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THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE ON EMERGING ADULT'S ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT STYLES

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THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE ON EMERGING
ADULT'S ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT STYLES

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science
in Family Sciences in the College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment at the University of Kentucky

By

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2019

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE ON EMERGING ADULT'S ROMANTIC ATTACHMENT STYLES

This study shined light on the gap in literature about the impact of communication and involvement of stepparents has on emerging adult's romantic attachment styles. A sample of 289 college students between the ages of 18 and 22 at the University of Kentucky was recruited to complete an online survey about their perceived experience with their stepparent and parental figures and the effects on their romantic attachment styles. Parental involvement in children's lives and having good communication, sets the foundation for individuals to have secure attachment styles. Emerging adults who experience parental figures and stepparents as being uninterested or passive in their relationship experience have higher anxious and avoidant attachment styles. These findings inform therapists about the importance of recognizing attachment injuries when dealing with individuals and supports the need for all parental figures to be involved in their child's life and have positive communication skills.

KEYWORDS: Stepparents, Remarriage, Divorce, Adult Attachment Styles, Romantic Attachment Styles

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	iii
List of Tables	iv
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Literature Review	2
Purpose	9
Chapter Two: Method	10
Sampling	10
Participants	10
Procedure	12
Measures	12
Demographics	12
The Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory Revised	13
Adult Attachment Scale	13
The Stepparent Relationship Index	15
Chapter Three: Results	16
Chapter Four: Discussion	24
Clinical Implications.....	24
Case Example	25
Limitations	28
Conclusion	29
Appendices	
Appendix 1: Participant Recruitment E-Mail	30
Appendix 2: Open Records Request	31
Appendix 3: Adult Attachment Scale	32
Appendix 4: The Experiences in Close Relationships Revised	33
Appendix 5: Stepparent Relationship Index	35
Appendix 6: Demographic Information	36
References	38
Vita	43

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Descriptive Table of the Perceived Relationship with Stepparent Variables.....	19
Table 2. Descriptive Information for All Variables.....	20
Table 3. Descriptive Information for Attachment Style by Parent Relationship Status....	21
Table 4. Attachment Correlations.....	22
Table 5. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA): Attachment –Variables by Parent Relationship Status.....	23

Chapter One: Introduction

In the United States the divorce rate continues to increase, and these divorced individuals continue to have an interest in marriage, thus, remarriages form into stepfamilies. First time married couples tend to divorce at a rate of 40% to 50% and from that divorce, they remarry another partner to form a stepfamily, indicating divorce is a common occurrence in many family households (Pasley & Garneau, 2012). Divorce affects family dynamics, structure, and relationships between family members and has an impact on all family members including extended family members (Cunningham & Thornton, 2005). One way of defining “all family members” within these newly formed families is to separate the family structure into two subgroups. The first subgroup is “first parent” and can be defined as the biological parent of the child in the household (Kumar, 2017). The second subgroup is the “second parent” known as the stepparent and/or blended family household (Kumar, 2017). Blended families are defined as a family system in which a new couple partnership is formed, either through cohabitation, death of a parent, divorce, or remarriage, that includes children from previous relationships (Gonzales, 2009).

The impact of parental divorce on children and adolescents is widely regarded as a stressful and disruptive life event with potentially adverse effects on subsequent late adolescent development (Lopez, Melendez, & Rice, 2000). Another negative effect of divorce and remarriage on children is the impact it has on the child’s attachment style. This is significant because children’s attachment styles are embedded in their ability to make decisions about possible future relationships (Cartwright & Gibson, 2013). In addition to the impact of divorce, the new stepparents’ attachment bond can also

influence how a child's attachment style continues to form after a remarriage (Dreman, 2000).

There are three attachment styles in children: secure, avoidant, anxious, (Ainsworth, 1968) and a fourth attachment style was identified as disorganized (Main & Solomon, 1986/1990). The attachment styles in children, paired with their attachment bond to parents, followed by the parents' parenting style, may have an impact on the emerging adults' romantic attachment style. The purpose of this study is to see how the perceived parental involvement of stepparents (through communication and time spent with a stepchild), and the attachment styles of the emerging adults' ability to form future romantic relationships.

Literature Review

The theory of attachment was originally developed by Bowlby (1907-1990), a psychoanalyst trying to gain more understanding and insight to how infants experienced distress when separated from their parents and then reunited once again. Bowlby was interested in the nature of the infant and caregiver relationship. Bowlby noted the attachment behaviors in the infants were adaptive responses to being separated from their primary attachment figure. A primary attachment figure is someone who provides support, protection and care (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby's colleague, Ainsworth studied the infant-parent dynamics and examined the infant's response from being separated from their primary caregiver and then introduced to a stranger, and then reunited back with their caregiver (Ainsworth, 1968).

Ainsworth developed the classification of attachment styles in children known as secure, anxious and avoidant (Ainsworth, 1968). Attachment styles in childhood

relationships set the foundation for future adult relationships with others beginning with parental caregivers' attachment style to children. Several factors can have an impact on a child's attachment style: how parents interact with each other, the parent's own parenting styles, and their involvement with the child. While early life experiences between parent and child have long been documented as having the biggest impact on an individual's attachment style, research is growing in the area of how later experiences in childhood—and even life—impact the adult's attachment style and more specifically romantic attachment style.

Since 2012, the rates of divorce and remarriage in the United States continue to maintain at the rate of 40% to 50% (Pasley & Garneau, 2012). Stepfamilies and or blended families are becoming more common in family dynamics and the transition into this new lifestyle, from a nuclear intact family, can be challenging for some family members, particularly children. Following divorce, remarriage can have both positive and negative experiences on young adult children and could have a lasting impression on their memory and forming new relationships with other. Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed the romantic attachment styles known as secure, avoidant and anxious. Research has shown that divorce and remarriage impact children in many ways, however little research to date has examined how these two factors, perceived stepparent involvement and parenting styles, impact romantic attachment style. Our culture favors one marriage over several marriages and the negative stereotypes around divorced family households are still held, so it is important to expand the research on studies examining how blended families are impacted by a divorce and how they incorporate all family members, especially stepparents and children.

Therefore, this study will examine the relationship between the perceived stepparent involvement as well as the emerging adult's perceived relationship with stepparent, and the impact of these on emerging adult's romantic attachment styles. Despite the fact that more and more emerging adults are coming from blended households, research is lacking as to how the child's relationship with their stepparent is impacting their ability to form relationships with others, more specifically with a future romantic partner.

Attachment Styles in Adults

An adult's individual attachment style begins formation in childhood and is carried forward. There are four adult attachment styles; secure, dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The adult attachment styles are views of one's self and others and examine the level of dependency and avoidance of intimacy for internally and external validation. A low degree of dependency is described as having a high positive self-regard for self and a low degree of needing validation from others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Avoidance of intimacy reflects the degree to which individuals avoid close contact with others.

Secure adult attachment style allows for the individual to feel comfortable with intimacy and autonomy, and has a positive view of self and others. In a dismissing-avoidant adult attachment style, the individual feels dismissed of intimacy and is counter-dependent and or has positive view of self but a negative view of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Preoccupied attachment styles result in an individual feeling preoccupied with relationship having a negative self-view and a positive view of others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Nichols (2013) suggest that one partner may believe

he or she is not good enough for his or her partner and may be holding the partner back from achieving future dreams and goals. Lastly, a fearful-avoidant adult attachment style is when an individual fears intimacy, is socially avoidant, and has a negative view of both themselves and others, resulting in a lack of satisfaction in the relationship all the way around (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). The negative impact on the formation of a secure base can prevent a child from forming a secure attachment style that can continue into adulthood (Feeney & Monin, 2008).

Adult Romantic Relationships

The adult's individual attachment style is slightly different concept than the adults who describe their romantic attachment styles as being happy, friendly, and trusting (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Hazan and Shaver (1987) developed the romantic attachment styles known as secure, avoidant and anxious. The two researchers explored Bowlby's ideas of romantic relationships and noted that the emotional development between adult romantic partners is comparatively a function in the motivational system like the attachment behavioral system that connects emotional bonds between infants and their caregivers (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). The secure romantic attachment style is characterized by adults who have a positive view of self and others and are comfortable with being intimate with others and in relationships. The avoidant romantic attachment style is characterized by adults who are afraid of intimacy, experience emotional highs and lows during the relationship as well as feeling of jealousy. Lastly, the anxious/ambivalent romantic attachment style is characterized by adults who view love in an obsessive way, have strong feelings of needing constant reciprocation and validation, experience emotional highs and lows during the relationship, feelings of jealousy, and

strong sexual attraction (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Hazan and Shaver noted similarities in the infant-caregiver relationship in comparison to romantic partner relationship such as both wanting to feel safe when the other is nearby, and both feeling insecure when the other is inaccessible (Fraley & Shaver, 2000).

Parental Divorce

Divorce is a difficult stage in life for the parents, children, and even extended family members. Divorce does not just affect the relationship between two married adults but it impacts their relationship with their children and even at times extended family members, depending on the level of their involvement in the nuclear divorced family. Children of divorce are often seen as products of a broken home; research has identified a relationship between this “stigma” and childhood depression. Through the act of divorce, the home is split so it is not uncommon for children to show signs of depression because their family is no longer together living in one household (Cartwright & Gibson, 2013). Finally, decreased interaction with their children may lead children of divorce to be feel abandoned, which may increase the child’s avoidant and anxious behaviors characteristic of the insecure attachment style (Faber & Witternborn, 2010).

Often children in divorced families will be traveling back and forth between homes that have rules and roles that are different from those that existed in the family before the divorce. The need to adapt to these can have an impact on the child’s emotions leading to increased anger and anxiety (Faber & Witternborn, 2010). Children become distant with both the biological parents and stepparents. Control issues arise in a divorce when children need to adjust to two different styles of disciplinary actions present in both households. When parents have different parenting styles, such as authoritarian in

household and permissive parenting style in the other household (blended family), resiliency offers children a copying skill to manage their emotions (Cartwright & Seymour, 2002).

Affection issues following a divorce may arise despite the length of time a couple was married. The couple themselves will continue to have feelings of abandonment associated with the pain and loss of a loved one (Bauserman, 2002; DiVerniero, 2013). The loss of affection between the adults can filter down into the children creating increased anger and anxiety in the children (Faber & Witternborn, 2010).

Parenting Styles

The nature of the parent's parenting style informs their parenting behaviors, and following remarriage these parenting styles can hinder or help the child to adjust to the new transitional phase in their life. Baumrind (1971) identified three parenting styles used by parents to help establish rules and expectations for their children: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. In addition to Baumrind's parenting styles, Maccoby and Martin (1983) added a fourth parenting style: uninvolved or neglectful. Research shows residential parents (that is the parent(s) living within the household with the child), typically biological mothers, tend to provide more support and have more parental control over their children than non-residential parents (Bastaitis & Mortelmans, 2016; Cartwright & Seymour, 2002).

Parents with the authoritative parenting style use high levels of support and control resulting in a secure attachment bond between parents and their children (Bastaitis & Mortelmans, 2016). Authoritarian parenting style parents use strict and rigid rules, and these parents make the decisions for their children without asking the child what they

would prefer (Bastaitis & Mortelmans, 2016). Permissive parenting style is the opposite of authoritarian parenting style; these parents allow their children to set their own rules and limitations resulting in a friendship style parent-child relationship (Bastaitis & Mortelmans, 2016; Cartwright & Seymour, 2002). Lastly, neglectful parenting style leads to children setting their own limits and rules, with no guidance on the child's decision making (Bastaitis & Mortelmans, 2016). Young adults who grew up with parents who criticized them repeatedly and were expected to meet a high level of expectations had higher levels of concern around abandonment and closeness than other young adults who experienced lower levels of criticism and moderate levels of expectations from parental figures (Gamble & Roberts, 2005).

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement that includes guidance and support in early life choices in a child's life helps to establish morals. Stepparent involvement in a child's life can be a difficult transition for both the stepparent and stepchild. Stepparents have a more difficult time knowing where the boundaries are for them when disciplining their stepchildren and setting guidelines. However, in order for stepparents to become involved in their stepchild's lives, they have to be able to communicate effectively, which leads to an increased ability to adapt and form a new relationship (Baxter et al., 2004; Schrodt et al., 2007).

Stepfamilies, also known as blended families, are common in U.S. households today. About 65% of remarriages formed stepfamilies in 2001 (Pasley & Garneau, 2012). The most common type of stepfamilies formed is stepfather-stepmother families; followed by the least common type, stepmother-only families (Pasley & Garneau, 2012).

Thus, stepparent involvement in a child's life can also be important as a biological parent's involvement for the child in the creation of healthy attachments style. However, research is lacking on stepparent involvement. Research has been conducted examining a stepmother's ability to form positive relationships with her stepchildren. Further, there is a stereotype about stepmothers being seen as "wicked" and that view could shift their ability to form attachments with their stepchildren (Ceglian & Gardner, 2000).

Communication between stepparents and stepchildren can be beneficial in helping the family dynamic and help children form a positive attachment style for future relationships (Baxter et al., 2004; Schrodt et al., 2007).

Purpose

The purpose of the present study is to examine the relationship between emerging adult's perceived stepparent's involvement and the emerging adult's romantic attachment style. Stepparent involvement can be measured through perceptions of communication between emerging adult and stepparent, as well as the role stepparents play. Romantic attachment styles in emerging adults can be measured through their feelings and thoughts about relationships with others. Thus, this correlational study examined the perceived communication competence, positive regard, and closeness in relationships to measurements of attachment styles: close, dependent, anxiety, and avoidant to examine the perceived parental involvement with stepparents. The main hypothesis tested was that perceived parental communication competence, closeness, and positive regard will have a correlation with Hazan and Shaver's (1987) (a) anxious and (b) avoidant romantic attachment styles and Fraley, Walker, and Brennan's (2000) dimensions of (a) anxiety

and (b) avoidance adult attachment styles in emerging adults who are the product of divorce and remarriage into stepparent households.

Chapter Two: Methods

Sampling

Participants from the University of Kentucky undergraduate studies program were recruited to complete an online survey through Qualtrics. Participants were recruited through a modified Dillman approach that emphasized repeated contact to the participants (Dillman, 2007). First, the e-mail addresses of all undergraduate students at the University of Kentucky were obtained by sending an open-records request to ukopenrecords@uky.edu. Then, 20,324 undergraduate e-mail addresses were obtained. From the 20,324 e-mails, every 10th e-mail was selected for a total of 2,034 e-mails. Next, an e-mail introducing the study and providing the Qualtrics survey link was sent to the participants (See Appendix 1). A reminder e-mail was sent a week after the initial e-mail to the students to have an opportunity to complete the survey.

The participants were informed in the recruitment e-mail, that by participating in the study, there would be a chance to enter into a drawing for four \$25 checks for every 100 people who completed the survey. Therefore, the students were informed that they had a 1 in 25 chance on winning \$25. For college students, using lottery incentives has been found to successfully increase and get college students' responses on internet surveys (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). There were not enough participants to select four randomized winners to win the four \$25 checks, so instead two \$25 checks were awarded to two winning participants. The participants' responses were given an

assigned number and then Microsoft Excel was used to generate the random numbers, which corresponded in the winning two winning participants.

Participants

Inclusion criteria required participants to be an undergraduate student at the University of Kentucky, between the ages of 18 and 22 years old, to assess for individuals considered to be emerging adults. A total of 289 students were used in the analysis. The majority of the participants were females (n=199), followed by males (n=90). Participants ranged from 18 to 22 years of age, with 19 years old being the largest group (29.12%), followed by 21 years old (22.11%), 20 years old (20.70%), 18 years old (15.09%), and finally 22 years old (12.98%). Most participants were Caucasian (81.43%), followed by Asian or Asian American (7.50%), Black or African American (5.36%), Latino or Hispanic (4.29%), and Middle Eastern or Arab American (1.42%). When asked if their biological parents are still together, (69.72%) indicated that their parents were still together and (30.28%) indicated that their biological parents were no longer together due to separation or divorce. Participants were also asked their age when their biological parents divorced. Participants indicated: early in their life with infancy (27.91%); and early childhood (27.91%); middle childhood (22.09%), and finally adolescence (16.28%), and young adulthood (5.81%).

When asked if biological parents were still married, (n=56) reported yes their biological parents were still married, while (n=30) reported no their biological parents were no longer married. If either parent remarried, (n=56) indicated that one of their parents remarried, while (n=30) indicated that neither of their parents had remarried from a divorce. When asked if biological parents did divorce did both parents remarry,

participants indicated, (n=22) of both their parents did remarried, and (n=64) indicated both of their parents did not remarry. Following, when asked if their biological parents did divorce, did their mother remarry, (n=38) indicated their mother did remarry, and (n=48) indicated their mother did not remarry. When asked how old were you when your mother remarried, participants indicated ages between 4 years old to 22 years old. Next, when asked if your biological parents divorced, did your father remarry, participants indicated (n=41) of their fathers did remarry and (n=45) indicated that their fathers did not remarry. When asked how old were you when your father remarried, participants indicated ages between 3 years old to 20 years old.

Procedure

Research procedures followed the University of Kentucky's Institutional Review Board protocol (See Appendix 2). The online survey from Qualtrics, began with the informed consent page for participants to read and agree to the terms of the study by clicking "next" to continue to the survey. Participants were asked to complete the survey, but were informed that they could stop and not complete the survey whenever they wished because the survey was purely voluntary, and if they had any questions or concerns they could e-mail the graduate student researcher. After the survey, the participants had the chance to be entered into the lottery to win a \$25 check for every 1 out of 100 participants. The researcher's contact information was provided to them. The e-mail questionnaires would take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Measures

Demographics. The first portion of the survey contained demographic questions, including those regarding sex, gender, age, race/ethnicity, as well as several

questions regarding the marital and re-marital status of their biological parents. For example, participants were asked whether or not their biological parents are still together, did either of their parents remarry, did both of their parents remarry, did their mother remarry, did their father remarry, how old they were when their mother or father remarried, how long did the remarriage last, and what age they were when their biological parents divorced, perceived participant's attitudes and communication with stepparent (See Appendix 6).

The Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory Revised. The 36-item Revised Experiences in Close Relationship Inventory Revised (ECR-R) (Fraley, Walker, & Brennan, 2000) was designed to measure how one generally experiences relationships. There are two dimensions: anxious and avoidant. The first 18 items comprise the attachment-related anxiety scale. The remaining 19 items comprise the attachment-related avoidance scale. (Fraley, Walker, & Brennan, 2000). The coding for this scale includes reverse coding on a few items. This questionnaire assesses the individuals' general feelings and thoughts in an emotionally intimate relationship. In general, avoidant individuals tend to be distressed and seek independence, whereas the anxious individuals tend to fear rejection and abandonment from others (Fraley, Walker, & Brennan, 2000). This questionnaire measures the emerging adult's current emotional thoughts and feelings about being in an emotionally intimate/romantic relationship. Sample items include "I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners", and "I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me" (See Appendix 4). Each item has a 1 to 7 Likert-type response including *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *slightly disagree* (3), *neutral* (4), *slightly agree* (5), *agree* (6), and *strongly agree* (7).

Adult Attachment Scale. The 18 item Adult Attachment Scale (AAS) (Collins & Reed, 1990), was originally based on the work done by Hazen and Shaver (1987) and Levy and Davis (1988), creating 3 prototypical descriptions. The 18-item questionnaire was used to measure adult attachment styles (See Appendix 3) in three subscale continual dimensions or spectrum include close, depend, and anxiety. The questionnaire measured the participants feelings about romantic relationships, generally speaking either in the past or present relationship. If the participant has not experienced a romantic relationship, they are asked to answer then answer in terms of how they would feel. Examples of items include, “In relationships, I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me”, and “I am nervous when anyone gets too close” (See Appendix 3). Collins and Read (1990) reported Cronback’s alpha coefficients for the original scale is .69 for close, .75 for depend, and .72 for anxiety. Five- point scale rating, 1= *not at all characteristic like me*, 5= *very characteristic like of me*.

The AAS measures three adult attachment styles including secure, anxious, and avoidant. With the subscales dimensions of AAS including anxiety, depend and close. Anxiety dimension measures the extent to which an individual is concerned about abandoned or being unloved. Depend dimension measures the extent to which and individual feels they can depend on others when needed. Close dimension measures the extent to which an individual is comfortable with intimacy and closeness when developing a new relationship. Secure attachment respondents classify as being secure if they have high dimension scores on depend and close subscales, and low on anxiety subscales. The anxious attachment respondents classify as being anxious if they have high dimension scores on anxiety and moderate dimension scores on depend and close

subscales. Finally, avoidant attachment respondents classify as being avoidant if they had low dimension scores of depend, anxiety, and close subscales.

The Stepparent Relationship Index. The Stepparent Relationship Index (SRI) measures the participants perspective of their relationship with an adult figure, specifically their stepparent (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991; Guerrero, 1994). The SRI assesses the stepparent with whom the stepchildren (emerging adult) interacted with. Eleven items measure of communication competence and the ten items measured relational closeness. The participants were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the statement using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1), *disagree* (2), *neither agree nor disagree* (3), *agree* (4) and *strongly agree* (5) (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991) (See Appendix 5). From the eleven items measuring communication competence, 2-item measured the perception of communication competence from Guerrero's instrument (1994). The short scale 2-item measure by Guerrero (1994) include "My stepparent's communication is usually appropriate to the situation at hand" and "My stepparent is a good communicator". Higher scores represent the greater competence. The alpha coefficient for the original scale is .86. The ten-item scale measured perception of relational closeness scale include "How openly do you talk with your stepparent" and "How close do you feel to your stepparent". Higher scores representing higher levels of relational closeness to their stepparent. The alpha coefficient for the original scale is .94.

Statistical Analyses

Data was collected using Qualtrics. A bivariate correlational analysis was completed to investigate the relationship between perceptions of parenting and

attachment dimensions. An analysis of variance was used to assess the relationship between the attachment styles. An ANOVA was conducted to examine the relationship between the variables.

Chapter Three: Results

The hypothesis for this study is that perceived stepparent involvement (communication competence, positive regard, and closeness) will have a correlation with an (a) anxious and (b) avoidant romantic attachment styles in adults who are the product of divorce and remarriage into stepparent households. The analysis examined the relationships between all the variables of perceived attachment styles, positive regard, communication competence, and closeness (see Table 1). In order to test the hypothesis, a bivariate correlational analysis was performed to obtain a correlation between the variables. The descriptive information for all the variable is located in located in Table 2 (see Table 2). The descriptive information for the attachment style by parent relationship status is located in Table 3 (see Table 3). The attachment correlation between the perceived emerging adult's stepparent involvement and their romantic attachment styles (see Table 4). The perceived stepparent relationship index was positively correlated with closeness (as a subscale in) the adult attachment scale in emerging adults, $r = .33, p < .01$ ($M = 35.21, SD = 21.16$) This meant that as emerging adults had an increase in positive regard with their perception of their stepparent's closeness of their relationship. Closeness of their relationship increased as well. The perceived stepparent relationship index was negatively correlated with avoidant, $r = -.44, p < .05$ ($M = 132.77, SD = 9.81$). As positive regard in stepparent relationship increased, avoidance in their relationship decreased. This meant that as positive regard in the stepparent relationship increased,

feelings of avoidance decreased. Communication competence was positively correlated with depend, $r = .41, p < .05, (M = 2.91, SD = 18.89)$ and negatively correlated with avoidance, $r = -.36, p < .01$. This meant that as emerging adults perceived their communication with their stepparent to positively increase, their communication increased and their avoidance decreased. Next, the perceived closeness of emerging adults with stepparent was positively correlated with emerging adult's feelings of close and dependent within a romantic relationship, $r = .35, p < .01 (M = 35.21, SD = 12.16)$ and $r = .42, p < .05 (M = 48.51, SD = 18.86)$. This meant that as emerging adults' feelings of being close in a relationship with their stepparent increased their dependency increased, so they felt close to their stepparent. As closeness increases, avoidant decreases in stepparent relationships and in forming a romantic relationship with a partner, $r = -.41, p < 0.5 (M = 137.22, SD = 9.81)$ and $r = -.35, p < .01 (M = 440.06, SD = 54.99)$. This meant that as positive closeness increases between the emerging adult and their stepparent, their avoidance decreases in that relationship, but also in forming a new romantic relationship. An emerging adult may feel more confident in beginning a new romantic relationship if their relationship with stepparents is close. An ANOVA was conducted to examine the relationship between the groups of parents married and divorced (see Table 5). The results indicate a trend in anxiety across the emerging adult's romantic attachment style between groups. The findings are complimentary with previous findings in regard to increased anxiety in emerging adults whose parents are divorced. The Adult Attachment Scale Anxiety, $p < 5.03 (M = 130.51, SD = 522.04)$. The findings suggest that this specific anxiety feelings may have other factors contributing to the participant's anxiety the study did not measure. The Experience in Close Relationship

Index Anxiety, $p < 2.21$ ($M = 1213.39$, $SD = 4853.58$), supports the suggestion for a trend between the two groups in emerging adult's romantic attachment styles being impact by anxious feeling.

Table 1. *Descriptive Table of the Perceived Relationship with Stepparent Variables*

	Minimum	Maximum	Together	Both Remarried	Mother Only Remarried	Father Only Remarried	Neither Parent Remarried	Sample Mean
SRI Pos Regard	8.00	40.00		31.3333	26.8421	29.4545		29.0714
Comm Competance	2.00	10.00		6.8	6.1053	6.0455		6.2679
Closeness	2.00	10.00		6.4667	5.2632	6.1364		5.9286

Note: SRI Positive Regard for Both Parents Remarried n=15, SRI Positive Regard for Mother Only Remarried n=19, SRI Positive Regard for Father Only Remarried n=22. Communication Competence for Both Parents Remarried n=15, Communication Competence for Mother Only Remarried n=19, Communication Competence for Father Only Remarried n=22. Closeness for Both Parents Remarried n=15, Closeness for Mother Only Remarried n=19, Closeness for Father Only Remarried n=22.

Table 2. *Descriptive Information for All Variables*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (<i>SD</i>)
AAS Close	6.00	30.00	21.16
AAS Depend	6.00	30.00	18.89
AAS Anxiety	6.00	30.00	15.56
AAS Avoid	12.00	60.00	9.81
ECR Anxiety	18.00	120.00	62.84
ECR Avoid	18.00	120.00	54.99
SRI Pos Regard	8.00	40.00	29.10
Comm Competence	2.00	10.00	6.27
Closeness	2.00	10.00	5.93

Note: AAS Close n=254, AAS Depend n=253, AAS Anxiety n=250, AAS Avoid n=250, ECR Anxiety n=245, ECR Avoid n=240, SRI Positive Regard n=56, Communication Competence n=56, Closeness n=56.

Table 3. *Descriptive Information for Attachment Style by Parent Relationship Status*

	Minimum	Maximum	Together	Both Remarried	Mother Only Remarried	Father Only Remarried	Neither Parent Remarried	Sample Mean
AAS Close	6	30	21.655	19.4286	20.5789	20.2857	20.069	21.1575
AAS Depend	6	30	19.3873	19.2857	17.6111	18.1818	16.8462	18.8893
AAS Anxiety	6	30	14.5509	18.3571	17.7895	17.3333	17.2414	15.556
AAS Avoid	12	60	30.9591	33.2857	34.0556	33.2381	34.8846	31.912
ECR Anxiety	18	120	59.8795	66.2143	68.2105	68.4	71.7692	62.8449
ECR Avoidance	18	120	54.0807	52.2857	55.8947	53.3158	62.3333	54.9875

Note: AAS Close n=254, AAS Depend n=253, AAS Anxiety n=250, AAS Avoid n=250, ECR Anxiety n=245, ACR Avoid n=240

AAS Close-Parents are Together n=171, AAS Close-Both Parents Remarried n=14, AAS Close-Mother Only Remarried n=19, AAS Close-Father Only Remarried n=21, AAS Close-Neither Parent Remarried n=29.

AAS Depend-Parents are Together n=173, AAS Depend-Both Parents Remarried n=14, AAS Depend- Mother Only Remarried n=18, AAS Depend-Father Only Remarried n=22, AAS Depend-Neither Parent Remarried n=26.

AAS Anxiety-Parents are Together n=167, AAS Anxiety-Both Parents Remarried n=14, AAS Anxiety- Mother Only Remarried n=19, AAS Anxiety-Father Only Remarried n=21, AAS Anxiety-Neither Parent Remarried n=29.

AAS Avoid-Parents are Together n=171, AAS Avoid-Both Parents Remarried n=14, AAS Avoid-Mother Only Remarried n=18, AAS Avoid-Father Only Remarried n=21, AAS Avoid-Neither Parent Remarried n=26

ECR Anxiety-Parents are Together n=166, ECR Anxiety-Both Parents Remarried n=14, ECR Anxiety- Mother Only Remarried n=19, ECR Anxiety-Father Only Remarried n=20, ECR Anxiety-Neither Parent Remarried n=26.

ECR Avoidance-Parents are Together n=161, ECR Avoidance-Both Parents Remarried n=14, ECR Avoidance-Mother Only Remarried n=19, ECR Avoidance-Father Only Remarried n=19, ECR Avoidance-Neither Parent Remarried n=27.

Table 4. *Attachment Correlations*

	AAS Close	AAS Depend	AAS Anxiety	AAS Avoid	ECR Anxiety	ECR Avoid
SRI Pos Regard	.33*	.48**	-.08	-.44**	-.15	-.23
Comm Competence	.25	.41**	.06	-.36**	-.04	-.21
Closeness	.35*	.42**	-.04	-.41**	-.18	-.35*

Note: SRI Positive Regard-AAS Close n=53, SRI Positive Regard-AAS Depend n=53, SRI Positive Regard-AAS Avoid n=52, Communication Competence-AAS Depend n=53, Communication Competence-AAS Avoid n=52, Closeness-AAS Close n=53, Closeness-AAS Depend n=53, Closeness-AAS Avoid n=52, Closeness-ECR Avoid n=51.

**p < .05, **p < .01*

Table 5. *Analysis of Variance (ANOVA): Attachment-Variables by Parent Relationship Status*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
AAS Close	Between Groups	140.85	4	35.21	1.38
	Within Groups	6332.51	249	25.43	
	Total		253		
AAS Depend	Between Groups	194.05	4	48.51	1.59
	Within Groups	7564.84	248	30.50	
	Total		252		
AAS Anxiety	Between Groups	522.04	4	130.51	5.03***
	Within Groups	6025.66	245	24.59	
	Total		249		
AAS Avoidance	Between Groups	531.08	4	132.77	1.38
	Within Groups	23422.97	245	95.60	
	Total		249		
ECR_Avoidance	Between Groups	1760.260	4	440.065	0.99
	Within Groups	104048.702	235	442.760	
	Total	105808.963	239		
ECR_Anxiety	Between Groups	4853.585	4	1213.396	2.212 [†]
	Within Groups	131670.521	240	548.627	
	Total	136524.106	244		
SRI Pos Regard	Between Groups	174.40	2	87.20	1.05
	Within Groups	4395.31	53	82.93	
	Total		55		
Comm Competence	Between Groups	5.83	2	2.91	0.51
	Within Groups	301.144	53	5.68	
	Total	306.982	55		
Closeness	Between Groups	13.70	2	6.85	0.84
	Within Groups	430.00	53	8.11	
	Total		55		

Note: [†]=.068, *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Chapter Four: Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the correlation between perceived stepparent communication, closeness, and positive regard, and two (anxious and avoidant) adult attachment styles, and measuring perceived experience in close relationship with their stepparent. The purpose overall was to find how perceived communication and closeness impacted the emerging adults' romantic attachment style. The two attachment styles include: anxious and avoidant are used in examining the perceived parental involvement with stepparents. The hypothesis stated that perceived parental communication competence, closeness, and positive regard will have a correlation with an (a) anxious and (b) avoidant romantic attachment styles in emerging adults who are the product of divorce and remarriage into stepparent households. The hypothesis suggested a positive correlation with perceived parental communication with adult attachment dependent and a negative correlation with adult attachment avoidant. One explanation would be that the family dynamics between the stepchildren and their stepparent(s) are stronger, and the stepchildren know they are cared for and being cared for allows their relationship to improve, and trust is built. Positive regard and closeness variable had a negative correlation with adult attachment avoid. These findings suggest that when emerging adults feel close to their stepparent they do not feel the need to stay away from their stepparent, because they are feeling heard and cared for.

Clinical Implications

From the present study, the research aims to help contribute to the family science research field by adding additional knowledge to help individuals working with divorced families. Specifically, this research shines a light on how important it is to incorporate

and encourage stepparent involvement in emerging adults' lives because it can have an impact on their emerging adult's ability to form healthy adult romantic relationships. The findings could suggest that specific stepparent involvement/parenting styles are beneficial in how stepchildren perceive their relationships. Thus, stepparents may want to make an effort to adjust their parenting style and involvement to support their new stepchildren. By being aware of their importance of healthy relationship, the stepchild can keep or change certain aspects in that relationship to transfer over to benefit a more stable adult romantic relationship.

For clinical implications, it would also be beneficial to the clients to discuss their concerns and explore where in their relationships individuals could improve. For example, such as a discussion, could aid in the development of better communication skills and thus better relationships.

Case Example

The following is a case example from the authors clinical experience that describes how some issues around stepparent communication and attachment styles have been presented in a therapeutic setting. Names of the clients have been changed and any identifying information has been removed to protect the client's confidentiality. The case example describes a divorced couple, whose son has a difficult time connecting to his parents and especially his stepparent. The son begins to believe he is not important in his parent's lives and or his stepparents' lives because his parents and stepparents are busy trying to start their new relationship and marriage together.

Sarah and Luke decided to seek out family counseling with the presenting problem of feeling disconnected, avoidant with one another. Sarah, the mother, had been

divorced from Luke's father for about seven years and was starting to date again. Luke, the son, did not want his mother to start dating because she would not be able to spend as much quality time with him anymore and their communication would decrease. Sarah took her son's concerns into consideration, but believed dating and finding another partner would help complete their family. Luke's father Lee was looking for a partner to spend the rest of this life with as well. Luke had told the therapist that his father would live with his temporary girlfriends and Luke would have to stay with the girlfriends to spend time with his father. However, it was never one-on-one time because his father was busy spending time with his new girlfriend to meet her needs. Luke felt his father did not have enough time to spend with him and became anxious when visiting. Eventually, Lee settled down and married Stephanie, his girlfriend of two years Stephanie and Luke had a contentious relationship. Luke described feelings of wanting to be close and have a friendship with Stephanie, but Stephanie did not make the time in her busy schedule to get to know Luke. Luke felt very isolated and became anxious with others when visiting his father's house because Stephanie would criticize Luke's actions. Luke wanted to make his stepmother proud of him, but felt he could not do that. Luke also felt stuck because he believed he could not tell his father how he felt and avoided talking about his true feelings of being unhappy. Luke longed to be close to his stepmother and to talk to her, but felt alone. Then Sarah met a man named Alex. Sarah and Alex became very serious from the start of their relationship. Alex made an effort to get to know Luke and to spend time with him. Luke appreciated Alex's attempts to be friends and to communicate with him.

In the beginning, the therapist suggested to Sarah and Luke to have a mother and son date night once a week for an hour to rebuild their connection and feel close again. The mother and son were instructed to ask open-ended questions on topics they wanted to know about. The goal was for the mother and son to know that their loved one's likes, dislikes, and favorite things are to set the foundation of friendship in their relationship, to have a common ground to understand each other to build a secure attachment relationship. The exercise was used to foster curiosity in their relationship. Next, the mother and son were instructed to write a letter to each other about how they were feeling disconnected and how they wanted to change their relationship; what their needs were and what was missing in their relationship. After the mother and son felt they could depend on each other, especially the son, and felt secure, the therapist asked Luke if he could write a letter to his other family members such as his father, stepmother and stepfather and describe his perception of their relationship and how he wants their relationship to look like or improve. Luke was able to write all three letters and believed the letters helped him articulate his thoughts and feels. Luke reported to the therapist that his letter to his stepmother helped improve their relationship and now she is scheduling time to spend with him one-on-one. Luke is very excited to get to know her and to talk to her about his personal life and even about dating.

This case example suggests that communication is very important in relationships, but especially for children and their parents/stepparents. For the stepchildren to know they are valued by their parents and stepparents helps them to not feel isolated, anxious, and alone in their family. The children are trying to balance two very different worlds and it can be lonely when they do not have anyone to talk to and not

feeling welcomed. Children can become distant and or avoidant with others when they do not feel a sense of security and acceptance. Their internal thoughts about themselves can become negative when they feel anxious and avoidant, but when they feel like they can depend on a parent or stepparent, they feel secure in their relationships and in themselves. Overall, having good communication and actively being involved in stepchildren's lives can have a positive impact on their internal view of self.

Limitations

Although this study presents findings on the correlation between the perceptions of stepparent(s) parenting on attachment styles and romantic attachment styles the communication competence, positive regard, and closeness should be interpreted with caution due to the limitations. First, the questionnaire was missing the complete questions list when completing Qualtrics due to research error when entering questions into Qualtrics. The communication and closeness questionnaire were incomplete, missing a few questions. If the complete questioner was used to measure communication and closeness, then there might have been a stronger statistically significant value for those questions and not due to change.

In addition, the present study used a sample of undergraduate students at the University of Kentucky, which means that the results are not generalizable to the larger population. There were a few complications when sending the e-mails out to participants and some participants received the e-mail more times than they would have preferred and became irritated with the study. Future research could benefit from participants more diverse countries and ethnic backgrounds outside of the United States to understand how stepparent's relationships are perceived. Another limitation would be the perceived

memories of the emerging adult's stepparent involvement by only asking the participant how their stepparent involvement impacted their attachment style in a romantic partner. By not also assessing the stepparents for their perceived involvement in the stepchild's life, the results could be skewed. As well, when participants think of their relationships with their biological parents and stepparents, there are four possible relationships to think about and measure as they answered certain items in the measures. This could get confusing. Moreover, if parent(s) have been remarried multiple times it could become even more complex to formulate accurate answers. Lastly, one more limitation would be retrospective perceptions of the participants. The participants are looking backwards and examining their exposures to specific environmental factors and this may be due to confounding variables or biases of the study.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to fill in the gap in the research literature by understanding the relationship between stepchildren (emerging adults) and stepparents and how that relationship impacts attachment styles and romantic attachment styles for the emerging adults. The purpose of this study is to provide support to families on how important it is to have stepparents involved in emerging adults' lives through parenting styles measured by communication and the amount of time spent within the blended households. The statistical findings helped confirm the essential characteristics used in attachment styles in emerging young adults are important for positive communication and closeness to have a positive correlation to dependency. The participants' responses to the questionnaires aim to support the importance of stepparent involvement and how it correlates to emerging adults' ability to form romantic attachments.

Appendix 1

Participant Recruitment E-mail

Dear student,

I am reaching out to you today, because you are enrolled in undergraduate studies at the University of Kentucky. I would appreciate it if you will take roughly 20 minutes to complete a survey that is designed to assess relationships with parents and stepparents. If you are a student, currently 18-22 years old, then you are eligible to participate in this research study. By completing the survey, you will be eligible to enter a drawing for \$25. We will award four \$25 checks for every 100 people who complete the survey, up to 500 participants. Students will have a 1 in 25 chance of winning a \$25 check. At the completion of the survey, you will have the opportunity to give your email address to be entered into this drawing; this information will remain confidential.

To begin the survey, go

to: https://uky.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eP5h19qvKTVzrrT

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please email Bailey Mortis, the graduate student

researcher, at blmo245@g.uky.edu.

Respectfully,

Bailey Mortis

Appendix 2

Open Records Request



University of

Kentucky

Official Records Custodian

February 11, 2019

VIA EMAIL: blmo245@g.uky.edu

Ms. Bailey Mortis

RE: Open Records Request

Dear Ms. Mortis:

This letter is in response to your Open Records Request received by this office on February 6, 2019. You requested the following:

“My name is Bailey Mortis and I am submitting an open records request for student email addresses. The email addresses are being sought for research purposes, under a protocol that has been approved by the University of Kentucky Office of Research Integrity. I am seeking email addresses for students (undergraduates) enrolled in the Spring 2019 semester.”

RESPONSE: Pursuant to your recent Open Records Request, please find the attached spreadsheet from the University’s Analytics Team responsive to your request. Please be advised that some students choose to keep their directory information confidential under Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (“FERPA”). FERPA is a federal law that protects the privacy and confidentiality of personally identifiable information contained in education records. Further, please note that when using email addresses for business purposes, you must comply with the CAN-SPAM Act. See <http://www.business.ftc.gov/documents/bus61-can-spam-act-compliance-guide-business>.

Should you have any further questions, please contact the Open Records Office.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bill Swinford".
Bill Swinford
Open Records Custodian

Attachment

see blue.

301 Main Building | Lexington, KY 40506-0032 | O: 859-257-6366 | F: 859-323-1062 | www.uky.edu/legal/open-records | ukopenrecords@uky.edu

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Appendix 3

Adult Attachment Scale

Please use the scale below by placing a number between 1 and 5 in the space provided to the right of each statement.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5
Not at all **Very**
characteristic **characteristic**
of me **of me**

- (1) I find it relatively easy to get close to others.
- (2) I do not worry about being abandoned.
- (3) I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on others.
- (4) In relationships, I often worry that my partner does not really love me.
- (5) I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like.
- (6) I am comfortable depending on others.
- (7) I do not worry about someone getting too close to me.
- (8) I find that people are never there when you need them.
- (9) I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others.
- (10) In relationships, I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.
- (11) I want to merge completely with another person.
- (12) My desire to merge sometimes scares people away.
- (13) I am comfortable having others depend on me.
- (14) I know that people will be there when I need them.
- (15) I am nervous when anyone gets too close.
- (16) I find it difficult to trust others completely.
- (17) Often, partners want me to be closer than I feel comfortable being.
- (18) I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them.

Appendix 4

The Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R)

	QUESTION	1=Strongly Disagree.....7=Strong Agree
1.	I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2.	I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3.	I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4.	I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5.	I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6.	I worry a lot about my relationships.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7.	When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8.	When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9.	I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10.	My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11.	I do not often worry about being abandoned.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12.	I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13.	Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14.	My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15.	I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16.	It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17.	I worry that I won't measure up to other people.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18.	My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
19.	I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20.	I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21.	I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22.	I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23.	I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24.	I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25.	I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26.	I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27.	It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28.	I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29.	It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30.	I tell my partner just about everything.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
31.	I talk things over with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
32.	I am nervous when partners get too close to me.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
33.	I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
34.	I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
35.	It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7
36.	My partner really understands me and my needs.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix 5

Stepparent Relationship Index (SRI)

1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree

1. My stepparent knows how to be a good parent.
2. I think of my stepparent as more than just a “stepparent”.
3. I do not like the way my stepparent treats me.
4. I ignore my stepparent’s advice.
5. I really don’t care that much about my stepparent.
6. My stepparent is supportive of me.
7. My stepparent treats me with respect.
8. I can’t stand spending time with my stepparent.
9. I have a positive relationship with my stepparent.
10. Growing up as a child, my stepparent disciplined me as if I was his/her own child.
11. My stepparent guides and enforces household rules.
12. When speaking to my friends, I refer to my stepparent as “Dad/Mom”.
13. My stepparent likes to stay out of my business.
14. My stepparent likes to give me advice on how to live my life.
15. My stepparent knows how I feel about him/her.
16. I have never told my stepparent how I feel about him/her.
17. My stepparent has told me how her/she feels about me.
18. My stepparent is a good communicator.
19. My stepparent’s communication is usually appropriate to the situation at hand.
20. I openly talk with my stepparent.
21. I feel close to my stepparent.

Appendix 6

Demographic Information

1. What is your age?
 - a. 18
 - b. 19
 - c. 20
 - d. 21
 - e. 22
2. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
3. Which of the following best describes your racial or ethnic identity?
 - a. Caucasian (non-Hispanic)
 - b. Latino or Hispanic
 - c. American Indian or Native Alaskan
 - d. Asian or Asian American
 - e. Black or African American
 - f. Middle Eastern or Arab American
 - g. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
 - h. None of the above
4. Are your biological parents still married?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
5. If your biological parents did divorce, did they both remarry?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. If your biological parents did divorce, did your mother remarry?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
7. How old were you when your mother remarried?
8. How long did that remarriage last?
9. If your biological parents did divorce, did your father remarry?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
10. How old were you when your father remarried?
11. How long did that remarriage last?
12. What age were you when your biological parents divorce?
 - a. Infancy (birth to 2 years old)
 - b. Early childhood (3 to 8 years old)
 - c. Middle childhood (9 to 11 years old)
 - d. Adolescence (12 to 18 years)
 - e. Young adulthood (18+)
13. What is your relationship status?
 - a. Single

- b. Cohabiting
- c. Committed romantic relationship
- d. Married

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