. Prior to starting any analyses, the data set was examined and cleaned in such a way that necessary corrections were made for missing, out of range, or singular outlier data. To this end, frequencies and descriptive statistics were run. With regard to missing items, if more than 50% of items were missed, the data from the participant was expunged. If fewer than 5% of items were missing and if the missed items appeared to be random, the data points were left coded as missing and analysis continued. If between 5 and 50% of items were missing, the plan was to use mean substitution.

The next step was to check for normality of the distribution of continuous variables by examining kurtosis and skewness. The distribution was considered normal if the values of

skewness and kurtosis were zero. If the data was not distributed normally ( $> z$  critical value 3.29 or  $< -3.29$ ) then transformations (i.e., square root transformation, log transformation) based on the shape of the distribution were conducted to correct for normality.

Finally, outliers were identified using the convention of  $z$ -critical values above or below 3.29. The plan was to first run analyses both with and without the outliers to determine the impact. If the impact on the results appeared to be substantial (i.e., changing the  $p$  values from close to significance to significance), the analysis with the outliers removed was accepted. If the outlier(s) were not influencing the results, then nothing further was done with them.

To test the first hypothesis, namely that emerging adults from divorced families, compared to emerging adults from intact families, would have lower romantic relationship quality, with the expectation of gender differences, ten (one for each romantic relationship feature) Analyses of Variance (2 [intact vs. divorced family] X 2 [males vs. females]) was planned with romantic relationship quality features (7 global scales and 3 stand-alone scales) as the dependent measures. It was expected that these analyses would show both interactions and main effects. If a significant interaction appeared, post hoc tests were planned. Post hoc tests were expected to specify the conditions under which the interaction was significant (Hombeck, 2002). Thus, to lessen the potential experiment wise error rate which may obtain with multiple  $t$ -tests, the following procedure for the post hoc analyses was planned. The first step was to create a new variable which consisted of four levels: (1) males from intact families, (2) males from divorced families, (3) females from intact families, and (4) females from divorced families. The next step was to run a one-way ANOVA with the four levels of the new variable as the independent variable and the romantic relationship feature for which the original ANOVA test was significant

as the dependent variable. The Scheffe test was planned for the post hoc test because it is the most conservative and cautious method (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

To test the second hypothesis of whether parent-child relationship quality was a mediator variable between family structure and romantic relationship quality, mediation analyses were conducted using Baron and Kenny's (1986) hierarchical regression steps. It must be noted that a standard multiple regression was planned rather than an ANOVA because an ANOVA provides a limited test of a mediational hypothesis while a regression model provides a better test to see whether the process variables mediate the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

The following steps, according to Baron and Kenny (1986), were planned to test the mediation hypothesis. Following the findings of an established relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality features, the next step in establishing mediation was to run standard multiple regression analysis to test whether there was a relationship between family structure and the mediating variable (parent-child relationship). In this step, the mediator variable was treated as outcome variable. Thus, family structure was the predictor variable and parent-child relationship quality was the criterion variable. The results of this analysis needed to be significant in order to go on to the next step.

Next, it was required to show that the mediator variable (parent-child relationship) affected the outcome variable (relationship quality feature[s] found to be related to the predictor variable). To this end, romantic relationship quality feature(s) was entered as the criterion variable(s) in the standard multiple regression and family structure along with the mediator variable functioned as the predictor. This step was necessary because it was not sufficient to simply correlate parent-child relationship with the outcome (romantic relationship quality feature or features). The



reason was that the mediator variable and the outcome(s) may be correlated because both are caused by the initial family structure variable. Therefore, to establish the effect of the mediator (parent-child relationship) on the outcome (s) (romantic relationship quality feature or features), family structure must be controlled.

The final step was designed to explore whether the parent-child relationship quality mediated the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality features. Thus, the final step involved examining whether the previous effect of family structure on romantic relationship quality features, controlling for the mediator variable (parent-child relationship), was zero. If family structure (the predictor variable) was reduced to zero in the final step (when parent-child relationship quality was entered along with family structure as predictors and romantic relationship quality feature as criterion variable), then it may be concluded that the mediator variable was the dominant mediator and fully mediated the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality. If, however, family structure was not reduced to zero but was significantly decreased from its initial level, then this would indicate that the factor in question here parent child relationship partially mediated the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality. Importantly, a significant reduction in family structure's significance would indicate that the mediator variable was important, even if it was not the only mediator variable for the relationship. If the alpha was not at zero, a Sobel test was run to see whether the reduction of the residual in family structure was indeed significant and, thus, would indicate whether the mediating variable was a significant partial mediator.

To test the third hypothesis, whether interparental conflict plays a moderating variable between family structure and romantic relationship quality, Baron and Kenny's (1986) steps to

examine moderation were planned. Prior to starting the analyses, the predictor (family structure) and the moderator (interparental conflict – both past and current) variables were “centered” in order to eliminate possible problematic multicollinearity effects between the first-order terms (predictor and moderator) and the higher order terms (interaction between predictor and moderator) (Holmbeck, 1997).

Once the variables were centered, family structure and interparental conflict were entered at Step 1, and the interaction between family structure and interparental conflict was entered at Step 2 of the hierarchical regression analysis, both for retrospective and current interparental conflict. This hierarchical regression was conducted using each of the 10 romantic relationship features (7 global scales and 3 stand-alone scales) as the dependent variable. In total there were 20 hierarchical regressions conducted, 10 were conducted using retrospective interparental conflict as the moderator and each of the 10 romantic relationship features as the dependent variables, and the next 10 hierarchical regressions were conducted using current interparental conflict as the moderator and each of the 10 romantic relationship features as the dependent variables. Unlike with the mediation analyses, there was no need here for family structure and interparental conflict to be correlated. However, the significance of the moderator was judged by the significance of the interaction between family structure and interparental conflict in predicting romantic relationship quality features.

While the presence of an interaction showed that there was significant moderation, this did not show the specific conditions under which the predictor was significantly related to the outcome (Holmbeck, 2002). Therefore post hoc test was required here. The first step in conducting the post hoc test was to create two new moderator variables: high interparental conflict and low interparental conflict. These variables were computed as follows:

a) high interparental conflict was  $>$  Median of Centered Interparental Conflict.

b) low interparental conflict was  $<$  Median of Centered Interparental Conflict.

Following these computations, the data set was split such that bivariate correlations between family structure and romantic conflict were run under the high and low interparental conflict separately. The results of these correlations showed how the relation between family structure and romantic conflict changed depending on whether it was under the high interparental conflict or the low interparental conflict conditions.

To test the fourth hypothesis, the emerging adults within divorced families were divided into two groups: earlier timing of divorce (if the emerging adult had experienced a family divorce before 12 years of age) and later timing of divorce (if the emerging adult had experienced a family divorce after 12 years of age). Due to the small sample size of participants from divorced families ( $N = 46$ ), a t-test was planned to compare mean differences for each of the romantic features in emerging adults from early divorced families and those from later divorced families.

## Results

### *Descriptive Statistics*

*Data Screening.* As a first step, prior to starting any analyses, the data set was examined for any ineligible participants and outliers. During this phase, 48 (13.4%) participants (26 women and 19 men) from intact ( $N = 31$ ) and divorced ( $N = 12$ ) families were omitted from the data due to ineligibility, such as being outside the age range of 18-25 years, not having experienced a romantic relationship or having a non-exclusive romantic relationship, or being from a widowed family. Some participants were also omitted due to large amount ( $>50\%$ ) of missing data. All of the items left in the data set had less than 5% of the data missing and, as such, nothing more was done with those items. Additionally, outliers were omitted from the data set. Although another

possible option was variable transformation, running the transformations did not seem to correct for the outliers and, thus, it was necessary to delete some outliers from the data set. Finally, descriptives were run to screen the continuous variables for normality in order to be able to apply multivariate analysis. The data did not violate the normality assumption, as observed from the low standardized scores of skewness and kurtosis, and the shapes of the histograms for the data. As such, transformations were not required.

*Reliability.* Reliability of all but one of the scales used in this study was found to be consistent with the typical reliability for the scales. All of the reliabilities for the scales may be seen in Table 3. The reliability for the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale was .53 whereas this scales' reliability among University students have been found to range from .66 to .70 (Strahan & Gerbasi, 1972). Deleting items from this scale did not increase the reliability of this scale. With this population, the items of this scale do not hang together with the same degree of reliability that they have in other studies. It may be that the emerging adults from University of Saskatchewan are different in their social desirability than other emerging adults that have been examined using this scale. At a minimum, the very low reliability indicates that within this sample, items intended to measure social desirability did not hang together to measure a single construct.

*Single-Parent vs. Step-Parent Families.* T-tests were conducted to determine whether there were any mean differences between individuals from single-parent families ( $N = 24$ ) and those from step-parent families ( $N = 16$ ) on any of the variables (i.e., romantic relationship quality features, interparental conflict, and parent-child relationship quality). Since no significant differences were found (i.e. all  $p$  levels  $> .05$ ) between these groups, these two groups were clustered together into one divorced family group.

Table 3

*Reliabilities for Scales Used in the Present Study*

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Relationship Rating Form	.96	68
Viability	.87	12
Intimacy	.80	7
Passion	.82	9
Care	.91	10
Global Satisfaction	.94	10
Conflict/Ambivalence	.81	6
Maintenance	.66	3
Commitment	.92	4
Coercion	.87	2
Equality	---	-
PIC-I/F (Current)	.94	13
PIC-I/F (Past)	.94	13
PAQ (Current)	.94	55
PAQ (Past)	.96	55
M-C SDS	.53	10

*Note.* PIC-I/F = Perceptions of Interparental Conflict-Intensity/Frequency Scale; PAQ = Parental Attachment Questionnaire. The reliability for Equality could not be obtained because it is a single-item question.

*Family Structure and Romantic Relationships*

To address the first hypothesis, which predicted that emerging adults from divorced families would have lower romantic relationship quality than those from intact families, a series of 2 X 2 ANOVA was conducted, with family structure (intact vs. divorced) and gender (males vs. females) as independent variables and romantic relationship quality features as dependent variables.

*Main Effects for Family Structure and Romantic Relationships.* In looking at main effects, the results revealed that emerging adults from divorced families, compared to those from intact families, reported having higher degree of care,  $F(1, 307) = 4.13, p = .04$ , maintenance,  $F(1, 306) = 3.86, p = .05$ , and commitment,  $F(1, 306) = 4.79, p = .03$ . Thus there were significant findings on just three of the ten romantic features. The means and standard deviations for males and females broken down by family structure may be seen in Table 4. This table also shows a trend, where romantic relationship quality is higher in emerging adults from divorced families compared to those from intact families.

*Main Effects for Gender.* Main effects for gender were found on three of ten dependent measures (see Table 4). Several main effects of gender were observed. Specifically, females, compared to males, reported having higher levels of intimacy,  $F(1, 307) = 18.04, p < .001$ , while males reported higher levels of conflict,  $F(1, 307) = 5.21, p = .02$ , and coercion,  $F(1, 307) = 26.78, p < .001$ .

*Interactions.* One interaction was found between family structure and gender for intimacy in romantic relationships,  $F(1, 307) = 3.73, p = .05$ . This interaction shows that males from intact families ( $M = 53.71, SD = .91$ ), reported higher intimacy than males from divorced families ( $M = 50.53, SD = 2.23$ ). In contrast, females from divorced families ( $M = 59.87, SD = 1.68$ ) reported

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations for Romantic Relationship Features Broken Down by Gender and Family Structure*

Variables	Intact Family (N=261)		Divorced Family (N=47)		Males N=(121)		Females (N=189)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Viability	87.21	0.81	89.12	1.92	87.08	1.66	89.25	1.26
Intimacy	55.46	0.58	55.20	1.40	52.12**	1.20	58.54**	0.92
Passion	71.51	0.77	75.30	1.84	72.28	1.59	74.53	1.21
Care	78.59*	0.84	83.02*	2.01	78.93	1.74	82.68	1.32
Global Satisfaction	82.98	0.92	86.84	2.19	83.61	2.89	86.21	1.43
Conflict	17.36	0.53	17.03	1.27	18.77*	1.10	15.62*	0.84
Maintenance	20.00*	0.29	21.48*	0.70	20.48	0.60	21.01	0.46
Commitment	27.27*	0.47	29.93*	1.12	27.75	0.97	29.46	0.74
Coercion	5.12	0.22	4.97	0.52	6.49**	0.45	3.6**	0.34
Equality	7.39	0.12	7.25	0.28	7.04	0.24	7.59	0.19

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .001$

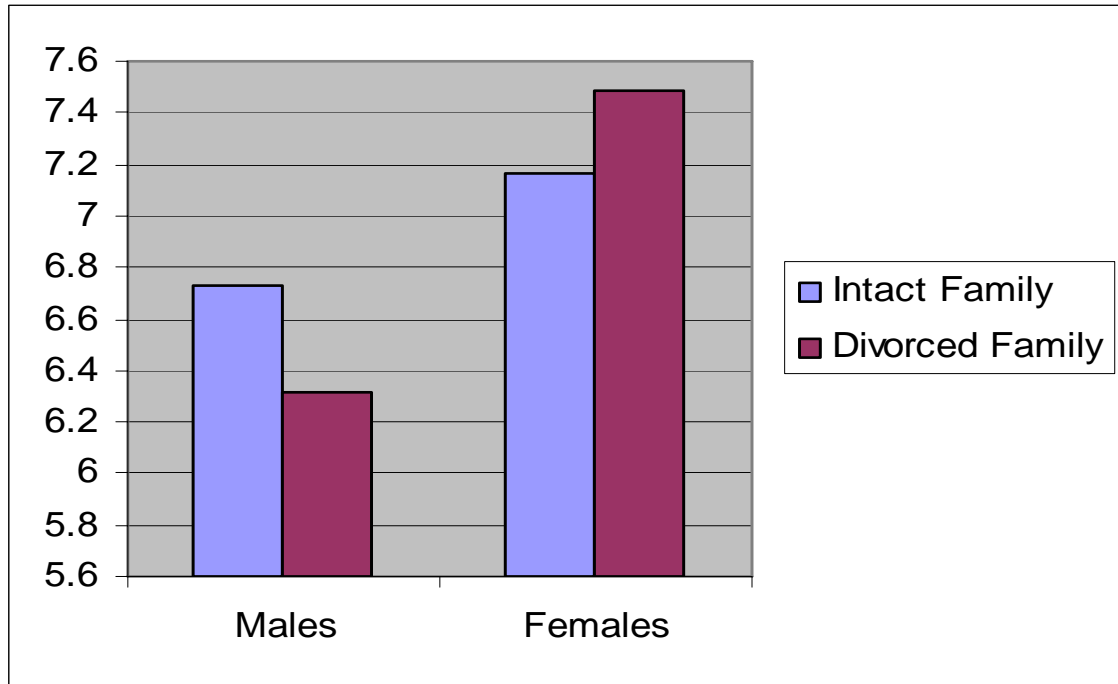
higher levels of intimacy than females from intact families ( $M = 57.21$ ,  $SD = .73$ ). Please see Figure 1 for this interaction.

Following these findings, Scheffe post hoc comparisons of the four groups (males from intact families, males from divorced families, females from intact families, and females from divorced families) indicated that males from intact families had significant ( $p < .05$ ) mean differences in intimacy between females from intact families ( $M = -3.50$ ),  $p = .03$ , as well as between females from divorced families ( $M = -6.16$ ),  $p = .02$ . Similarly, males from divorced families significantly differed in means for intimacy between females from intact families ( $M = -6.68$ ),  $p = .05$ , and females from divorced families ( $M = -9.34$ ),  $p = .01$ . However, males from intact families and males from divorced families did not significantly differ in means for intimacy between each other ( $M = 3.18$ ),  $p = .63$ . Additionally, the same pattern was observed for females, where females from intact families and females from divorced families did not significantly differ in means for intimacy between each other ( $M = -2.66$ ),  $p = .55$ .

This post hoc test shows that there were clear gender differences present, where males and females differed in intimacy between each other, regardless of family structure. The difference in means was such that females had higher intimacy levels than males. However, although family structure differences were not shown to be significant in this test, there is still a trend that may be seen where females from intact families have lower means in intimacy than females from divorced families, while males from intact families have higher means in intimacy than males from divorced families. This trend suggests a different trajectory in intimacy for males as compared to females, where divorce is associated with lower males' intimacy but higher females' intimacy.



Figure 1. Means for Interaction between Family Structure and Gender for Intimacy in Romantic Relationships.



*Parent-Child Relationship Quality*

To examine the second hypothesis, regarding whether parent-child relationship quality, both in the past or currently, mediates the relationship between family structure and the romantic relationship quality features, a hierarchical linear regression was conducted. As indicated in the discussion of the planned analysis above, Baron and Kenny's (1986) mediation steps were followed in this procedure. Since only care, maintenance, and commitment in romantic relationships were found to be significantly different between family structures, only these romantic features were analyzed for mediation. Thus, the predictor variables included in examining mediation effects were family structure and parent-child relationship quality whereas the criterion variables were care, maintenance, and commitment in romantic relationships. These analyses were run separately for retrospective parent-child relationship quality as a mediator and for current parent-child relationship quality as a mediator.

*Retrospective Parent-Child Relationship Quality.* As shown in Table 5, the findings revealed that retrospective parent-child relationship quality did not significantly mediate between family structure and the care feature in romantic relationships. Given each of their significance for care in romantic relationships on their own, both family structure and retrospective parent child relationships show main effects on Step 2. However, retrospective parent child relationships suppressed the effect of family structure on care. As seen in Table 5, family structure increased in its beta weight when retrospective parent-child relationship quality was added as a possible mediator between family structure and care in romantic relationships. That is, while the beta weight for family structure prior to the addition of retrospective parent-child relationship quality was .12, this beta weight for family structure increased to .15 with the addition of parent-child relationship quality. Since both independent variables (family structure and retrospective parent-

Table 5

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Past) as a Mediator between Family Structure and Care in Romantic Relationships ( $N = 306$ )*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.01*	.01*
Family Structure	4.41	2.12	.12*		
Step 2				.05*	.04*
Family Structure	5.55	2.12	.15*		
Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Past)	4.50	1.39	.18*		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $\Delta R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

child relationship quality) positively correlated with the dependent variable (care),  $r(307) = .12$ ,  $p = .04$  and  $r(312) = .16$ ,  $p = .01$ , respectively, and since both independent variables correlated negatively with each other,  $r(308) = -.17$ ,  $p < .01$ , these results indicate a cooperative or reciprocal suppression (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Thus, retrospective parent-child relationship quality enhanced the predictive power of family structure by virtue of suppression of irrelevant variance in prediction of care.

There were also no significant effects for retrospective parent-child relationship quality growing up as a mediator between family structure and maintenance,  $\beta(2, N=305) = .07$ ,  $t(303) = 1.26$ ,  $p = .21$ , or between family structure and commitment,  $\beta(2, N=305) = .09$ ,  $t(303) = 1.55$ ,  $p = .12$ , as may be seen in Table 1B and Table 2B, respectively, in Appendix B. Hence, these findings do not support the hypothesis.

*Current Parent-Child Relationship Quality.* Current parent-child relationship quality was not found to be a significant mediator between family structure and care, maintenance, or commitment. These results may be seen in Table 3B, 4B, and 5B, respectively, in Appendix B.

#### *Interparental Conflict*

Next, hierarchical regression following Kenny's moderation steps was conducted to find out whether interparental conflict, retrospective or currently, moderates the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality.

*Retrospective Interparental Conflict.* The results partly support the hypothesis, indicating that retrospective interparental conflict is a significant moderator between family structure and the romantic relationship conflict feature,  $\beta(3, N=305) = -.14$ ,  $t(302) = -2.18$ ,  $p = .03$ . These results may be seen in Table 6. Upon running post hoc correlation tests, the results revealed that emerging adults from divorced families reported lower romantic conflict when they experienced

Table 6

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Past) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Conflict in Romantic Relationship (N = 305)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.01	.002
Family Structure	-1.12	1.41	-.05		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	.70	.44	.09		
Step 2				.02*	.01*
Family Structure	.30	1.55	-.01		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	.79	.44	.11		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Past)	-2.44	1.12	-.14*		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $\Delta R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

high retrospective interparental conflict,  $r(148) = -.08, p = .31$ . In contrast, emerging adults from divorced families reported having higher romantic conflict when they experienced low retrospective interparental conflict,  $r(158) = .04, p = .62$ . However, these correlations were not statistically significant.

Retrospective interparental conflict did not moderate between family structure and any other romantic relationship feature, however. These non-significant results are in Appendix B of the thesis in Tables 6B-14B, where the interaction pertaining to viability is  $\beta(3, N=305) = .09, t(302) = 1.46, p = .14$ ; for intimacy it is  $\beta(3, N=305) = .08, t(302) = 1.25, p = .21$ ; for passion it is  $\beta(3, N=305) = .06, t(302) = .86, p = .39$ ; for care it is  $\beta(3, N=305) = .01, t(302) = .20, p = .84$ ; for global satisfaction it is  $\beta(3, N=305) = .07, t(302) = 1.13, p = .26$ ; for maintenance it is  $\beta(3, N=305) = .02, t(302) = .29, p = .78$ ; for commitment it is  $\beta(3, N=305) = .06, t(302) = .89, p = .37$ ; for coercion it is  $\beta(3, N=305) = .02, t(302) = .23, p = .82$ ; and for equality it is  $\beta(3, N=305) = .07, t(302) = 1.06, p = .29$ .

*Current Interparental Conflict.* Current interparental conflict was not found to be a significant moderator between family structure and any of the romantic relationship quality features. These non-significant results may also be seen in Appendix B in Tables 15B-24B, where the interaction pertaining to viability is  $\beta(3, N=304) = .05, t(301) = .92, p = .36$ ; for intimacy it is  $\beta(3, N=304) = .03, t(301) = .48, p = .63$ ; for passion it is  $\beta(3, N=304) = .02, t(301) = .29, p = .78$ ; for care it is  $\beta(3, N=304) = -.001, t(301) = -.01, p = .99$ ; for global satisfaction it is  $\beta(3, N=304) = .05, t(301) = .80, p = .43$ ; for conflict it is  $\beta(3, N=304) = -.07, t(301) = -1.24, p = .22$ ; for maintenance it is  $\beta(3, N=304) = -.01, t(301) = -1.22, p = .90$ ; for commitment it is  $\beta(3, N=304) = .03, t(301) = .59, p = .56$ ; for coercion it is  $\beta(3, N=304) = .02, t(301) = .38, p = .71$ ; and for equality it is  $\beta(3, N=304) = .07, t(301) = 1.19, p = .24$ .

*Retrospective Interparental Conflict Main Effects.* As may be seen from Tables 6B-24B, although retrospective and current interparental conflict did not significantly moderate between family structure and most of the romantic relationship features, there were some significant main effects for interparental conflict and these romantic features.

Specifically, retrospective interparental conflict uniquely contributed to viability (see Table 6B) in romantic relationships at step 1 of the model,  $\beta(3, N=305) = -.16, t(302) = -2.67, p = .01$ , and step 2 of the model,  $\beta(3, N=305) = -.17, t(302) = -2.80, p = .01$ , over and above the family structure predictor in the equation. Similarly, retrospective interparental conflict uniquely contributed to intimacy in romantic relationships (see Table 7B) at both steps of the model,  $\beta(3, N=305) = -.16, t(302) = -2.69, p = .01$  and  $\beta(3, N=305) = -.17, t(302) = -2.79, p = .01$ , respectively, over and above the family structure predictor in the equation. Finally, there was a significant main effect for retrospective interparental conflict and care in romantic relationships (see Table 9B) at both steps of the model,  $\beta(3, N=305) = -.12, t(302) = -2.09, p = .04$  and  $\beta(3, N=305) = -.13, t(302) = -2.10, p = .04$ , respectively. However, this main effect was uniquely predictive of care by both retrospective interparental conflict and family structure. These main effects were such that higher retrospective interparental conflict predicted lower viability, lower intimacy, and lower care in romantic relationships.

As well, there were some main effects seen for family structure (in addition to care, commitment, and maintenance) in these results that were not originally seen when family structure and gender were entered together in the 2X2 ANOVA. Thus, family structure uniquely contributed to passion in romantic relationships, over and above retrospective interparental conflict in the equation, but only at step 1,  $\beta(3, N=305) = .14, t(302) = 2.34, p = .02$ , and not at step 2 (see Table 8B),  $\beta(3, N=305) = .12, t(302) = 1.75, p = .08$ . As well, family structure

uniquely contributed to global satisfaction in romantic relationships, over and above retrospective interparental conflict in the equation, at step 1,  $\beta(3, N=305) = .12$ ,  $t(302) = 1.97$ ,  $p = .05$ , though not at step 2,  $\beta(3, N=305) = .09$ ,  $t(302) = 1.31$ ,  $p = .19$  (see Table 10B).

These main effects show that emerging adults from divorced families had higher levels of passion and global satisfaction in their romantic relationships than emerging adults from intact families. However, these main effects were not strong enough to continue through when the interaction between family structure and interparental conflict was entered at step 2. As well, these results indicate that retrospective interparental conflict had a unique relation to viability and intimacy which family structure did not. This means that retrospective interparental conflict is more important for these romantic features than family structure. In contrast, both retrospective interparental conflict and family structure are linked to be important contributors to care in romantic relationships.

*Current Interparental Conflict Main Effects.* Consistent with the main effects for retrospective interparental conflict, current interparental conflict uniquely contributed to viability in romantic relationships (see Table 15B) at both steps of the model,  $\beta(3, N=304) = -.13$ ,  $t(301) = -2.29$ ,  $p = .02$  and  $\beta(3, N=304) = -.14$ ,  $t(301) = -2.36$ ,  $p = .02$ , respectively, over and above the family structure predictor in the equation. Similarly, current interparental conflict uniquely contributed to intimacy in romantic relationships (see Table 16B) at both steps of the model,  $\beta(3, N=304) = -.17$ ,  $t(301) = -3.02$ ,  $p < .01$  and  $\beta(3, N=304) = -.18$ ,  $t(301) = -3.05$ ,  $p < .01$ , respectively, over and above the family structure predictor in the equation.

Consistent with one of the main effects for family structure entered with retrospective interparental conflict, there was a main effect (in addition to care, commitment and maintenance originally found in the 2X2 ANOVA) for family structure and passion at step 1,  $\beta(3, N=304) =$



.12,  $t(301) = 2.16$ ,  $p = .03$ , and step 2,  $\beta(3, N=304) = .13$ ,  $t(301) = 2.17$ ,  $p = .03$ , of the model (see Table 17B), where family structure uniquely contributed to passion, over and above current interparental conflict in the equation.

These results are similar to the results for retrospective interparental conflict and family structure, since they indicate that current interparental conflict has a unique relation to viability and intimacy which family structure does not. This means that current interparental conflict is more important for these romantic features than family structure. In contrast, the main effects for family structure indicate that family structure is uniquely linked with passion, regardless of interparental conflict. Thus, it seems that family structure is more important than interparental conflict in its contribution to passion in romantic relationships.

#### *Earlier versus Later Timing of Divorce*

To test whether timing of divorce is a significant predictor of the emerging adults' romantic relationship quality features, a t-test was conducted to compare mean differences for each of the romantic features in emerging adults from early divorced families and those from later divorced families. The analysis was not supportive of the hypothesis since it did not show any significant difference in romantic features between emerging adults who experienced a family divorce earlier in life (prior to 12 years old) or later (after 12 years old). These results may be seen in Table 25B in Appendix B.

#### Discussion

The present study was designed to investigate whether there is a relationship between family structure and the ten features of emerging adults' romantic relationship quality, whether there are gender and timing of divorce differences in this relationship between family structure and the ten features of emerging adults' romantic relationships, and whether family process variables

(parent-child relationship quality and interparental conflict) mediate or moderate, respectively, the relationship between family structure and any or all of the ten features of romantic relationship quality. The results of this study partly support some of the hypotheses, and fail to find support for others. Consequently, adjustments to some of the theoretical perspectives leading to the predictions may be needed.

It is important to note that while the effect sizes were fairly low for all the results indicating that family structure influences are minimal, these effect sizes were consistent with other previous studies. In comparing young adult males and females from divorced and intact families on relationship features, Jacquet and Surra (2001), for instance, found the effect sizes to be fairly low. The effect sizes in the present study were in the same range as Jacquet and Surra's (2001) study. This shows that family experiences may be predictive of romantic relationships in a very minor way. Thus, this suggests that there are other influences on romantic relationships that should be considered besides families, such as peers and other support networks.

As well, although there were no significant differences found between participants living at home or outside the home and family structure, gender, or romantic relationships, this factor may act as a complicating factor since the majority of participants (58.1%) reported living outside the home. Thus, these individuals may have been less impacted by their parents and more independent by living outside their family home.

#### *Family Structure and Romantic Relationships*

The literature review showed that family divorce has various negative effects on adult children's romantic relationships (e.g., Cartwright, 2006; Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). Accordingly, in this study it was predicted that emerging adults from divorced families, compared to those from intact families, would have lower quality of romantic relationships. The

results of the present study failed to support the prediction. That is, while much of the past research suggests that some individuals from divorced families have lower romantic relationship quality than those from intact families, the present study found that undergraduate emerging adults from divorced families reported having higher romantic relationship quality than did those from intact families.

Indeed, some of the results with regard to the care, maintenance, and commitment features of romantic relationship quality appear to contradict much of the past research. It was found that care, commitment, and maintenance are specific features that seem to be influenced by family structure, though not in the direction predicted in the present study. What is intriguing is how the observed link between family structure and these romantic relationship features obtained.

Interestingly, both care and maintenance appear to be reflective of various related, though distinct, aspects of commitment, where a deliberate choice in deciding to love someone and to maintain that love is made. Past research indicates that commitment is the strongest, most consistent predictor of relationship satisfaction (Acker & Davis, 1992). Although global satisfaction in romantic relationships was not found to be significantly different between individuals from divorced and intact families in the present study, it may be speculated that these commitment related features of romantic relationships are reflecting relationship satisfaction that was not measured by the global satisfaction scale in this study.

Another possible speculation for these findings may be that they reflect a different pattern of dating relationships. Responses to a question about how long the emerging adults had been in their current relationship indicated a trend toward individuals from divorced families being in their current relationship longer than those from intact families. Although time of first serious relationship was not measured in the present study, the emerging adults from divorced families

may rush into serious relationships earlier. If they did, the results may be consistent with longitudinal qualitative and quantitative research conducted by researchers such as Amato (1996), who has shown that adult children from divorced families, both males and females, seek commitment in hopes that these relationships will provide them with emotional and physical needs that they are lacking. Amato's research suggests that the adult children from divorced families observe a lack of commitment between their parents and, as such, may have developed a view of commitment as an important relationship ideal (Amato, 1996). To evaluate this speculation, further study is needed.

Given that these relationship features were found to be robust and not due to limitations of the present study (limitations are discussed presently), these results raise questions about the parental absence perspective which led to the prediction that having an intact home with two parents present would contribute to more positive romantic relationships for emerging adults and suggests a need to extend or abandon the perspective. What the perspective does not take into account is the response of the emerging adults to the parents' divorce. Rather than creating a deficit, the decrease in parental attention, assistance, and direction may result in the children of divorce turning for support to their peers and later on in their emerging adult years, to their romantic partners. This investment in support-finding leads to experiences which enhance romantic relationship quality and which are not measured by family structure.

Indeed, the quest for extra-parental support in divorced families appears early in development. Research has shown that youth from divorced families tend to spend more time with their peers than youth from intact families (Kim et al., 1999), and therefore are likely to have more experience with making relationship work. Subsequently, when the emerging adults

from divorced families are in romantic relationships, they are better prepared to spend more time with and open up more to their romantic partners than emerging adults from intact families.

Moreover, decrease in parental attention has also been shown to have some favorable outcomes in children's development and may do so for emerging adults as well. That is, some children from these divorced families show enhanced levels of functioning in maturity, self-esteem, and empathy (Gately & Schwebel, 1992). The earlier maturity may play an important role in how emerging adults from divorced families behave in their romantic relationships. That is, perhaps emerging adults from divorced families, who, as some researchers have found (e.g., Bouchev & Furman, 2005), also tend to start dating earlier, may be more ready for more serious and committed romantic relationships than emerging adults from intact families, who may have less experience and may be less mature. Given that data on timing of initial dating, support from peers, and maturity were not collected in the present study, further research is needed to evaluate this speculation.

It may be speculated that perhaps the phenomenon has little to do with parental absence. Research indicates that young adults' own experiences in romantic relationships serve as an important source of influence on their conceptions of romantic relationships (Mahl, 2001). If the emerging adults from divorced families have more experience with romantic relationships, then they may also have more insight into what constitutes a healthy and satisfying romantic relationship. If so, then their cognitions about romantic relationships would not be dependent only on their experiences with their parents divorce. Perhaps it is necessary to examine how emerging adults move beyond their experience of their parents to craft anchor points for their own romantic relationships.

Regarding cognitions about romantic relationships, research has found variability in young adults' romantic relationships and the impact of family divorce. For instance, in both Mahl's (2001) and Cartwright's (2006) studies participants varied in their perception of family divorce on their romantic relationships. While there were some young adults who struggled in maintaining their romantic relationships, others reported that they view new relationships as positive models with which to contrast the things that went wrong in their parents' marriage. These individuals also reported becoming stronger and more independent from this experience. Thus, these individuals identified characteristics that constitute a successful romantic relationship and engaged in these types of relationships. This view is consistent with the cognitive-developmental perspective, where these individuals learn to identify which characteristics constitute a successful relationship based on observation of what did not work in their parents' marital relationship.

If the above speculation concerning emerging adults' ability to learn from their parents' relationship mistakes is correct, then the findings in the present study showing that emerging adults from divorced families had higher levels of care, maintenance, and commitment may be partly supportive of the cognitive-developmental perspective. However, since other features of romantic relationship quality were not found to be significantly different between emerging adults from divorced and intact families, there may be other factors in addition to cognitive development that play a role in these emerging adults' romantic relationships. Since data on cognitions about romantic relationships were not collected in the present study, further study is needed to evaluate the speculation.

The results of this study suggest possible strengths in the romantic relationships of emerging adults who come from divorced families. Harvey and Fine (2004) concluded that while children

of divorce may be hurt by their parents' divorce, it is important not to lose sight of the children's resiliency and strength which carries with them through emerging adulthood. Although the question was not put directly and there is no direct data from the present study, it seems likely that emerging adults from divorced families in this study may have had a strong motivation for stronger intimate relationships in their own lives than their parents had, as evidenced by the higher care, commitment, and maintenance in their romantic relationships. At the same time, it is important to keep track of the developmental period these participants are in. Romantic relationships during emerging adulthood tend to be more serious and long-lasting where emerging adults explore romantic relationships and to whom they want to commit (Arnett, 2000). Thus, it is also important to conduct further research in this area to test the above speculations and to clarify whether these romantic features are conducive to positive romantic relationships in the long run, following the period of exploration in emerging adulthood.

Lastly, it should be noted that while there were main effects found in the present study for family structure and additional romantic relationship features, where emerging adults from divorced families reported significantly higher passion and global satisfaction in their romantic relationships than emerging adults from intact families, these main effects became non-significant when gender was taken into consideration in the 2X2 ANOVA. These results showed that although there were some romantic features that, regardless of gender, were different for individuals from divorced and intact families (i.e. care, commitment, maintenance), there were other romantic features (i.e. global satisfaction and passion), that were influenced by gender as well. Thus, gender is an important factor that should be taken into account in examining romantic differences between individuals from different family structures.

*Parent-Child Relationship Quality*

Past research suggested that the parent-child relationship is mostly negatively changed following a family divorce (Amato & Booth, 1991). In the present study, it was argued that family structure influenced parent child relationships which in turn influenced romantic relationship quality and therefore it was predicted that the effect of family structure on emerging adults' romantic relationship quality would be mediated by parent-child relationship quality, both retrospective and present.

The results of the present study did not support the hypothesis that retrospective or current parent-child relationship quality mediates between family structure and romantic relationship quality. However, the results indicated that both retrospective parent-child relationship quality and family structure influenced the care feature of romantic relationship quality directly. The analysis also showed that parent child relationship suppressed the influence of family structure on the care feature of romantic relationship quality. These results suggest that retrospective parent-child relationship is an important variable in its relationship to family structure and care in romantic relationships due to its own significant relationship with care and its enhancement of the significance of the relationship between family structure and care.

The combination of both the family process and cognitive-developmental perspectives may help to explain the main effect findings regarding the significance of retrospective parent-child relationship quality and its link to the care feature of romantic relationships. Research indicates that both parent-child relationships and romantic relationships share similar attachment processes. Attachment theorists have argued that parent-child relationship forms the basis of the working model which children internalize as a model of close relationships. Thus, both parent-child relationships and romantic relationships can be described using three primary attachment



categories: secure, anxious-avoidant (dismissing), and anxious-ambivalent (preoccupied) (Furman & Simon, 1999). If as a child an individual was able to have a secure relationship with a parent, then as an emerging adult this individual would have a secure romantic attachment and be comfortable turning to a partner when distressed. On the other hand, someone with an anxious-avoidant attachment would avoid depending on the parent while growing up and would later also avoid depending on a romantic partner. Finally, the emerging adult with an anxious-ambivalent attachment to a parent or partner would find it difficult to find comfort from the parent or partner due to uncertainty about the other's availability (Furman & Simon, 1999). Given that no data on attachment was collected in the present study, this speculation can not be evaluated empirically without further study.

In the present study, care in romantic relationships was measured by features of giving, championing, and assistance. It may be speculated that the emerging adults who developed a poor parent-child relationship quality, characterized by either anxious-avoidant or anxious-ambivalent attachment styles, may also struggle in believing that their partner would be there for them, since they experienced this lack of care with their parents. This speculation is consistent with research which has found that young adults who grew up with accepting parents are likely to feel secure in their romantic relationships, regardless of family structure (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998).

Since parent-child relationship quality was not a significant mediator between family structure and any of the romantic features, the findings from this study do not help to differentiate variables which may mediate between family structure and romantic relationship quality. Specifically, past research has connected parent-child relationship as a mediator between family structure and children's psychological well-being (e.g., Amato & Sobolewski, 2001), but

to date there is no evidence that parent child relationship mediates family structure and later romantic relationships. It appears that while parent-child relationship is an important mediator between family structure and psychological well-being, this mediation effect does not include the romantic relationship aspect of well-being.

In spite of the lack of empirical data, both the cognitive-developmental and family process perspectives suggest that the child gains information about the nature of self, relational partners, and the social world through the relationship with the parent (Burns & Dunlop, 1998). This would suggest that the parent-child relationship would play an important role in adult children's romantic relationships. Since it is unclear exactly why retrospective parent-child relationship was not a significant mediator between family structure and any of the romantic relationship features, it is important to explore the role that parent-child relationship plays in romantic relationships in future research. It may also be helpful to examine parent-child relationship as separate measures for mother-child and father-child relationships, since there may be some important differences between these two types of relationships and their connection to romantic relationships.

### *Interparental Conflict*

In contrast to parent-child relationship quality, since past research did not show a necessary change in interparental conflict in divorced families (Mahl, 2001), in this study interparental conflict, both retrospective and current, was predicted to moderate the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality.

The hypothesis that interparental conflict would moderate the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality was partly supported. Only retrospective interparental conflict moderated the relationship between family structure and the conflict feature of romantic

relationships, while current interparental conflict was not a significant moderator for any measured romantic variables.

The results regarding interparental conflict's moderational role between family structure and romantic conflict appears to support the predictions from the combination of family process perspective and cognitive-developmental perspective. According to the cognitive-developmental perspective, a supportive family environment provides positive role models that children internalize as representations of healthy relationships (Furman & Simon, 1999). Since children have many opportunities to observe their parents, research suggests that children's interpersonal styles, at least to a certain extent, resemble their parents' interpersonal styles. For instance, researchers have found that parents and their children tend to use similar conflict-resolution strategies (Dadds et al., 1999, as cited in Amato & Booth, 2001). From the cognitive-developmental perspective, it may be hypothesized that emerging adults who experienced high interparental conflict develop poor interpersonal skill schemas and, thus, will exhibit high conflict in their own romantic relationships. As such, the strength of the relationship between family structure and romantic relationship quality would be affected or moderated by interparental conflict. This explanation is consistent with the findings in this study, where retrospective interparental conflict was found to only moderate between participants' family structure and the conflict feature of romantic relationships.

Interestingly, emerging adults from divorced families reported lower romantic conflict when experiencing higher interparental conflict. These results may have a similar explanation to the main effect results, where emerging adults from divorced families also had higher levels of commitment, maintenance, and care. That is, these emerging adults from divorced families may have learned from their parents' mistakes by observing the consequences of their parents'

divorce. Thus, the cognitive-developmental model may help to possibly explain these results, since, through observation of their parents' marital relationship, these individuals may have learned to identify which characteristics constitute a successful relationship and which pose dangers to the relationship.

*Current Parent-Child Relationship and Interparental Conflict*

One possible reason that current parent-child relationship quality and current interparental conflict were not found to be significant mediators or moderators, respectively, for any romantic relationship features may be because of the age group itself. Romantic relationships have been found to be embedded deeply in relationship experiences prior to emerging adulthood. In particular, parents play direct and indirect roles in this developmental process (Collins & van Dulmen, 2006). Hence, it is clear that parents have an important influence on their children's social development growing up. However, emerging adults may interact less often with their parents. For instance, in the present study the majority of participants lived with roommate(s), not with parent(s). Thus, since many of the participants did not live with their parent(s), they also may not have experienced as much conflict as they may have experienced in earlier periods living at home. Further research is needed, however, in learning why current parent-child relationship quality and interparental conflict does not affect the relationship between family structure and emerging adults' romantic relationships.

Importantly, there were high correlations between retrospective interparental conflict and current interparental conflict,  $r(310) = .86, p < .001$ , as well as between retrospective parent-child relationship and current parent-child relationship,  $r(311) = .84, p < .001$ . This shows that both interparental conflict and parent-child relationship are closely related throughout time and may in fact be redundant in this way.

*Timing of Divorce*

The results of this study did not show any differences in participants' romantic relationship quality and age at the time of their parents' divorce and therefore fails to instruct the discrepancies in past research. Past research is unclear on whether or not timing of divorce affects adult children's romantic relationships (e.g., Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998; Gabardi & Rosen, 1992; Amato & DeBoer, 2001). This study's results do not support or reject past research findings.

It should be noted that this lack of significant findings that there is a relationship between timing of divorce and romantic relationship quality during emerging adulthood may also be subject to the limitation of the divorced sample in this study. Since there were only 30 participants who experienced a family divorce early (before 12-years-old) compared to 12 participants who experienced a family divorce later (after 12-years-old), a Type II error may have been made due to this small divorced sample. It must also be noted that there were some participants who did not indicate when the divorce occurred. This issue of the sample size was addressed by examining the power in this sample. Ideally, according to the rule of thumb, power should be at least .80 to detect a reasonable departure from the null hypothesis. The power for the current sample, however, was below .80. Thus, it may be concluded that this sample was not sufficient to detect a significant difference between emerging adults from earlier compared to later divorced families.

As well, this study only examined the age at which the participants experienced parental divorce, but did not address the time elapsed since the divorce. The timing since the divorce may be an important factor, however, since studies have found that children's well-being improves after 2 years have passed since the divorce (Amato & Keith, 1991). Although it is unclear

whether improvement in these adult children's romantic relationships would be seen based on the timing since the divorce, it is important for future research to consider both the age at which divorce occurred as well as the time since the divorce.

### *Gender Differences*

This study also found some gender differences, where females reported having higher levels of intimacy, while males reported having higher levels of conflict and coercion.

The overall gender difference findings were consistent with past research findings which show that females tend to have more positive features in romantic relationships, such as intimacy, than males (e.g., Block, 1983; Shulman & Scharf, 2000). The present findings also add to past research by showing that males tend to exhibit more negative romantic features in their romantic relationships than females, such as conflict and coercion. As well, this study's findings also help clarify the ambiguous past findings on gender differences within divorced families, by showing that females from divorced families have more positive features in their romantic relationships than males from divorced families, similar to the overall gender patterns in this study. Thus, the current findings suggest that females tend to have features that are more positive in their romantic relationships than males, regardless of family structure.

Interestingly, females from divorced families as compared to intact were found to have higher intimacy in romantic relationships while males from intact families as compared to divorced were found to have higher intimacy. These results suggest that divorce may be positively linked to females' intimacy but not to males' intimacy. While these results support some past findings that males show greater difficulties with social adjustment than females following a family divorce (Amato & Keith, 1991), they also contradict other research which has

found that females from divorced families tend to have lower levels of intimacy than males (Mullet & Stolberg, 2002).

### *Strengths and Limitations*

Since parental divorce is not a uniform experience and research has shown that there is much diversity in how children experience family divorce (e.g., Harvey & Fine, 2004), an important strength of the current study was to examine not just the event of family divorce itself, but also some specific process variables of divorce experiences, such as parent-child relationships, interparental conflict, and timing of divorce. Although these process variables did not clarify much in terms of how various aspects of parental divorce may impact adult children's romantic relationships, the results showed that perhaps there is a need to look at other possible influences on romantic relationships since these particular family variables were not significantly linked to romantic relationships.

As well, this study examined the role that family experiences play in emerging adults' romantic relationships. Since emerging adulthood has not been explored as a specific developmental period in this research area, this study served as a significant addition to the knowledge of emerging adults' romantic relationships in particular and the family influences that are important during emerging adulthood.

In addition, the overall sample size of 310 participants and the gender breakdown of 189 females and 121 males provided good power for conducting statistical analyses. The gender breakdown was fairly equal and, as such, reduced the possible female biases which many studies encounter (since there are typically many more females than males in research studies).

It should also be noted that all of the measures used in this study were found to be valid and reliable and have been standardized to be used with young adults. Thus, since the participants in

this study were emerging adults, this was an additional strength in reliably assessing this particular population.

Finally, using retrospective accounts in this study provided several advantages. Firstly, this method circumvented the problem of incomplete data, which may occur in the pre and post study methods. As well, researchers have found that using a retrospective survey decreases the “response-shift bias” that may occur in the pre/post surveys, where participants overestimate their behaviors on the pre-survey and underestimate their behaviors on the post-survey due to change in frame of reference (Raidl et al., 2004).

There are also several limitations in the present study that should be noted. Research participants in this study were all students attending university. Research indicates that there is an economic decline for families who experience divorce (e.g., Amato & Keith, 1991). Indeed, children from divorced families have been found to have lower educational attainment than children from intact families (Bumpass et al., 1991, as cited in Mullet & Stolberg, 2002). Therefore, the participants from divorced families in this study may have been better adjusted than other emerging adults from divorced families who do not attend university, since this group of individuals was able to afford and attend university. If this is true, then generalizability of these findings may be problematic for emerging adults from divorced families who do not attend university.

Moreover, since this study exclusively examined emerging adults in the university setting, it did not contribute to the debate regarding whether or not individuals not attending post-secondary education are similar in their romantic relationships and family influences as the individuals in university. However, as previously noted, the individuals who do not end up attending post-secondary education may have had different starting points prior to emerging



adulthood. That is, the “forgotten half” may have been left behind long before emerging adulthood due to lack of resources (Tanner, 2006). Hence, post-secondary education may not be the specific context for emerging adulthood but, rather, may provide more opportunities for exploration. Nevertheless, as has already been reviewed, researchers have found that, regardless of whether individuals attended post-secondary education, all emerging adults experience a period of transition and exploration (e.g., Arnett, 2000). As such, although this study only examined emerging adults in the university setting, it was hoped that the emerging adults in the present study were representative of emerging adults outside of university, at least in their romantic explorations.

In addition, the sample in this study mainly consisted of Caucasian emerging adults in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Family experiences may be perceived differently by other ethnicities and by different cultures. Thus, there is a question of generalizability of these findings to emerging adults from other cultures. Moreover, since research indicates that there are more single-parent families in Saskatoon (31%) than in Canada overall (16.6%) (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2005), the sample in this study may have been biased and not reflective of other Canadian emerging adults. Thus, future research in this area should look at much broader range of emerging adults.

As well, due to the small sample size within the emerging adults from divorced families, another important limitation in this study was the reduction of power and an increased possibility for error. Although the power for gender comparisons was good (189 females, 121 males), the analyses using family structure as comparison groups and the interactions did not have strong power since the sample size in the divorced category was so small (261 from intact family, 47 from divorced family). Moreover, another limitation related to power was conducting 20

regressions to test for the moderator variable. Since only one interaction was found to be significant for the moderator, there is a chance that this finding was a Type 1 error. Thus, the implication of running 20 regressions was that one might be found significant by chance alone and that one may have been the one found in this study.

Another important limitation that should be noted is in regards to the PAQ measure. Since 20.9% participants from divorced family reported that they never see their father, and 43 of these participants had mother as the primary parent, compared to 5 who had father as the primary parent, it appears that these participants were more likely to report on their relationship with their mothers rather than their fathers on the PAQ measure, at least currently. Consequently additional studies are necessary to examine the influence of relationships with the father.

A final limitation that should be noted is regarding the measure of interparental conflict. The PIC-I/F scale used to measure interparental conflict in this study examined the intensity and frequency dimensions of conflict between parents. However, many researchers agree that it is important to look at the full multidimensional nature of parental conflict, which includes six dimensions: (1) frequency, (2) content, (3) level of implication of the child, (4) intensity, (5) parents' behaviour, and (6) the presence or the absence of resolution (Sarrazin & Cyr, 2007). Since this study only looked at two of the six dimensions of interparental conflict, it is important to look at the other four dimensions of interparental conflict in future research in order to see if some aspects of interparental conflict may be more important than others.

### *Future Research*

Overall, it is not fully clear from the mediation and moderation findings in this study why only one romantic feature was moderated but not others and why parent-child relationship quality did not mediate between family structure and any of the romantic relationship features.

Thus, these results suggest the importance of conducting further research on family process variables, including parent-child relationship quality and interparental conflict, in their impact on emerging adults' romantic relationship quality and family structure, perhaps using different measures for comparison. Further research may provide more insight into what role (if any) these family process variables play in emerging adults' romantic relationships.

While family experiences – namely parent-child relationship and interparental conflict – did not mediate or moderate between family structure and most of the romantic relationship features in this study, they did show some main effects. This suggests that these family experiences may be as important - if not more important – as family structure. As such, future research should explore further the main effects of these family process variables in their link to romantic relationship quality.

At the same time, it is important to think about other possible influences that may contribute to these differences in romantic relationships. Research shows that there are other important factors that young adults report influence their romantic relationships, including media and observation of their friends' relationships (Mahl, 2001). As such, it is important to keep in mind that the current study provided a partial view of the impact that family experiences have on emerging adults' romantic relationships.

Additionally, since the current study's sample size for participants from within divorced families was low and, hence, did not provide sufficient power for analyses on timing of divorce and its link to romantic relationships, it may be helpful for future research to explore this hypothesis further with a larger sample size.

The findings in this study also raise questions about how romantic relationships develop over time. That is, if the emerging adults from divorced families do in fact have successful

romantic relationships at this time, will these relationships continue to be positive? Since there is the possibility that the results of this study may be showing these individuals' tendency to rush into commitment, as discussed earlier, it is important to examine the longitudinal paths of these relationships. Longitudinal research will provide insight into the quality of romantic relationships as these emerging adults transition into possibly more stable relationships. As well, since experiences that are more relevant to a specific type of relationship are more influential in strengthening or changing representations than other experiences that are not as relevant (Furman & Simon, 1999), it may be that parents' impact on offspring's romantic relationships would become stronger as emerging adults move into adulthood romantic relationships and marriages. Thus, a longitudinal study would shed light on whether there are these delayed effects that exist in parents' impact on offspring's romantic relationships. Finally, longitudinal research is also important because it would be beneficial to use a longitudinal approach, rather than retrospective self-reports, in order to obtain a more detailed and possibly more accurate picture of family influences.

It may also be useful to try to create composite of romantic features that are highly related with each other. This method will reduce the number of analyses that need to be done and correspondingly reduce the possibility of a Type 1 error.

As well, future research may benefit from using mixed methods to see changes in romantic relationships and family experiences, such as using both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore emerging adults' descriptions of their experiences of parents' conflict and their own ability to deal with conflict.

Finally, little is known about how family experiences and family divorce influence romantic relationships in minorities. These family structural and process variables may be experienced

differently by non-White emerging adults and by individuals in homosexual relationships. Broadening research to these groups would provide researchers with a deeper understanding of how parental divorce and other family experiences, such as parent-child relationships and interparental conflict, affect emerging adults' romantic lives.

### *Conclusions*

Overall, the first hypothesis failed to be supported and, contrarily, the results suggested that emerging adults from divorced families have a higher degree of care, maintenance, and commitment than emerging adults from intact families. This study also raised some questions about the importance of family experiences such as parent-child relationships and interparental conflict in emerging adults' romantic relationships. As well, the present study provided support for past gender findings, indicating that females tend to have more positive features in romantic relationships, such as higher levels of intimacy, than males, who exhibit more negative features in romantic relationships, such as higher levels of conflict and coercion.

In spite of the limitations of this study, several conclusions can be brought forward to future researchers in the field. The implication of these findings for other researchers, clinicians, and people in general is that we need to be cautious of the preconceived negative notions and beliefs about the impact of divorce on offspring's relationships, since it appears that individuals from divorced families have resiliency factors that are seen in their own romantic relationships. The findings produce fruitful leads for future research.

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Appendix A

Measures



*Relationship Rating Form*

1 = Not at all; 2 = very little; 3 = Slightly (or rarely); 4 = somewhat (not often); 5 = a fair amount; 6 = very much; 7 = a great deal; 8 = strongly (almost always); 9 = Completely or extremely

Viability (alpha = .80; .90; .85; tt = .74)

Acceptance/Tolerance (.61; .50; tt = .69)

1. Do you accept this person as s/he is?
2. Are you willing to ignore this person's small sins because of the way you feel about her/him?
3. Is it easy for you to forgive this person?
4. Does this person disappoint you? (R)

Respect (.63; .69; tt = .71)

5. Do you respect this person?
6. Does this person make bad judgments on important matters? (R)
7. Does this person bring out the best in you?
8. Is this person a good sounding board for your ideas and plans?

Trust (.59; .60; tt = .62)

9. Do you trust this person?
10. Can you count on this person in times of need?
11. Does this person ever forget your welfare? (R)
12. Does this person use things against you that s/he shouldn't? (R)

Intimacy (.76; .73; .79; tt = .78)

Confiding (.75; .55; tt = .71)

13. Do you and this person openly discuss personal matters?
14. Do you confide in this person?
15. Do you feel that there are things about you that this person just would not understand?(R)
16. Do you feel some things about yourself are none of this person's business?(R)

Understanding (.57; .64; tt = .75)

17. Do you know what kind of person s/he is?
18. Is this person's behavior surprising or puzzling to you?(R)
19. Do you know this person's faults and shortcomings?
20. Do you know about this person's past?

Passion (.82; .78; .80; tt = .82)

Fascination (.68; .67; tt = .77)

21. Does this person dominate your thoughts?
22. Does it give you pleasure just to watch or look at this person?
23. Do you think about this person even when you are not with him/her?

Exclusiveness (.71; .65;  $tt = .77$ )

24. Are there things that you do only with this person?
25. Do you have feelings about this person that you couldn't have about others?
26. Would you feel betrayed or hurt if this person had the same relationship with someone else that s/he now has with you?
27. Do you and this person have your own way of doing things?

Sexual Intimacy (.65; .75;  $tt = .77$ )

28. Are you sexually intimate with this person?
29. Do you find this person sexually attractive?
30. Do you enjoy being touched by this person and touching him/her?

Care (.89; .89; .97;  $tt = .78$ )

Giving the utmost (.79; .78;  $tt = .79$ )

31. Can you count on this person to lend you a substantial sum of money?
32. Can you count on this person to risk personal safety to help you if you were in danger?
33. Can you count on this person to give the utmost on your behalf.
34. Are you prepared to make a significant sacrifice on this person's behalf.

Championing (.82; .80;  $tt = .60$ )

35. Can you count on this person to let you know how others feel about you?
36. Can you count on this person to support you in an argument or dispute with others?
37. Can you count on this person to champion your interests where there is a conflict between your interests and those of others?

Assistance (.76; .78;  $tt = .75$ )

38. Can you count on this person to come to your aid when you need help?
39. Can this person count on you for help when s/he is in need?
40. Can you count on this person to tell you what s/he really thinks about issues regardless of whether he or she agrees with you?
41. Do you tell this person exactly what you think about important issues regardless of whether he or she agrees with you?

Global Satisfaction (.90; .93; .93;  $tt = .73$ )

Success (.83; .87;  $tt = .66$ )

42. Are you happy in your relationship with this person?
43. Has your relationship with this person satisfied your needs?
- \*44. Has your relationship with this person been a success?

Enjoyment (.81; .78;  $tt = .75$ )

45. Do you enjoy doing things with this person more than with others?
46. Do you enjoy doing things with this person that you otherwise would not enjoy?

47. Do you enjoy this person's company?

Reciprocity (.77; .84;  $tt = .74$ )

48. Does your partner share the same feeling for you that you have for him/her?

49. Does this person really care about you as a person?

50. Do you feel that your partner cares for you as much as you care for him/her?

Esteem (.90; .86;  $tt = .60$ )

51. Does your partner make you feel worthwhile and special?

52. Does your partner make you feel proud of yourself?

Conflict/Ambivalence (.73; .79; .83;  $tt = .68$ )

Conflict (.73; .72;  $tt = .64$ )

53. Do you fight and argue with this person?

54. Does this person treat you in unfair ways?

55. Is there tension in your relationship with this person?

Ambivalence (.70; .71;  $tt = .65$ )

56. Are you confused or unsure of your feelings toward this person?

57. Do you feel that this person demands too much of your time?

58. Do you feel trapped in this relationship?

Scales not included in global scales

Maintenance (.71; .68;  $tt = .80$ )

59. Do you talk with this person about your relationship?

60. Do you and this person try to work out difficulties that occur between you?

61. Are you trying to change things that you do to make the relationship better between the two of you?

Commitment (NA; .89; .89;  $tt = .81$ )

62. Are you committed to staying in your relationship?

63. Does this person measure up to your ideals for a life partner?

\*64. How likely is it that your relationship will be permanent?

\*65. How committed is your partner to this relationship?

Coercion (.85; .91;  $tt = .60$ )

66. Has your partner ever forced you to do something that you did not want to do?

67. Have you ever forced your partner to do something that s/he did not want to do?

Equality

68. Is your relationship one of equals? ( $tt = .64$ )

*Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale – Shortened*

- 16. (T) I'm always willing to admit it when I make a mistake.
- 17. (T) I always try to practice what I preach.
- 25. (T) I never resent being asked to return a favor.
- 26. (T) I have never been irked when people expressed ideas very different from my own.
- 33. (T) I have never deliberately said something that hurt someone's feelings.
  
- 11. (F) I like to gossip at times.
- 15. (F) There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.
- 19. (F) I sometimes try to get even rather than forgive and forget.
- 22. (F) At times I have really insisted on having things my own way.
- 23. (F) There have been occasions when I felt like smashing things.

*Perceptions of Interparental Conflict-Intensity/Frequency Scale*  
(past & current)

Rate each statement on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) as described below by circling the appropriate number.

1.	I never see my parents arguing or disagreeing. <b>(R)</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.	My parents get really mad when they argue.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	They may think I don't know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4.	When my parents have a disagreement, they discuss it quietly. <b>(R)</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
5.	My parents are often mean to each other, even when I'm around.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6.	I often see my parents arguing.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7.	When my parents have an argument, they say mean things to each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8.	My parents hardly ever argue. <b>(R)</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
9.	When my parents have an argument, they yell a lot.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10.	My parents often nag and complain about each other.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11.	My parents hardly ever yell when they have a disagreement. <b>(R)</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
12.	My parents break or throw things during arguments.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13.	My parents push or shove each other during arguments.	1	2	3	4	5	6

*Parental Attachment Questionnaire*  
(past & current)

Recode the following questions [ (1=5), (2=4), (4=2), (5=1) ] where the first number is the respondent's answer, and the second number is the value to which it should be recoded.

Questions to be recoded:

3 20 29 41

6 22 31 43

10 23 33 47

11 25 34 52

14 26 35 53

16 18 27 38

55

Scale 1: Affective Quality of Relationships

1 26 35 52

2 28 36 53

4 29 37 55

14 30 38

16 31 40

20 32 41

21 33 42

22 34 43

Scale 2: Parents as Facilitators of Independence

5 15

6 17

8 18

9 23

10 24

11 25

13 27

Scale 3: Parents as Source of Support

3 44 50

7 46 51

12 47 54

19 48

39 49

Please use the following scale to respond to the statements below.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	Somewhat	A Moderate Amount	Quite a Bit	Very Much
(0-10%)	(11-35%)	(36-65%)	(66-90%)	(91-100%)

**In general, my parents.... . .**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>___1. are persons I can count on to provide emotional support when I feel troubled.</p> <p>___2. support my goals and interests.</p> <p>___3. live in a different world.</p> <p>___4. understand my problems and concerns.</p> <p>___5. respect my privacy.</p> <p>___6. restrict my freedom or independence.</p> <p>___7 are available to give me advice or guidance when I want it.</p> <p>___8. take my opinions seriously.</p> <p>___9. encourage me to make my own decisions.</p> <p>___10. are critical of what I can do.</p> <p>___11. impose their ideas and values on me.</p> | <p>___15. have provided me with the freedom to experiment and learn things on my own.</p> <p>___16. are too busy or otherwise involved to help me.</p> <p>___17 have trust and confidence in me.</p> <p>___18. try to control my life.</p> <p>___19. protect me from danger and difficulty</p> <p>___20. ignore what I have to say.</p> <p>___21. are sensitive to my feelings and needs</p> <p>___22. are disappointed in me.</p> <p>___23. give me advice whether or not I want it.</p> <p>___24 respect my judgment and decisions,</p> |
|---|---|

- \_\_\_12. have given me as much attention as I have wanted even if different from what they would want.
- \_\_\_13. are persons to whom I can express differences of opinion on important matters.
- \_\_\_14. have no idea what I am feeling or thinking.  
(go to next column)
- \_\_\_25. do things for me, which I could do for myself.
- \_\_\_26. are persons whose expectations I feel obligated to meet.
- \_\_\_27. treat me like a younger child.

---

1	2	3	4	5
Not at All (0-10%)	Somewhat (11-35%)	A Moderate Amount (36-65%)	Quite A Bit (66-90%)	Very Much (91-100%)

---

**During recent visits or time spent together, my parents were persons. . .**

- \_\_\_28. I looked forward to seeing.
- \_\_\_29. with whom I argued.
- \_\_\_30. with whom I felt relaxed and comfortable.
- \_\_\_31. who made me angry.
- \_\_\_32. I wanted to be with all the time.
- \_\_\_33. towards whom I felt cool and distant.
- \_\_\_34. who got on my nerves.
- \_\_\_35. who aroused feelings of guilt and anxiety.  
(go to next column)
- \_\_\_36. to whom I enjoyed telling about the things I have done and learned.
- \_\_\_37. for whom I felt a feeling of love.
- \_\_\_38. I tried to ignore.
- \_\_\_39. to whom I confided my most personal thoughts and feelings.
- \_\_\_40. whose company I enjoyed.
- \_\_\_41. I avoided telling about my experiences.

---

**Following time spent together, I leave my parents. . .**



\_\_\_42. with warm and positive feelings. (go to next column)

\_\_\_43. feeling let down and disappointed by my family.

---

**When I have a serious problem or an important decision to make. . .**

\_\_\_44. I look to my family for support, encouragement, and/or guidance.

\_\_\_47. I work it out on my own, without help or discussion with others.

\_\_\_45. I seek help from a professional, such as a therapist, college counselor, or clergy.

\_\_\_48. I discuss the matter with a friend.

\_\_\_46. I think about how my family might respond and what they might say.(go to next column)

\_\_\_49. I know that my family will know what to do.

\_\_\_50. I contact my family if I am not able to resolve the situation after talking it over with my friends.

---

**When I go to my parents for help. . .**

\_\_\_51. I feel more confident in my ability to handle the problems on my own.

\_\_\_54. I feel confident that things will work out as long as I follow my parent's advice.

\_\_\_52. I continue to feel unsure of myself.

\_\_\_55. I am disappointed with their response.

\_\_\_53. I feel that I would have obtained more understanding and comfort from a friend.

*Demographics*

Please tell us a little about yourself and your family by answering the following questions.

1. How old are you now? \_\_\_\_\_ (years)
2. When is your birthday? \_\_\_\_\_ (month) \_\_\_\_\_ (day) \_\_\_\_\_ (year)
3. Please indicate your gender (check one):       MALE       FEMALE
4. Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?  Yes     No  
 If "NO": Did you have a romantic partner at some point between 18-25 years?       Yes  No
5. Are you currently married?       Yes  No
6. How long have you been together with your current/previous romantic partner? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How old is your current/previous romantic partner? \_\_\_\_\_
8. How would you describe your romantic relationship?  
 Exclusive (E.g., a romantic couple relationship, not seeing anyone else)  
 Open (E.g., a romantic relationship but also seeing other people)  
 "Friends with benefits" (E.g., friends engaging in sexual acts without commitment)
9. Are your current/previous romantic partner's parents divorced or separated?  
 Yes     No  
 If "YES": A) Did your romantic partner's parents divorced/separated during the time of your romantic relationship with your partner?  Yes     No  
 B) Please estimate the age of your romantic partner at which his/her parents divorced: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Who do you live with right now? (check one)  
 both biological parents    **(0)**       my mother and step-father    **(1)**  
 my father and step-mother    **(2)**       my mother only      **(3)**  
 my father only    **(4)**       on my own    **(5)**  
 roommate(s)      **(6)**       other: \_\_\_\_\_ **(7)**

- If you do not live at home currently, how far away from home do you live:
- Within the same city       within 100 km (1 hour) of home
  - within 100-200 km (1-2 hours) of home     more than 200 km (2 hours) of home
  - Not applicable

11. What is the current structure of the household that you grew up in (check one):

- both biological parents
- my father and step-mother
- my father only
- my mother and step-father
- my mother only
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

**If your parents are married (or equivalent) please skip to question #17, if your parents are divorced or separated please continue with the following questions.**

12. If your parents are divorced or separated:

- A. How old were you when this event occurred? \_\_\_\_\_
- B. How long ago did this event occur? \_\_\_\_\_

13. If your parents are divorced or separated, how many remarriages and/or divorces or separations did they have?

Mom \_\_\_\_\_

Dad \_\_\_\_\_

14. If your parents are divorced or separated, do they have:

- shared custody
- parallel parenting
- sole custody
- no custody determination

If you have a primary parent, who is it:  Mom  Dad

15. If your parents are divorced or separated, how often do you see your mother?

- at least once a week
- every few months
- never
- at least once a month
- every once in a while
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

16. If your parents are divorced or separated, how often do you see your father?

- at least once a week
- every few months
- never
- at least once a month
- every once in a while
- other: \_\_\_\_\_

17. Check the box that shows how you identify yourself by race.

- European-Canadian (White)
- Native-Canadian (e.g., Native Indian)
- African/Caribbean-Canadian (Black)
- Asian-Canadian (e.g., Chinese, Korean)
- South-Asian Canadian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani)
- Latin American-Canadian (e.g., Hispanic)

other: \_\_\_\_\_

18. Were you born in Canada? (check one)       Yes       No

If "NO":    A) How long have you lived in Canada? \_\_\_\_\_ (years)

B) What country were you born in? \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix B

Tables

Table 1B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Past) as a Mediator between Family Structure and Maintenance in Romantic Relationships (N = 306)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.02*	.01*
Family Structure	1.61	.73	.13		
Step 2				.02	.02
Family Structure	1.76	.73	.14		
Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Past)	.61	.48	.07		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $\Delta R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

]Table 2B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Past) as a Mediator between Family Structure and Commitment in Romantic Relationships (N = 306)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.02*	.02*
Family Structure	2.87	1.17	.14		
Step 2				.03	.02
Family Structure	3.17	1.19	.15		
Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Past)	1.21	.78	.09		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $\Delta R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 3B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Current) as a Mediator between Family Structure and Care in Romantic Relationships ( $N = 306$ )*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.01*	.01*
Family Structure	4.41	2.12	.12		
Step 2				.03*	.02*
Family Structure	4.99	2.12	.13		
Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Current)	3.77	1.64	.13		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $\Delta R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$



Table 4B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Current) as a Mediator between Family Structure and Maintenance in Romantic Relationships (N = 306)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.02*	.01*
Family Structure	1.61	.73	.13		
Step 2				.02	.01
Family Structure	1.69	.73	.13		
Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Current)	.54	.57	.06		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $\Delta R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 5B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Current) as a Mediator between Family Structure and Commitment in Romantic Relationships (N = 306)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.02*	.02*
Family Structure	2.87	1.17	.14		
Step 2				.02	.02
Family Structure	3.01	1.18	.15		
Parent-Child Relationship Quality (Current)	.92	.91	.06		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $\Delta R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 6B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Past) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Viability in Romantic Relationship (N = 305)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$+R^2$
Step 1				.03*	.02*
Family Structure	3.80	2.09	.11		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-1.76	.66	-.16*		
Step 2				.03	.02
Family Structure	2.38	2.30	.07		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-1.85	.66	-.17*		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Past)	2.44	1.67	.09		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $+R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 7B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Past) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Intimacy in Romantic Relationship (N = 305)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$+R^2$
Step 1				.02*	.02*
Family Structure	1.74	1.56	.07		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-1.32	.49	-.16*		
Step 2				.03	.02
Family Structure	.83	1.72	.03		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-1.38	.50	-.17*		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Past)	1.56	1.25	.08		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $+R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 8B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Past) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Passion in Romantic Relationship (N = 305)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$+R^2$
Step 1				.02	.01
Family Structure	4.73	2.03	.14*		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-.55	.64	-.05		
Step 2				.02	.01
Family Structure	3.92	2.24	.12		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-.60	.64	-.06		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Past)	1.40	1.62	.06		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $+R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 9B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Past) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Care in Romantic Relationship (N = 305)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$+R^2$
Step 1				.03*	.02*
Family Structure	5.54	2.22	.15*		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-1.46	.70	-.12*		
Step 2				.03	.02
Family Structure	5.33	2.46	.14*		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-1.48	.70	-.13*		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Past)	.35	1.78	.01		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $+R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 10B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Past) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Global Satisfaction in Romantic Relationship (N = 305)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.01	.01
Family Structure	4.74	2.41	.12*		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-.83	.76	-.07		
Step 2				.02	.01
Family Structure	3.47	2.66	.09		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-.91	.76	-.07		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Past)	2.18	1.93	.07		

\* $p < .05$

Table 11B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Past) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Maintenance in Romantic Relationship (N = 304)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$+R^2$
Step 1				.02*	.01*
Family Structure	1.86	.77	.14*		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-.24	.24	-.06		
Step 2				.02	.01
Family Structure	1.76	.84	.14*		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-.24	.24	-.06		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Past)	.18	.61	.02		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $+R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$



Table 12B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Past) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Commitment in Romantic Relationship (N = 305)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$+R^2$
Step 1				.02*	.02*
Family Structure	3.16	1.24	.15*		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-.34	.39	-.05		
Step 2				.02	.01
Family Structure	2.65	1.36	.13*		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-.38	.39	-.06		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Past)	.88	.99	.06		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $+R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 13B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Past) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Coercion in Romantic Relationship (N = 305)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.003	-.004
Family Structure	-.39	.61	.04		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	.15	.19	.05		
Step 2				.003	-.01
Family Structure	-.46	.67	-.05		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	.14	.19	.05		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Past)	.11	.49	.02		

\* $p < .05$

Table 14B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Past) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Equality in Romantic Relationship (N = 304)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.002	-.01
Family Structure	.04	.31	.01		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	-.07	.10	-.04		
Step 2				.01	-.004
Family Structure	-.12	.34	-.02		
Interparental Conflict (Past)	.08	.10	.05		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Past)	.26	.25	.07		

\* $p < .05$

Table 15B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Current) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Viability in Romantic Relationship (N = 304)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$+R^2$
Step 1				.02*	.02*
Family Structure	2.75	2.00	.08		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-1.53	.67	-.13*		
Step 2				.02	.01
Family Structure	2.82	2.01	.08		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-1.58	.67	-.14*		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Current)	1.56	1.70	.05		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $+R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 16B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Current) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Intimacy in Romantic Relationship (N = 304)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$+R^2$
Step 1				.03*	.02*
Family Structure	1.15	1.49	.04		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-1.50	.50	-.17*		
Step 2				.03	.02
Family Structure	1.17	1.50	.05		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-1.52	.50	-.18*		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Current)	.61	1.27	.03		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $+R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 17B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Current) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Passion in Romantic Relationship (N = 304)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.02	.01
Family Structure	4.20	1.94	.12*		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.38	.65	-.03		
Step 2				.02	.01
Family Structure	4.22	1.95	.13*		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.40	.65	-.04		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Current)	.47	1.65	.02		

\* $p < .05$

Table 18B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Current) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Care in Romantic Relationship (N = 304)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$+R^2$
Step 1				.02*	.02*
Family Structure	4.77	2.13	.13*		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-1.24	.71	-.10		
Step 2				.02	.01
Family Structure	4.77	2.14	.13*		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-1.24	.71	-.10		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.02	1.81	-.001		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $+R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 19B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Current) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Global Satisfaction in Romantic Relationship (N = 304)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.01	.01
Family Structure	4.21	2.32	.11		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.60	.77	-.05		
Step 2				.01	.004
Family Structure	4.28	2.32	.11		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.65	.78	-.05		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Current)	1.57	1.97	.05		

\* $p < .05$



Table 20B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Current) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Conflict in Romantic Relationship (N = 304)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.01	.001
Family Structure	-.72	1.35	-.03		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	.65	.45	.08		
Step 2				.01	.002
Family Structure	-.78	1.35	-.03		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	.70	.45	.09		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Current)	-1.42	1.15	-.07		

\* $p < .05$

Table 21B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Current) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Maintenance in Romantic Relationship (N = 303)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.02	.01
Family Structure	1.67	.73	.13*		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.19	.25	-.05		
Step 2				.02	.01
Family Structure	1.66	.74	.13*		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.19	.25	-.04		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.08	.62	-.01		

\* $p < .05$

Table 22B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Current) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Commitment in Romantic Relationship (N = 303)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$+R^2$
Step 1				.02*	.01*
Family Structure	2.97	1.18	.14*		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.27	.40	-.04		
Step 2				.02	.01
Family Structure	2.99	1.18	.15*		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.29	.40	-.04		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Current)	.59	1.01	.03		

*Note.*  $R^2$  and  $+R^2$  significance are for the overall model at each step.

\* $p < .05$

Table 23B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Current) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Coercion in Romantic Relationship (N = 304)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.003	-.004
Family Structure	-.33	.58	-.03		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	.15	.19	.05		
Step 2				.003	-.01
Family Structure	-.32	.58	-.03		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	.15	.19	.04		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Current)	.18	.49	.02		

\* $p < .05$

Table 24B

*Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Interparental Conflict (Current) as a Moderator between Family Structure and Equality in Romantic Relationship (N = 303)*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				.000	-.01
Family Structure	-.01	.30	-.001		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.03	.10	-.02		
Step 2				.01	-.01
Family Structure	.01	.30	.001		
Interparental Conflict (Current)	-.04	.10	-.02		
Family Structure X Interparental Conflict (Current)	.30	.25	.07		

\* $p < .05$

Table 25B

*Group Differences for Children Under 12 and Children Over 12 when Divorce Occurred and Romantic Relationship Features*

Romantic Features	Under 12 Years (N=30)		Over 12 Years (N=12)		<i>t</i> (40)
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Viability	89.53	12.58	86.25	10.73	.79
Intimacy	56.47	9.88	56.08	5.68	.13
Passion	76.37	8.80	76.17	8.39	.07
Care	82.73	12.59	84.0	6.98	-.33
Global Satisfaction	86.70	13.34	89.08	6.50	-.59
Conflict	15.70	8.68	18.75	7.45	-1.07
Maintenance	21.80	4.07	20.50	3.34	.98
Commitment	30.30	6.59	29.25	4.97	.50
Coercion	5.10	3.79	4.83	3.71	.21
Equality	7.07	2.10	7.83	1.34	-1.17