

# Relationship Trends Across Two Generations: An examination of relationship quality in children with divorced parents

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine the relationship quality trends in offspring of divorced and non-divorced parents. Relationship domains included self, friendship, and romantic relationships. 68 undergraduate students completed an online survey pertaining to these three relationship dimensions. Results indicated that there were not statistically significant positive correlations between offspring of married parents versus divorced parents and their self-relationship, friendship, and romantic relationships.

## INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, divorce rates in America have been on an incline (American Psychological Association, 2013). Traditional households began to disintegrate and today, many families are affected by the conflicts that come from divorce. But how are these effects manifesting themselves in relationships of children who grow up in these families? One study suggests that children are resilient and do not reflect negative relationship qualities later in life (Thomas and Woodside, 2011). However, many more studies claim that the children of marriages that end in divorce are much more likely to experience a divorce themselves (Janice Clifford, 1998). Today there is little research examining how divorce manifests itself in offspring's later relationship trends. The authors are examining which relationships are affected in those offspring with divorced and married parents. Friendships, relationship with the self, and romantic relationships are all being observed.

### Purpose

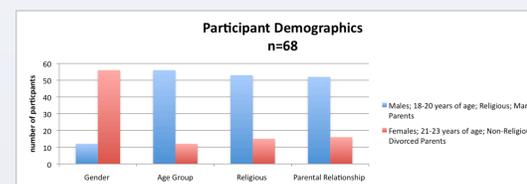
The purpose of this study is to examine relationship quality in children of both married and divorced parents in 3 dimensions: self-relationship, friendship, and romantic relationship.

### Hypothesis

Offspring of married parents experience more positive relationship quality compared to those offspring of divorced parents, in each of the three dimensions: self-relationship, friendship, and romantic relationships.

## METHODS

68 participants completed a 56-item online survey assessing the participants' familial, self, friend, and romantic relationship quality. These participants consisted of 56 females and 12 males. 52 participants reported that they have married parents and 16 participants reported that they have divorced parents. The data collected for this study was created by the authors and approved by the Pepperdine University IRB committee. The study was given in a Likert Scale and Free Response format.



### Romantic Relationship Quality

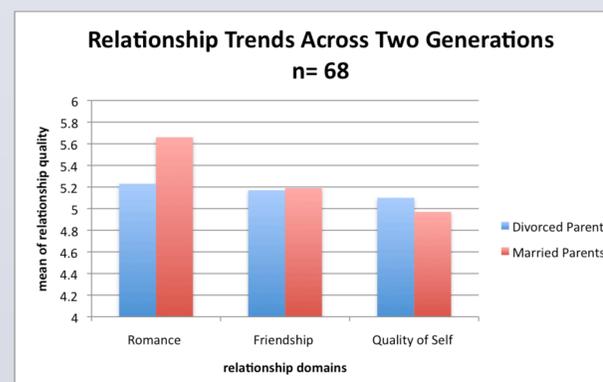
Among students who currently report having a significant other, there is no difference in their romantic relationship quality between those whose parents are divorced ( $M=5.23$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ) versus those who are married ( $M=5.66$ ,  $SD=.74$ ),  $t(18)=-1.00$ ,  $p=.33$ ,  $rp^2=.05$ .

### Quality of Friendship

Among students, there is no difference in quality of friendship between those whose parents are divorced ( $M=5.17$ ,  $SD=1.18$ ) versus those who are married ( $M=5.19$ ,  $SD=1.01$ ),  $t(66)=-0.8$ ,  $p=.93$ ,  $rp^2=.08$ .

### Self-Relationship Quality

Among students who currently report having a significant other, there is no difference in their quality of self relationship between those whose parents are divorced ( $M=5.1$ ,  $SD=1.29$ ) versus those who are married ( $M=4.97$ ,  $SD=0.87$ ),  $t(18)=.26$ ,  $p=.80$ ,  $rp^2=.004$ .



## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study is highly beneficial for professionals interested in the dynamic between parent's relationship status and its impact on offspring. The more able we are to understand the implications of divorce, the more likely we will be able to promote more positive relationship quality. The findings incorporated in this study may also be advantageous to offspring of divorced parents who may suffer from poor relationship quality in different aspects of their life. This study's findings may help them identify factors that may produce unsatisfactory relationships. Our study shows that there is no significant correlation between offspring of married and divorced parents and their relationship quality in three domains: self-relationship, friendship, and romantic relationship. This gives offspring of divorced parents hope and resiliency factors that may indicate these poor relationship habits they witnessed from their parents are not necessarily carried over into their relationships with friends, with themselves, and their significant other.

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