



# Parental Divorce Influence on College Students Perception of Intimacy, Passion, and Commitment

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, divorce has increased. Divorce can influence an individual's outlook regarding commitment, intimacy, and passion. Divorce may benefit the family or become the most tragic situation in a child's life. Many individuals who are raised in a nonintact family develop psychological and emotional problems. Long-term effects can also be expected if the parental divorce places the young person on an unfortunate life course (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). These problems arise when they enter into a romantic relationship. Individuals may fear commitment and lack trust. They may fear losing the person they love, and fear experiencing the same experience of their parents. An individual's childhood can influence his or her selection of a life partner. Parents are one of the main influences upon one's upbringing. Divorce can have a detrimental impact on both short-term and long-term adjustment (Richardson & McCabe, 2001). Family structure is an important factor in the leading causes of the development of the perceptions of commitment, trust, and intimacy among adults with their life partner. If children are raised in an intact family, they are more likely to seek long-term relationships. Whereas, adults from nonintact families with high parental conflict may not seek long term relationships, and fear commitment.

### Hypotheses

- College students from divorced families are less likely to be in committed relationships than students from nondivorced families.
- College students from divorced families will report less favorable attitudes toward intimacy than students from nondivorced families.
- College students from divorced families are less likely to be passionate in their relationship than students from nondivorced families.

## METHOD

### Participants

One hundred psychology students (89 females, 11 males) were selected from various classes at the University of La Verne. Both undergraduate and graduate students participated in this study. Their ages ranged between 18 to 56 years old ( $M = 25.58$ ,  $SD = 8.04$ ). The ethnicity of the participants included Latino/Hispanic 50%, European American/White 27%, African American/Black 7%, Biracial 7%, Asian American/Pacific Islander 2%, Native American/American Indian 1%, and other 6%. There were 28% of students from divorced families, and 58% of students from nondivorced families. Sexual orientation was as follows: heterosexual 96%, and homosexual 4%.

### Materials and Measures

The Triangular Lover Scale (Lemieux & Hale, 1999) was used to measure the level of commitment, passion, and intimacy with in individual's romantic relationships. The TLS contains three subscales; intimacy, passion and commitment. The scale consists of 19-items that are scored on a 7-point Likert scale, 1 indicating "strongly disagree", 2 indicating "occasionally disagree", 3 indicating "sometimes disagree", 4 indicating "neither agree or disagree", 5 indicating "sometimes agree", 6 indicating "occasionally agree", and 7 indicating "strongly agree". The anchoring of the 7-point Likert scale was slightly modified to include additional anchors, other than the original "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree". High scores indicate a greater likelihood of being intimate, passionate, and committed in a relationship,

while low scores indicate the converse. The TLS demonstrates excellent reliability, with a Cronbach alpha of .87 for the intimacy subscale, .89 for the passion subscale, and .80 for the commitment subscale (Lemieux & Hale, 1999). An 8-item demographic questionnaire was also included to obtain information such as: gender, age, ethnicity, marital status, parental marital status, sexual orientation, and class standing.

### Procedure

Permission was requested from psychology professors to administer the survey during their class time. Students were debriefed regarding the purpose of the study and informed of their rights as research participants. Two consent forms were distributed; one was for them to keep for their own records, the other was returned to the researcher. After participants signed the consent form, they received they survey packet that included the demographic page, and the survey questions. Consent forms were collected and placed in a separate envelope from the survey envelope to ensure confidentiality. Candy was offered as an inducement for their participation. Completion of the study took approximately 5-7 minutes.

## RESULTS

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted between parental relationship status and level of commitment. This hypothesis was not supported, as [ $F(1,98) = .562$ ,  $p > .05$ ] Parental relationship status was not a factor in determining the commitment level of their offspring's relationships. Findings suggested that the level of commitment between students from nondivorced families ( $M = 19.94$ ,  $SD = 4.10$ ) and students from divorced families ( $M = 19.33$ ,  $SD = 2.05$ ) were comparable.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted between parental relationship status and attitudes. This hypothesis was not supported, as [ $F(1, 98) = .070$ ,  $p > .05$ ]. Parental relationships status was not a factor in determining offspring's attitudes towards intimacy. Findings suggested that attitudes towards nondivorced families ( $M = 34.99$ ,  $SD = 7.45$ ) and students from divorced families ( $M = 34.54$ ,  $SD = 8.30$ ) were comparable.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted between parental relationship status and level of passion. This hypothesis was not supported, as [ $F(1, 98) = 1.367$ ,  $p > .05$ ]. Parental relationship status was not a factor in determining offspring's level of passion. Findings suggested that level of passion between students from nondivorced families ( $M = 31.83$ ,  $SD = 5.28$ ) and students from divorced families ( $M = 30.42$ ,  $SD = 5.90$ ) were comparable.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of parental relationship status upon college students' perceptions regarding intimacy, passion, and commitment. The first hypothesis proposed that college students from divorced families were less likely to be in committed relationships than students from nondivorced families. This hypothesis was not supported. Students from divorced families did not differ from students from nondivorced families, and were as likely to be in committed relationships. A possible explanation for this finding is that perhaps views of society have changed over the years and students from divorced families may no longer avoid committed relationships. Another possible explanation for the findings is that perhaps the participant's parents divorced

when they were older. Therefore, they are less likely to be influenced by their parents divorce. Current findings do not support the current literature as Jacquet and Surra (2001) indicated that young adults from divorced families reported lower levels of commitment.

The second hypothesis proposed the college students from divorced families would report less favorable attitudes towards intimacy than students from nondivorced families. This hypothesis was not supported. Students from divorced families did not differ from students from nondivorced families, and were likely to report favorable attitudes towards intimacy. Therefore, children are as likely to develop favorable attitudes toward intimacy. A possible explanation for this finding is that perhaps parental divorce helps them to recognize the importance of intimacy. Another possible explanation for the findings is that perhaps intimacy was modeled in relationships through other family members. Current findings do not support previous literature as Guttman and Rosenberg (2003) indicated that children of divorce families were less intimate than children from nondivorced families.

The third hypothesis proposed that college students from divorced families will be less passionate in their relationships than students from nondivorced families. This hypothesis was not supported. Students from divorced families did not differ from students from nondivorced families, and were as likely to be passionate in their relationships. A possible explanation for this finding is perhaps parental divorce no longer adversely affects levels of passion among children from divorced families, as in the past. However, research in this area is limited; therefore future research is needed to determine how passion affects children of divorced families.

### Limitations of Current Study

Although this study examined the influence of parental relationship status upon young adult's views and their own relationships, several limitations apply. For example, the same size was very small, which made it difficult to generalize, and it is not an adequate representation of the general population. In addition, this study was conducted at a small private university, which makes it difficult to generalize about college student population. Also, the questions that were used in the survey might have confused the participants. Further, the study consisted of more female participants than male participants. Females might view certain issues differently than do males in which results can be affected. Finally, participants were only recruited from the Psychology department, which makes it difficult to generalize about the rest of the college student population.

### Recommendations for Future Research

When examining college students' perceptions regarding commitment, intimacy, passion researchers should assess age of the participants when their parents divorced. Research has indicated that time and age matters in how divorce influences children (Malone et al., 2004). Children from divorced families may be influenced more at a younger age, than those who are older. Also, a larger sample size would help in obtaining a better understanding of the effect of divorce on the general population. Another recommendation for future research is to recruit participants from various areas, instead of focusing solely on college students.