PARENTAL PROCESSES AND YOUNG ADULTS' ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

IN TRADITIONAL, DIVORCED, AND REMARRIED FAMILY STRUCTURES

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PARENTAL PROCESSES AND YOUNG ADULTS' ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN TRADITIONAL, DIVORCED, AND REMARRIED FAMILY STRUCTURES

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VITA

Jacqueline (Jackie) Cornett Pflieger, daughter of Stephen Andrew and Denise Marie (Harrington) Pflieger, was born December 11, 1978, in Arlington, Virginia. She graduated from James Madison High School in Vienna, Virginia, June 1996. She then attended James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology, May 2000. After working in the Washington, D.C. area for three years as (1) Project Assistant for the National Head Start Training and Technical Assistance Resource Center, (2) Research Assistant for the National Head Start Research Support Contract, and (3) Human Services Planner for the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, she entered the Graduate School at Auburn University, August 2003.

THESIS ABSTRACT

PARENTAL PROCESSES AND YOUNG ADULTS' ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS IN TRADITIONAL, DIVORCED, AND REMARRIED FAMILY STRUCTURES

Jacqueline Cornett Pflieger

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The purpose of this study was to explore the influence of parental figures on young adults' romantic relationships in traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures. Participants (n = 786) were recruited from a large university located in the southeastern region of the United States. Young adults completed self-reported questionnaires assessing their perceptions of parental relationship quality on indicators of affection, independence, and support for biological mothers, biological fathers, and if applicable, for stepmothers and stepfathers. Young adults also rated their romantic relationships on indicators of trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety. Results found that parental figures continued to influence children during young adulthood through their romantic relationships. Specifically, young adults perceived relationships with biological mothers as higher on affection and support than relationships with biological fathers. Dimensions of relationship quality with biological mothers and biological fathers were associated with young adults' romantic outcomes in similar ways;

however, fathers exerted a stronger influence on young adults' reports of trust and anxiety, and biological mothers had a stronger effect on young adults' romantic intimacy. Further, young adults perceived relationships with biological fathers as more positive in traditional two-parent families as compared with both divorced/separated and remarried groups, although no differences were found for young adults' romantic outcomes based on family structure. Finally, in remarried families, perceptions of relationships with biological parents were not related to young adults' reports of romantic competence. However, stepfathers' affection and independence-granting behaviors were related to less avoidance and greater intimacy in young adults' romantic relationships. Clearly, father figures more strongly influenced young adults' romantic relationships, with biological father-young adult relationships associated with trust and anxiety, and stepfather-young adult relationships associated with intimacy and avoidance.

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INTRODUCTION

Current research has supported the notion that young or "emerging" adulthood is a relatively new and distinct developmental phase in the life course. Emerging adulthood is a time of extended growth between adolescence and adulthood and may be an especially formative period in terms of exploring romantic relationships. Arnett (2004) characterized emerging adulthood as the age of identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and possibilities. This time period is quite different from adolescence, affording young adults more egalitarianism with parents, an extended timeframe to find their own identities, and the option to explore a greater number of intimate relationships. Collectively, these added experiences also have the potential to affect subsequent marital or other committed relationships. The processes (i.e., affection, autonomy and support) responsible for the transforming affiliation between parents and young adults, and how these interactions affect long-term romantic relationship development in positive and negative ways, are yet to be determined by research.

To place emerging adulthood in a larger social context, only 35 years ago, becoming an adult was universally accepted to occur when one turned the age of 18. The average age at first marriage was 21 years for women and 23 years for men; young adults in previous years were clearly on a differing life course as compared with present generations. Today, the average age at first marriage has risen to 25 years for women and 27 years for men (Fields & Caspar, 2000), and typically, women have postponed

childbearing until their later twenties or early thirties. Much of this change has occurred due to a shift in cultural norms and beliefs, with contemporary young adulthood consumed by the idea of self-fulfillment, as compared to previous generations' focus on fulfilling familial tasks (Arnett, 2004). Today's generation of young adults primarily hold a belief that one needs to accomplish personal goals before being "ready" for the lifelong commitment of marriage, while in the past, young adults often married early and held a belief in building their lives together from the ground up. In addition, past generations frequently thought of parents as authoritarian figures that merely (financially) supported their children until marriage, when young adults would often start families of their own. Today, as young adults continue to delay marriage, they also rely on their own families of origin for greater support, thus raising the question of how dimensions of these ongoing relationships with parents during emerging adulthood influence mature romantic relationship experiences and outcomes. Thus, it is quite important to examine the role of parental figures in young adults' intimate relationships as a result of this new developmental context.

Although the literature that exists is sparse, research is beginning to point to the relevance of the parent-child relationship for development during late adolescence and early adulthood, and suggests that dimensions within this relationship, including parental warmth, support, and low coercion/hostility, distinctively contribute to the development of interpersonal competencies and romantic relationship quality (Bryant & Conger, 2002; Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000). Additionally, individual characteristics of mother- and father-young adult child relationships contribute differently to the development of

interpersonal competencies and romantic relationship quality. Young adults often report feeling closer to their mothers, although fathers appear to play an especially formative role in children's development of interpersonal competence (Kawaguchi, Welsh, Powers, & Rostosky, 1998; Miller & Lane, 1991; Russell & Saebel, 1997; Valery, O'Connor, & Jennings, 1997).

Theoretically, many different perspectives have been taken to understand how the quality of the parent-child relationship can influence the development of romantic relationship competence during young adulthood. Intergenerational transmission theory and the Development of Early Adult Romantic Relationships (DEARR) model (Bryant & Conger, 2002) aptly provide a framework that encompasses several relevant theoretical perspectives. The overarching theory of intergenerational transmission, as used to guide the DEARR model, effectively incorporates premises found in observational learning, socialization, and attachment perspectives in order to explain the mechanisms involved in the transmission of attitudes, values, and behaviors through the generations from parent to child. Attachment and socialization theories emphasize the importance of the parent-child relationship throughout development, with primary emphasis on how parenting behaviors are related to children's social development (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999). As children mature into adults, parents may continue to exert an influence by affecting young adults' romantic relationships on attachment-related dimensions such as avoidance and anxiety (Feeney, 2004). Consistent with observational learning theory, the DEARR model proposes that both the quality of parents' marital relationships, as well as parenting behaviors, serve as models that children observe, internalize, and incorporate into similar

situations outside of the family environment. Thus, young adults may utilize past attributions, cognitions, emotions, and learned behaviors directly experienced with parents in the context of romantic relationships. Further, the DEARR model takes into account the impact of family demographic change versus stability for young adults' life course trajectories, although parental divorce and remarriage are not specifically addressed in this model. However, it is quite important to emphasize the life course developmental perspective through exploring the impact of divorce and remarriage on one's trajectory for initiating and sustaining successful relationships (Miller, 2002).

Moreover, it is important to recognize that a large percentage of young adults are products of nontraditional families, and thus, have witnessed their own parents' divorce and potential remarriage. Recent statistics estimate that 43-to-50 percent of all first marriages end in divorce (Sutton, 2002). Further, approximately 40 percent of children will have experienced the divorce of their parents before they reach the age of 18 (Amato, 2000), and an estimated 75 percent of divorced individuals remarry or cohabit at least once in their lifetime (United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2001). In fact, the stepfamily is predicted to become the dominant family structure in the near future by exceeding the number of traditional two-parent families that currently exist in the United States (Kheshgl-Genovese & Genovese, 1997). These changes have warranted the need to better understand the impact of diverse family structures on the development of romantic relationships, and also have required a stronger recognition of the long-term influence that both biological parents and stepparents can have on young adults' intimate relationships.

The increase in divorce and subsequent remarriage and the implications of these family transitions for young adult outcomes has generated much interest among social scientists, as well as the general public, and there has been a great deal of divisiveness in the literature regarding the consequences of divorce and remarriage for children. On one side of the debate, scholars argue that divorce, single-parenthood, and remarriage contribute to numerous social problems, whereas others argue that both adults and children can function effectively in diverse family structures (see Amato, 2000; Amato & Keith, 1991b; Hetherington, 1989, 2003; Morrison & Coiro, 1999). However, there is agreement among scholars that in order to better understand the effects of divorce and other family transitions on children, researchers must recognize the complexity of intervening factors that influence outcomes (see Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Feng, Giarrusso, Bengtson, & Frye, 1999; Kelly & Emery, 2003). These include aspects of the parents' marital relationship before and after divorce, ongoing aspects of the parent-child relationship and other family process factors, characteristics of the relationship between children and stepparents, and individual characteristics of the child that interact to impact outcomes in young adulthood.

Although much of the research exploring the long-term effects of parental divorce and remarriage on young adults' romantic relationships has yielded mixed results, primarily due to the presence of a variety of mediators and moderators (for a review see Amato, 2000), literature has documented that difficulties are experienced across a number of dimensions (Amato & Keith, 1991a; Hetherington, 1989; McCabe, 1997; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). The experience of divorce and the resultant changes, which

may include adding new relationships with stepparents, have the potential to produce insecurity and deficits in interpersonal skills, which in turn may lead to problems in forming and maintaining romantic relationships (Summers, Forehand, Armistead, & Tannenbaum, 1998). Further, parenting styles for divorced and remarried parents have been predominantly described as more negative in comparison to two-parent married families (Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). Consequently, parenting is impacted because on average, children with divorced parents reside with their mothers, while noncustodial fathers tend to become less involved in their child's life following a divorce, especially if a poor co-parenting relationship exists. Moreover, single parents have been characterized as less authoritative, less involved, and more permissive with their children (Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999). Further, norms regarding parenting in stepfamilies are less defined, and these families lack institutional and societal guidelines for their appropriate functioning (Cherlin, 1992). Typically, the biological parent assumes the main parenting role, and the stepparent often performs a role closer to that of a "friend" to the stepchild. In addition, biological parent-child relationships may be impacted as a result of remarriage, although no research exists that explores the direct impact of the addition of stepparents on biological parent-child relationships and the effect this has on the development of interpersonal competencies (Fine & Kurdek, 1995). Further, Cartwright and Seymour (2002) argued that biological parent-child relationships could be more important to the long-term adjustment of children as compared to stepparent-stepchild relationships. Research has found that the biological parent-child relationship may transform during adolescence, and even after

initial adjustment following a remarriage, problems in stepfamilies may reemerge as adolescents struggle to find their identities and establish autonomous relationships with both custodial and noncustodial parents (Bray, 1999). Further research is clearly necessary in order to determine how biological parent relationships are affected in remarried family structures, and to assess the unique impact of both biological parent and stepparent relationships during young adulthood.

After reviewing the literature on this area of research, and utilizing a predominantly intergenerational theoretical perspective to guide future research, it has been established that emerging adulthood is a relatively new developmental stage requiring further exploration, especially in regards to the influence of parental figures on the development of interpersonal competencies such as trust and intimacy. Although many factors create risk or foster resiliency, current research suggests that the quality of the parent-child relationship may serve as an important determinant for young adults' outcomes and may exert a particularly strong influence on young adults' romantic relationship development. Further, the usage of innovative theoretical models have led to promising linkages between parent-child relationships characterized by warm, affectionate, and supportive parenting styles and the positive development of relationship competencies in young adulthood (i.e., Conger et al., 2000). Past research has suggested that characteristics inherent to maternal and paternal relationships may uniquely contribute to the development of interpersonal competencies and romantic relationship quality for young adult children. Also, we know that the family of origin influences children's interpersonal development across a variety of family structures. Finally,

biological and stepparent figures may play a distinctive part in the socialization of children and the development of interpersonal competencies during emerging adulthood.

Although attachment research has provided evidence that parents continue to exert a strong influence on children's interpersonal attributes into adulthood, there is still much to learn in regards to the explicit processes that contribute to the development of romantic relationships. Due to the relatively new area of study surrounding the period of emerging adulthood, researchers have yet to discover how current parent-young adult relationship quality influences young adults' romantic relationships, as well as how differences that exist in these parent-child relationships across diverse family structures impact young adult outcomes. The lack of research on the role of stepparents and their influence on the development of interpersonal competencies indicates the need to understand in greater depth how these parental figures influence young adults' romantic relationships. Additional research is also needed on how the quality of relationships with both maternal and paternal figures, including biological mothers and biological fathers, and stepmothers and stepfathers, influence young adults' romantic relationships.

Clearly, in order to better understand the development of romantic relationship competencies during young adulthood, an in-depth exploration into the processes inherent to parent-young adult relationships within traditional two-parent, single-parent divorced, and remarried family structures is necessary in order to move beyond merely exploring the differences between children from traditional two-parent versus divorced or remarried families. In addition, further understanding of how parental figures such as biological mothers and biological fathers, and stepmothers and stepfathers, continue to

exert an influence over romantic relationships during young adulthood is necessary. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the quality of parent-young adult relationships within traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures, including relationships between biological parents and young adult children, and stepparents and young adult children, and the influence of parent-child relationships in these three family types on interpersonal outcomes for young adults. Specifically, young adults reported on affective, independence-promoting, and supportive aspects of relationships with maternal and paternal parental figures. Young adults also rated themselves on levels of avoidance, anxiety, intimacy, and trust in the context of romantic relationships, dimensions that have consistently been identified in the literature as important for developing and maintaining intimate relationships (Benson, Larson, Wilson, & Demo, 1993; Feldman, Gowen, & Fisher, 1998; Perlman & Fehr, 1987; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985; Steinberg, 1986). It is expected that parental figures will continue to play an influential role in the lives of their young adult children by having an impact on their romantic relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The processes inherent to parent-child relationship quality during emerging adulthood have been largely understudied, with the majority of relevant research exploring parent-child relationships during adolescence. Further insight into the developmental period of young adulthood is especially key considering that during this transition to adulthood, parental figures continue to occupy an influential role in the lives of their children, and in the case of stepfamilies, the addition of stepmothers and/or stepfathers to the family may influence young adults' views of romantic relationships and development of interpersonal competencies. The following literature review will first describe the theoretical foundation for this study. Next, the narrow scope of literature that has explored the processes inherent to parent-child relationships and young adults' romantic outcomes will be covered, and the unique contributions of maternal and paternal relationships for young adults' romantic outcomes also will be discussed. Subsequently, parenting processes in divorced and remarried families will be covered. Finally, a brief overview of the literature on family structure, namely divorce and remarriage, and young adults' romantic outcomes will be discussed.

Theoretical Framework

Intergenerational Transmission – The Development of Early Adult Romantic Relationships (DEARR) Model

Bryant and Conger (2002) proposed a model that predicted how specific behavioral, cognitive, and emotional characteristics in the family of origin influenced adult offspring to behave in particular ways in their own intimate relationships. The Development of Early Adult Romantic Relationships (DEARR) model is divided into promoting versus inhibiting experiences in the family of origin, including (1) family members' positive versus negative attributions or cognitions about relationships (i.e., attitudes toward divorce, perceptions of parents' relationship); (2) behavioral interactional processes and parenting in the family of origin (i.e., warm/supportive versus hostile/coercive interactions, effective versus dysfunctional problem-solving skills, nurturant/involved versus harsh/inconsistent parenting); (3) emotional stability versus neuroticism (i.e., optimistic dispositions versus irritable and depressed moods); and (4) family of origin demographic characteristics and socioeconomic status (i.e., resources, education). Mediators include social and economic advantage versus disadvantage and individual characteristics of the young adult (i.e., personality traits). In addition, a direct link from the family of origin to attributes of the young adult couple relationship may influence young adults on indicators such as trust and love, although this linkage has yet to be tested directly. Finally, relationship success is described in terms of commitment, happiness, and overall satisfaction in young adults' romantic relationships. Results of this study supported the socialization hypothesis – that is, parenting behaviors, rather than

marital interactions or the behaviors of siblings toward each other, affected the quality of interpersonal behaviors in early adult romantic relationships. Relationship promoting experiences in the family of origin, including parental warmth, monitoring, and consistent discipline predicted romantic relationship quality (i.e., happiness, satisfaction, and commitment), and were mediated through the affective attributes of warmth and low hostility in the young adult couple relationship (Bryant & Conger, 2002). These findings rejected the observational learning, sibling socialization, and continuity hypotheses, concluding that parenting behaviors played a strong role in influencing young adults' romantic competence. In the following section, more specific information from this landmark study on the influence of parental figures on young adults' romantic indicators will be provided.

Parental Relationships and Young Adults' Romantic Outcomes

Although research exploring the impact of current parent-young adult relationships on romantic relationship quality in young adulthood is fairly sparse, a couple of research studies (i.e., Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000; Riggio, 2004) have established a foundation for how romantic relationship competence develops through affective, independence-promoting, and supportive aspects of the parent-child relationship. The following sections will discuss the evaluation of the DEARR model in further detail (i.e., Conger et al.), as well as research studies that have taken into consideration parental relationships in diverse family structures (i.e., Riggio). Articles in these sections include studies organized by romantic outcomes, including trust and intimacy, avoidance and anxiety, and communication and conflict resolution behaviors.

Much of this research also explores the impact of maternal and paternal parental figures on young adults' romantic relationship competencies.

Foundational Research

The Development of Early Adult Romantic Relationships (DEARR) model established a foundation for exploring how the family of origin contributes to the development of interpersonal competencies. To test the DEARR model, Conger, Cui, Bryant, and Elder (2000) utilized a longitudinal research project that investigated the development of early adult romantic relationships. The developmental perspective is the idea that specific characteristics and dispositions acquired in the family of origin, such as intimate communication skills, affect the course of later romantic relationships. The study was comprised of $N = 193$ romantically involved couples (M age = 20.7), with the target partner individually interviewed and videotaped in 1989 when in seventh grade, and again in 1997 along with their romantic partner in order to assess how the family of origin influenced offspring's interpersonal skills and romantic relationship quality. The family of origin characteristics were measured in terms of the parenting behaviors toward the target child, the marital interaction between the parents, sibling behavior toward the target, and target behavior toward the sibling. Parental affect, hostility and coercion, monitoring, and levels of harsh and inconsistent parenting were assessed to determine if effective parenting promoted appropriate regulation of negative affect and effective conflict management skills. Both members of the young adult couple were assessed on indicators of affect toward partner and relationship qualities of happiness, satisfaction, and commitment to the relationship by using observer ratings of interpersonal affect,

which were characterized by high warm-supportiveness as opposed to low hostility-coercion in romantic relationships. The researchers hypothesized that observed interactional processes between parents and their seventh-grade child at Time 1 would predict later behaviors when the child reached young adulthood and was involved in a romantic relationship. The researchers found that a "nurturant-involved" parenting style, as opposed to observations of parents' marital interactions or sibling interactions, directly impacted young adults' interactional styles toward dating partners in the context of romantic relationships. Specifically, parent-adolescent relationships characterized by high warmth, support, and low hostility, contributed to the development of similarly warm and supportive interpersonal styles when children reached young adulthood and were involved in romantic relationships. This study was key in suggesting that interpersonal competence in young adulthood mediated the effect of parenting style during adolescence on young adults' reports of romantic relationship quality, defined by happiness, satisfaction, and commitment. Limitations of this study included the homogenous family backgrounds (i.e., all participants were from married, two-parent families) and a lack of investigation into parenting styles within diverse family structures, the failure to distinguish between the unique contributions of mothers and fathers toward young adults' romantic relationships, and a lack of ethnic and geographic diversity within the sample. In addition, romantic relationship quality indicators were comprised of one-item global assessments, and the quality of parental relationships was assessed during early adolescence only, versus assessing the impact of current parental relationships on young adults' romantic relationship experiences.

Further, Riggio (2004) explored young adults' (*M* age = 21.4) perceptions of anxiety in romantic relationships, perceived social support, and the quality of mother- and father-young adult relationships (i.e., affect, emotional support, and facilitation of independence), as predicted by levels of parental conflict and divorce. Parents were grouped into levels of low, medium, and high conflict based on young adult children's reports of the amount and intensity of conflict in their parent's marriage. Higher levels of parental conflict were related to poorer parent-young adult relationship quality, with reports of lower affective quality, less emotional support, and lower levels of independence in young adulthood. Also, young adults that experienced higher levels of parental conflict reported fewer social supports and greater anxiety in romantic relationships. Parental divorce was associated with lower affection and less emotional support in father-child relationships; however, because most respondents lived with their biological mothers, young adults reported closer relationships with maternal figures in divorced families, as well as greater independence and lower anxiety in intimate relationships. In contrast to the young adults that were grouped into the high-conflict parent category, those with divorced parents reported a greater number of social supports. Further, for young adults from either traditional two-parent or divorced families of origin, higher anxiety in romantic relationships was significantly related to the quality of paternal relationships, whereas relationships with maternal figures were not related to relationship anxiety. This study had many limitations, including less rigorous analytic procedures (i.e., correlations and mean scores), the inability to control for custody arrangements and frequency of contact with fathers in divorced families, the absence of a

remarried family structure group, the use of retrospective reports for parental conflict, and the fact that the sample was comprised of college students only. In addition, although this study recognized both traditional two-parent and divorced family structures, the research design did not allow for replication of the Conger et al. (2000) model, thereby focusing on the impact of marital conflict and divorce on parent-child relationship quality and neglecting to take into account the unique influence of parental relationships within diverse family structures for young adult children's interpersonal outcomes.

Trust and Intimacy

It is important to study romantic relationship indicators such as intimacy and trust to clearly and consistently determine the effects of the family of origin on these pivotal relational outcomes. Three main themes have been identified as comprising intimacy, including interdependence, self-disclosure, and affection (Perlman & Fehr, 1987). Intimacy dynamics can often be traced back to the family of origin, and in particular, can be influenced by the degree of intimacy experienced within the parent-child relationship. Females typically are socialized toward an orientation of connectedness, primarily through their relationships with their mothers, whereas males are socialized toward an independent orientation (Cooper & Grotevant, 1987). Males, regardless of family structure, typically report lower levels of intimacy as compared with females (Bolgar, Zweig-Frank, & Paris, 1995).

Seiffge-Krenke (2003) explored adolescents' (age range = 13-21 years) perceptions of their self-concept and the quality of their relationships with their mothers

and fathers on dimensions of companionship, conflict, instrumental aid, satisfaction, intimacy, nurturance, affection, punishment, admiration, relative power, and reliable alliance. Young adults also reported on their perceptions of the quality of their romantic relationships with their dating partners on indicators of happiness, friendship, trust, fear of closeness, acceptance, emotional extremes, jealousy, obsessive preoccupation, sexual attraction, desire for union, desire for reciprocation, and love at first sight when they were 21 years old. Results showed that support from mothers at ages 13 and 15 was related to the development of "bonded love," defined by happiness, physical attraction, friendship, trust, and acceptance in young adults' romantic relationships at age 21. Thus, romantic relationships increased in seriousness, duration, and intimacy from early adolescence through young adulthood, with a significant increase in the characteristics of "bonded love" between the ages of 17-21. Furthermore, support from fathers at all ages was as predictive as mothers' support.

Additionally, Scharf and Mayseless (2001) investigated adolescent (*M* age = 17.5) Israeli men's ratings of the quality of their relationships with their mothers and fathers on dimensions of acceptance versus rejection and parental encouragement of independence versus overprotection, and how the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship was related to interpersonal competence in young adulthood. Interpersonal competence was assessed using the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ), defined by emotional support-giving, assertiveness, and management of interpersonal conflict. The researchers also explored how these competencies mediated young adults' capacity for intimacy, defined by closeness (i.e., self-disclosure, interpersonal disclosure, caring and affection),

separateness, and commitment (i.e., duration and quality) in romantic relationships. Young men were interviewed again four years later on their capacity for intimacy in romantic relationships. Researchers found that higher levels of parental acceptance and encouragement of independence in adolescence were associated with higher levels of interpersonal competence, which mediated the aptitude for intimacy in young adult men's romantic relationships.

Avoidance and Anxiety

Research has established that parental relationships can influence indicators such as avoidance and anxiety in the context of intimate relationships. Parental attachment is pivotal to understanding the transference of attachment to intimate relationship partners outside of the family of origin. Kenny and Donaldson (1991) examined the influence of the parent-young adult relationship and family structure variables, including levels of parents' marital conflict and family anxiety over separation, and the effect of these variables on social competence and psychological functioning (i.e., somatization, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, interpersonal sensitivity, anxiety, depression) among first-year college students. Although both males and females reported strong overall relationships with parents and viewed themselves as socially competent, females reported closer parental attachments characterized by higher affective quality and emotional support. In addition, family structure supportive of individuation was significantly related to higher levels of social competence and psychological functioning for females only. It is important to note that females reported more indices of psychological symptoms as compared to males.

Also, the male sample size was relatively small, especially in comparison to the number of variables assessed, thus parental relationships were not significant predictors of social competence or psychological symptoms for males.

Moreover, Benson, Larson, Wilson, and Demo (1993) explored individual anxiety and communication patterns (i.e., conflict, open communication) in young adults' romantic relationships. Late adolescents (*M* age = 18.8) described their perceptions of family triangulation (i.e., taking sides, feeling caught in the middle, parental disagreements), fusion (i.e., doubting parents' love, parents trying to change child's personality, worrying about parents being able to care for themselves without child's presence), and control (i.e., parents' expectations about school, work, dating, appearance, life style). Fusion in the parent-adolescent relationship was significantly associated with adolescents' anxiety, and control was moderately related to anxiety, with females reporting higher levels of anxiety. Further, fusion was associated with less open communication in intimate relationships, although anxiety mediated the effects of fusion on reports of less open communication. Similarly, adolescents' reports of experiencing less individual anxiety were associated with more open communication in romantic relationships.

Communication and Conflict Resolution Behaviors

The intergenerational transmission of communication patterns and conflict resolution styles learned in the family of origin has been widely supported by research, and in particular, these interpersonal qualities can have a profound impact on young

adults' romantic relationships when directly experienced in terms of parent-child conflict. For instance, Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring (1998) explored late adolescents' (*M* age = 21.8) perceptions of conflict resolution styles (i.e., attack, avoidance, and compromise) in their romantic relationships, which were predicted to have a relationship to young adults' reports of the same conflict resolution styles in mother/father-daughter/son dyads. Results indicated that conflict resolution styles in mother/father-late adolescent relationships mediated interparental and romantic couple attack styles. In other words, conflict between parents and adolescent children was the most influential way that adolescents learned conflict resolution styles, as opposed to observing the parents' marital relationship. The researchers explained this by asserting that the conflict styles that people experience directly (e.g., through the parent-child relationship) are more influential in having a greater impact for usage in other situations, such as romantic relationships.

In addition, Kim, Conger, Lorenz, and Elder (2001) explored how hostility (i.e., hostile, angry, critical, disapproving, rejecting, contemptuous behaviors), angry coercion (i.e., attempting to control or change another's actions or thoughts through hostility, threatening, or blaming), and antisocial behaviors (i.e., self-centered, defiant, insensitive, resistant behaviors) essentially mediated the relationship between the growth in negative reciprocal affect expressed between parents toward their young adult children, and young adults' negative affect toward their romantic partners. Results confirmed that young adults' initial negative affect expressed towards parents predicted the initial level of negative affect towards a romantic partner.

Similarly, Bartle-Haring and Sabatelli (1997) examined how emotional reactivity towards parents contributed to the development of interpersonal competence, as defined by the Interpersonal Competence Questionnaire (ICQ), measuring dimensions of initiation, negative assertion, self-disclosure, emotional support, and conflict management. The study utilized two samples of young adults (*M* age = 21.4) to investigate emotional reactivity, defined by physical and psychological withdrawal, counter-attacking and defensive behaviors, and loss of self-control by young adults toward their parents. Results indicated that higher emotional reactivity toward parents by young adults was associated with lower competence in intimate relationships. Young adults who displayed less emotional reactivity toward parents, however, were more competent in initiating activities, negatively asserting themselves, disclosing and providing emotional support in intimate relationships. Bartle-Haring and Sabatelli also found gender differences in reports of interpersonal competence in dating relationships. Overall, females reported higher interpersonal competence scores. Specifically, females scored higher on measures of negative assertion and conflict management with dating partners than did their male counterparts.

Further, Reese-Weber and Marchand (2002) examined late adolescent males' and females' (*M* age = 19.9) perceptions of conflict resolution behaviors, including attachment anxiety and depressive symptoms with mothers and fathers, and how these behaviors were related to conflict resolution behaviors used in their own romantic relationships. Results indicated that for females, both mother- and father-daughter conflict resolution behaviors predicted romantic relationship conflict resolution

behaviors, while for males, only father-son conflict resolution predicted romantic relationship conflict resolution behaviors. Depressive symptoms, but not attachment anxiety, predicted conflict resolution behaviors in romantic relationships for males. On the other hand, attachment anxiety, not depressive symptoms, predicted conflict resolution behaviors in romantic relationships for females.

Mothers, Fathers, and Young Adults' Romantic Outcomes

Many studies have explored the distinctive role of mothers and fathers during adolescence; however, a limited amount of literature exists that has specifically examined the continuing role that parents play in the lives of their young adult children, and how these parental relationships affect romantic relationship indicators during emerging adulthood. The differences that have been documented in the literature for the roles of mothers and fathers in their children's lives include interactions (i.e., frequency and content of interactions, shared time, caregiving versus play, instrumental emphasis, perceived engagement, perceived acceptance, reciprocity, conflict), affect (i.e., positive and negative emotions, closeness, emotional states of parents and adolescents), and cognitions (i.e., interpersonal perceptions, mutual relevance), which are all important to the development of romantic relationship indicators and may affect romantic relationship quality in young adulthood (Kuczynski, 2003).

Further, a review of the research confirmed that mothers tend to spend more time with their children than fathers (Miller & Lane, 1991; Russell & Russell, 1987). Mothers also identified with more of a caregiver role as compared to fathers' role in more physical play, and mothers were more likely to have conversations with their children, especially

daughters, on personal matters (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Conversely, mothers were more involved in conflict with their children, although mother-child interactions were more frequently characterized by warmth and responsiveness. Relationships with mothers were also characterized as being closer (Collins & Russell, 1991; Steinberg, 1988). Finally, children rated relationships with mothers as higher in quality than relationships with fathers, except for areas of respect and enjoyment. Further, improvements in relationship quality were greater as time went on for mother-child relationships as compared to father-child relationships (Thornton, Orbuch, & Axinn, 1995).

On the other hand, fathers have been characterized as more interested in the instrumental goals of their children (i.e., future goals and school achievements) (Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Father exchanges also have been associated with autonomy and interpersonal competence in their children. In particular, father-child relationships have been associated with self-esteem (LeCroy, 1988), gender identity and individualization (Kalter, 1987), and trust (Southworth & Schwartz, 1987). It is interesting to note the profound impact that fathers have on the development of children's interpersonal competencies considering that they are often less involved with their children as compared to mothers, especially after a divorce occurs and custody arrangements typically favor mothers. Further exploration into the processes that are unique to paternal relationships and the impact they have on young adults' romantic relationships is clearly necessary.

Summary

We know from past research that the quality of the parent-child relationship contributes to the development of young adults' romantic relationships, and parental figures may continue to play a pronounced role during emerging adulthood. Specifically, research has determined that authoritative parenting styles, defined by high warmth and nurturance, adequate monitoring and firm discipline, and low levels of hostility and low conflict lead to better outcomes for children (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000). Further, processes within divorced families, including high levels of marital conflict, may negatively contribute to the quality of the parent-child relationship. Riggio (2004) found that these young adults reported poorer quality relationships with fathers on dimensions of affect and support. Poorer relationships with fathers were also associated with higher levels of anxiety in intimate relationships regardless of family composition. We also know that children whose parents foster a sense of autonomy are more interpersonally competent in young adulthood. Many studies have linked positive, supportive, autonomous-promoting parenting behaviors to trust and intimacy in young adults' romantic relationships (Scharf & Mayseless, 2001; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003). Further, negative aspects of parent-child relationships, including a lack of individuation from the family of origin and high levels of parent-child conflict, have been associated with avoidance and anxiety in the context of young adults' intimate relationships (Benson, Larson, Wilson, & Demo, 1993; Kenny & Donaldson, 1991; Reese-Weber & Marchand, 2002). Finally, the intergenerational transmission of communication and conflictual interactions in the family of origin have been associated with young adults' interactions

in the context of relationships outside of the family. Conflict experienced directly within the parent-child relationship appears to have a greater impact on the long-term adjustment of young adult children as opposed to merely observing conflict between parents (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998). The affective tone of the parent-young adult relationship also influences young adults' romantic relationships (Kim, Conger, Lorenz, & Elder, 2001), and emotional reactivity between parents and children has been associated with young adults' interpersonal competence (Bartle-Haring & Sabatelli, 1997).

In addition, mothers and fathers continue to uniquely influence their children's lives in young adulthood. Specifically, mothers tend to have closer, more affectionate and supportive relationships with children, and greater levels of open communication with both sons and daughters, although fathers appear to have substantial influence in regards to young adults' interpersonal competencies such as trust and self-esteem, and independence-promoting behaviors and identity. It is quite interesting to note that although fathers are generally not as involved in the lives of their children, they continue to exert a strong influence in the long term, even after a divorce or remarriage occurs. Further research is clearly necessary in order to better understand the unique contributions that both maternal and paternal figures have on young adults' romantic relationships, as well as the impact of parental figures across diverse family structures, particularly for stepfamilies.

Family Structure, Parental Figures, and Romantic Relationships

The increasing divorce rate in the 1970s invoked concerns surrounding the possible negative effects of marital disruption on the long-term well-being of children (Braver & Cookston, 2003). The first research studies exploring the effects of divorce on children used two-group comparison designs with children from traditional two-parent families versus children with divorced parents. Much of this early work concluded that divorce negatively impacted children. In particular, Judith Wallerstein was one of the first researchers to explore the effects of divorce on children (see Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989; Wallerstein & Lewis, 1998). Using a non-random, clinical sample of families ($N = 57$), Wallerstein's work has been criticized for being flawed because many of the problems reported by the families she interviewed existed pre-divorce, her results could not be generalized to the entire population, and a comparison group was not used in her qualitative reports (Amato, 2003).

In contrast to these well-publicized findings of the deleterious long-term effects of divorce, recent and more sophisticated methodologies involving longitudinal designs have found small effect sizes to explain the negative impact of divorce, especially after controlling for mitigating factors such as parental education, socioeconomic status, and the greater prevalence and acceptance of divorce as a part of modern cultural norms.

However, despite the minimal differences between young adults from divorced versus traditional families of origin, recent studies continue to explore group differences, and maintain many of the original conclusions finding that children who have experienced disruption in the family of origin are at a slightly greater risk for negative

outcomes. In particular, these outcomes may manifest themselves later in life, particularly when young adults are beginning to form intimate relationships outside of the family of origin. While it is true that on average, children display better outcomes when raised in a healthy, two-parent marriage as compared to being raised by divorced parents, the vast majority of children with divorced parents are well-adjusted (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Accordingly, family structure in itself does not provide information on the processes that result in poorer child outcomes. In fact, for some children, behavioral and emotional problems manifest themselves well before parental divorce. Further, custodial parents may have a more contentious relationship with children and utilize authoritarian discipline styles (i.e., strict discipline, less affection) post-divorce. However, individual differences have been observed among divorced mothers and fathers in terms of parenting styles. Booth and Amato (1994) found that parents' marital quality as well as divorce affected the quality of relationships with children, and this finding was especially pronounced for father-daughter relationships, and in general, was more detrimental to opposite-sex parent-child relationships. Divorce was related to less support in adolescence, which was then related to less closeness and lower levels of contact in young adulthood.

Divorce and Parental Relationships

It is important to point out that much of the research that exists on parenting in single-parent and divorced families does not distinguish between post-divorce versus continuously single parents. This makes a difference because the disruption from a divorce may produce different outcomes as opposed to non-disrupted parenting from a

continuously single mother or father. Keeping this in mind, research that has explored parent-child relationships in divorced families indicated that these relationships are distinct from those relationships in two-parent families. Single-parent families post-divorce tend to use less supervision and report lower overall parent-child relationship quality (Webster, Orbuch, & House, 1995), and also have been characterized by more inconsistent discipline patterns and overall lower levels of child control (Hetherington, 1989). Moreover, children with divorced parents report less affection and lower levels of support from their single parents as compared to young adults in traditional two-parent families (Amato & Booth, 1996; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). It appears that the increased stressors associated with single-parenthood often decrease parents' abilities to sufficiently monitor and provide structure for their children, which may impact young adults' interpersonal outcomes in the long term.

Moreover, mothers tend to retain primary custody of children after a divorce, making maternal relationships especially relevant in the lives of children of divorce. Further, relationships with fathers tend to suffer more than those with mothers, because as mothers gain custody, fathers fade into the background of their child's life. Mothers and sons tend to have the most tumultuous relationships, and daughters are especially distraught if the mother remarries (Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). It is important to acknowledge that these effects are generally small and adjustment depends on the amount of time since the divorce. On average, children make a healthy adjustment to the transitions inherent to divorce. Further, when positive parenting relationships do exist in divorced family structures, this can provide a protective buffer against the impact of

divorce. For instance, Hayashi and Strickland (1998) found that when parents were accepting and promoted independence in their children earlier in life, these young adults later reported feeling more secure in their romantic relationships. Conversely, those young adults with overprotective parents and those who experienced high levels of conflict between their parents reported greater jealousy and fear of abandonment in their romantic relationships. Clearly, positive parenting processes and healthy attachments to parents, over structure alone, predicts young adults' long-term adjustment to divorce and appears to impact attachment in later romantic relationships.

Divorce and Young Adults' Romantic Outcomes

In line with the research documenting the cumulative negative effects of divorce, recent literature has also found evidence for the intergenerational transmission of divorce. In essence, children of divorce are slightly more inclined to marry earlier, report higher levels of marital dissatisfaction, and are more likely to divorce as compared to individuals with married parents (Amato, 1999, 2000; Chase-Lansdale, Cherlin, & Kierman, 1995; Wolfinger, 2000). Further, research has found that adult children of divorce hold attitudes of lower trust and commitment to the institution of marriage and may view divorce as a more acceptable option than individuals from well-functioning traditional two-parent families (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). Jacquet and Surra (2001) found that women from divorced families reported less trust and satisfaction in romantic relationships as compared to women from traditional two-parent families, and mens' perceptions of their satisfaction depended on the marital status of their partners' parents. Young adults that classified themselves in casual relationships displayed the highest

effects from their parent's divorce, suggesting that these adults enter relationships with predispositional characteristics. Additionally, young adults who have experienced their parents' divorce have reported lower levels of intimacy in relationships. Specifically, Lauer and Lauer (1991) found that young adults from divorced and unhappy traditional two-parent families displayed the highest dating rates, and those in happy traditional two-parent families reported the lowest rates of dating. The researchers suggested an "intimacy-deficit" to explain why young adults with parents in unhappy marriages may seek out more intense intimate relationships, which implies that the quality of parents' marital relationships is more predictive of children's long-term adjustment as opposed to family structure alone.

Moreover, Sprecher, Cate, and Levin (1998) found that young adults' beliefs on love depended more on the processes within their families of origin, which included traditional two-parent/happily married, traditional two-parent/unhappily married, and divorced groups. Divorce alone did not account for the differences in attitudes and attachment styles, but instead, the greatest variability was between those in the traditional two-parent/happy and divorced groups. Men in the unhappy/traditional two-parent group reported the lowest attitudes on love. In addition, pre-divorce and post-divorce conditions may impact young adults' romantic beliefs. Mahl (2001) found that the greatest variability in young adults' beliefs was accounted for by the family climate before and after divorce. It is important to acknowledge that many children benefit from parents' marital dissolution by ending exposure to high-conflict environments, and thus, divorce may lead to improved relationships within families.

Remarriage and Parental Relationships

Although the literature on stepfamilies has expanded significantly over the past decade, there is still much that is unknown about how stepfamilies function. Children's adjustment to remarriage depends on a variety of factors, including child's age at remarriage, gender of the child, and the quality of parents' marriage after divorce (Collins, Newman, & McKenry, 1995). However, stepparent relationships can be viewed as both positive (Hines, 1997) and as negative and stressful (Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). Negative outcomes include high conflict and less warmth and involvement as compared to biological parent relationships (Bray & Berger, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). Conversely, on the positive side, Hines (1997) found that stepparents provided a buffer to the disruption associated with divorce by establishing a positive relationship with stepchildren. In addition, stepchildren have reported that they often feel as though they grow up faster and are allowed more independence and responsibility, often as a result of more egalitarian and mutually supportive relationships with stepparents (Hines, 1997).

Further, Love and Murdock (2004) examined how parental attachment affected college students' psychological well-being. Young adults were asked to recall the first 16 years of their lives on areas of parental warmth and care, control, and intrusiveness in traditional and remarried families, although those with a stepparent figure only reported on the most "prominent" stepparent in their life along with their custodial biological parent, whereas individuals with traditional two-parent families reported on both biological parents. Findings revealed similar interaction effects between attachment and

well-being regardless of family type. Analyses also demonstrated higher levels of care from maternal and parental figures in traditional two-parent families, as well as a larger effect for fathers as compared to mothers, with paternal relationships more disrupted in a stepfamily environment. No differences in care were found based on stepmother or stepfather households, and overprotection was not significant based on family type. Regression analyses revealed that those in traditional two-parent families reported significantly higher levels of well-being, and Sobel tests showed that attachment partially mediated the relationship between family type and well-being.

Also, Kraft and Zuckerman (1999) explored family type (i.e., traditional two-parent, stepmother and stepfather families) and parent-child relationship quality on indicators of love, punishment-rejection, and control, and the effect of these constructs on young adults' personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, extraversion, psychoticism) with 87 college students in stepfamilies. Students in traditional two-parent families were used as a control group. Factorial ANOVAs revealed differences between young adults' ratings of parental figures in traditional two-parent and stepfamilies. Biological mothers in both traditional two-parent and stepfather families were rated higher on love than biological mothers in stepmother families. Biological fathers in traditional two-parent families were rated higher on love as compared to both stepmother and stepfather families. Males and females did not rate love differently across family structures. For ratings of punishment-rejection, biological mothers in traditional two-parent families were rated higher by males than females, and in stepfather families, females rated biological mothers higher on punishment-rejection than males. Males rated biological fathers higher on punishment-

rejection as compared with females in traditional two-parent families, and in stepmother families, biological fathers were rated higher in punishment-rejection than in traditional two-parent families. Males also rated biological fathers higher in punishment-rejection in both stepmother and stepfather families as compared to females. In stepfather families, females rated stepfathers higher on punishment-rejection as compared to males. Both males and females reported control was highest in stepmother families as compared to traditional two-parent and stepfather families.

Another study that examined relationships between biological parents and children and stepparents and stepchildren found that biological parents in stepfamilies were rated differently than biological parents in traditional two-parent families (see Fine, Voydanoff, & Donnelly, 1993). A number of dimensions were assessed, and results, though complicated, generally indicated that relationships between biological parents and children were most positive in traditional two-parent families. Children in stepfamilies tended to describe their relationships with their biological parents less positively, with some variations found depending on the type of stepfamily (i.e., stepmother or stepfather family).

Finally, Fine and Kurdek (1995) found that the association between marital quality and the parent-child relationship was stronger for the stepparent-stepchild relationship than for the biological parent-child relationship. Further, family structure alone was not related to differences in children's personality traits, but instead family processes informed child outcomes. Specifically, biological mother love was negatively correlated with psychoticism in females, and biological father punishment-rejection was

related to neuroticism for both males and females. In traditional two-parent families, biological father love was related to extraversion and sociability for females, and control was positively related to neuroticism in males. Stepfathers influenced females' outcomes only.

Remarriage and Young Adults' Romantic Relationships

The integration of stepparents into children's lives may have long-term implications on the development of romantic competencies in young adulthood, with one-third of children living in a remarried or cohabiting family before the age of 18 (Wu, Bumpass, & Musick, 2001). Research has associated the additional transitions that children face as a result of remarriage to a slight increase in the risk for divorce in adulthood, although problems are less clearly traced to remarriage as opposed to the divorce in itself. Further, stepfamilies can be more stressful than first marriages due to a lack of knowledge surrounding the negotiation of new family forms and dynamics (Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, & Dornbusch, 1993). One explanation for the potentially negative outcomes associated with remarriage may be the additional attachment relationships children form with stepparent figures. Perry (1995) documented that younger children seemed to have an easier time forming relationships with stepparents. Further, research has found that girls tend to have more trouble establishing relationships with stepparents, particularly stepfathers. Also, stepchildren are at risk for poorer adjustment and lower school-related achievement, and are more likely to experience teen pregnancy and school drop-out as compared to children from traditional

two-parent families (Hetherington, 1989; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992; Hetherington & Jodl, 1994; Vuchinich, Hetherington, Vuchinich, & Clingempeel, 1991). Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, and Roberts (1990) found that young adult sons whose custodial parents (i.e., mothers) had not remarried reported less trust in their mothers as compared to mothers who did remarry. Children whose mothers had never remarried, or who had remarried multiple times, reported more intimacy issues as compared with children from traditional two-parent families or compared with mothers that only remarried one time (Bolgar, Zweig-Frank, & Paris, 1995). Finally, Wolfinger (2000) explored the family change hypothesis, which states that the number of transitions related to family structure is more detrimental to children than is living in a single-parent home. Results indicated that parental divorce lowered young adults' commitment to relationships, and that remarriages did not offset the negative effects of divorce. It is important to note that in general, the effect sizes for the negative outcomes associated with remarriage are small.

In contrast to the increased risk for negative outcomes that have been associated with remarriage and the presence of stepparents, Aseltine (1996) found that children with a remarried custodial parent reported fewer depressive symptoms and less interpersonal problems as compared to children raised in healthy, two-parent families. Further, Hetherington and Clingempeel (1992) found little difference in outcomes between children with single, divorced parents as compared to children with remarried parents. Finally, Clark and Kanoy (1998) found that daughters with a stepfather reported similar

levels of trust and dating satisfaction in romantic relationships as compared to young adults from two-parent families.

Summary

We know from the research that parent-child relationships are affected by divorce and remarriage. Regardless of family structure, certain characteristics have been determined to constitute optimal parenting. Authoritative parenting styles, comprised of warmth, support, firm discipline and control have been associated with positive outcomes for children. However, as children emerge into adulthood, parent-child relationships transform and become more egalitarian. There is a lack of research on the effects of both parents and stepparents within the new time period known as emerging adulthood. In addition, from the sparse amount of literature that does exist, stepmothers and stepfathers appear to uniquely contribute to young adults' outcomes. Although remarriage has been associated with poorer outcomes for stepchildren, further exploration into the processes that constitute these relationships is necessary in order to determine what role, if any, stepmothers and stepfathers exert in the lives of stepchildren during emerging adulthood. Biological parent-child relationships also may be affected when stepparents are present, although further research is clearly necessary in this area. Depending on the age at remarriage, stepchildren tend to view stepparents as peer-like figures, and as they enter into young adulthood and begin to form their own romantic relationships, distinctions between the roles of biological parents and stepparents may become less clear.

The research comparing romantic outcomes across traditional two-parent, divorced, and remarried family structures appears to suggest that young adults that face

multiple transitions as children may be at an increased risk for negative outcomes in terms of the development of romantic competencies. However, family structure tells us very little about the specific processes within the family of origin that influence long-term romantic relationships. The vast majority of young adults successfully adjust to their parents' divorce and subsequent remarriage (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). Clearly, family process provides the best information pertaining to the intergenerational transmission of interpersonal competencies, and in particular, characteristics inherent to parent-child relationships within various family structures may provide insight into how interpersonal abilities develop during young adulthood.

Purpose of Study

The emerging literature on parent-child relationships during young adulthood points to the continuing influence of this relationship for young adults' beliefs about close relationships and the development of skills needed to form and maintain romantic relationships. It is crucial to understand young adults' *current* perceptions of the quality of their relationship with each of the parental figures in their lives when intimate romantic relationships are actually developing, since this is a unique time period that sets the stage for future relationships. Further research is clearly needed to delineate the factors that contribute to both negative and positive outcomes during young adulthood, and to examine in more depth various indicators of intimate relationship functioning within diverse family structures.

The current study will examine affection, independence-promoting and supportive behaviors between parents and their young adult children, and will explore how these

characteristics are related to young adults' experiences of trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety in their romantic relationships. Further, this study will examine biological parent-child relationships across traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures in order to discover how these relationships may vary within different family types and to determine how the parent-child relationship within these diverse structures is related to young adults' experiences in intimate relationships.

Research Questions

The first questions focus on dimensions of the biological parent-young adult relationship. More specifically, this study is interested in assessing dimensions of quality, as indicated by affection, independence-promoting and supportive behaviors, how these dimensions differ in mother-young adult and father-young adult relationships, and how these dimensions are related to young adult outcomes. Two research questions will be explored:

Research Question 1a: Will biological mother-young adult relationships be higher in affectionate and supportive behaviors as compared to biological father-young adult relationships, and will biological father-young adult relationships be higher in independence-promoting behaviors as compared to biological mother-young adult relationships?

Research Question 1b: Will the quality of biological mother-young adult and biological father-young adult relationships, as indicated by affectionate, independence-promoting and supportive behaviors, have a statistically significant positive association with trust and intimacy, and a statistically significant negative relationship with

avoidance and anxiety in young adults' romantic relationships? Further, will the quality of relationships with biological mothers and biological fathers uniquely contribute to young adult children's reports of trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety in intimate relationships?

The next questions focus on how the quality of the biological parent-young adult relationship differs across diverse family structures, as well as how young adults' intimate relationship outcomes differ across family structure. Two research questions will be addressed:

Research Question 2a: Will the quality of biological parent-young adult relationships differ across traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures?

Research Question 2b: Will young adults' reports of romantic relationship trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety differ across traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures?

Finally, this study will address the potentially unique processes in remarried family structures, and the contributions of both biological parents and stepparents toward young adults' relationship outcomes. Two research questions will be investigated:

Research Question 3a: In remarried family structures, will the quality of biological mother-young adult and biological father-young adult relationships, as well as stepmother-young adult and stepfather-young relationships, as indicated by affectionate, independence-promoting and supportive behaviors, have a statistically significant

positive association with trust and intimacy, and a statistically significant negative relationship with avoidance and anxiety in young adults' romantic relationships?

Research Question 3b: In addition to biological mothers and biological fathers, will the quality of relationships with stepmothers and stepfathers uniquely contribute to young adults' interpersonal outcomes, as indicated by trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety?

METHOD

Procedures

Data were collected from undergraduate and graduate students attending a large university located in the southeastern region of the United States. Young adults were given a self-report instrument with instructions, a description of the project, and a confidentiality agreement consistent with IRB protocol. Surveys were administered in classrooms by the principal investigators. The majority of questionnaire packets were administered to courses in the departments of sociology and human development and family studies.

Sample

The original sample consisted of $N = 831$ participants. The sample was limited to the selection of participants based on dating status (i.e., non-married) and those that were between the ages of 19-to-29 years due to the inadequate number of married participants and to capture the time span of young adulthood. Based on these limitations, the final sample consisted of $n = 786$ participants. The mean age of participants was 21 years ($SD = 1.57$). The sample included 514 females (65.4%, mean age = 20.9, $SD = 1.55$) and 272 males (34.6%, mean age = 21.3, $SD = 1.56$). There were 654 Caucasian Americans (83.2%, mean age = 20.9, $SD = 1.51$), 98 African Americans (12.5%, mean age = 21.4, $SD = 1.86$), and 34 participants (4.3%) reporting "other" racial backgrounds. Young adults reported on their parents' current marital status, which was categorized for analytical purposes as traditional two-parent ($n = 523$, 70%), divorced/separated without remarriage ($n = 48$, 6.4%, mean age of child at separation = 14.9, $SD = 2.71$; mean age at

divorce = 14, *SD* = 6.05) or remarried (*n* = 176, 23.6%, mean age of child at divorce = 7.63, *SD* = 5.83; mean age of child at mothers' remarriage = 11.9, *SD* = 5.76; mean age of child at fathers' remarriage = 12.7, *SD* = 5.70). Of those reporting remarriages, 49 were mother only (27.8%, mean age at remarriage = 13.6, *SD* = 6.06), 49 were father only (27.8%, mean age = 14.7, *SD* = 5.36), and 78 reported that both parents remarried (44.3%, mean age when mothers remarried = 10.9, *SD* = 5.34; mean age when fathers remarried = 11.3, *SD* = 5.55). Further, within the remarried group, the majority of young adults resided with their biological mother and stepfather prior to the age of 18 (*n* = 60, 34.1%), and 3.4% resided with their biological father and stepmother prior to age 18 (*n* = 6). In addition, one-quarter of young adults with recently remarried parents resided with both biological/adoptive parents prior to age 18 (*n* = 44, 25%), and close to one-quarter resided with their biological mother only prior to age 18 (*n* = 43, 24.4%). Finally, the majority of respondents were in a serious romantic relationship at the time of the survey (*n* = 400, 51.3%, mean age = 21.1, *SD* = 1.62; mean length of relationship = 20.3 months, *SD* = 17.49) (see Table 1 for more information).

Measures

Participants were asked questions concerning demographic variables such as age, sex, race, family structure, current dating status, and length of current relationship, as well as measures of biological parent- and stepparent-young adult relationship quality, and young adults' romantic relationship outcomes (i.e., anxiety, avoidance, intimacy, and trust) (see Table 1 for further information demographic variables).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables*

	Total Sample	Traditional	Divorced/Separated	Remarried
N	786	523 (70%)	48 (6.4%)	176 (23.6%)
Age (*SD*)	21 (1.57)	20.9 (1.49)	21.2 (1.84)	21.2 (1.58)
Sex				
Male	272 (34.6%)	172 (32.9%)	18 (37.5%)	63 (35.8%)
Female	514 (65.4%)	351 (67.1%)	30 (62.5%)	113 (64.2%)
Race				
Caucasian	654 (83.2%)	457 (87.4%)	29 (60.4%)	147 (83.5%)
African American	98 (12.5%)	41 (7.8%)	13 (27.1%)	27 (15.3%)
Other	34 (4.3%)	25 (4.8%)	6 (12.5%)	2 (1.2%)
Dating Status				
Casually dating	197 (25.1%)	138 (26.4%)	14 (29.2%)	36 (20.5%)
Seriously dating	302 (38.4%)	22 (38.6%)	20 (41.7%)	65 (36.9%)
Engaged	33 (4.2%)	19 (3.6%)	0 (0%)	12 (6.8%)
Cohabiting	51 (6.5%)	26 (5%)	4 (8.3%)	17 (9.7%)
Not dating	203 (25.8%)	138 (26.4%)	10 (20.8%)	46 (26.1%)

Age. Adolescents were asked their age in years, as well as the month in which they were born. The day of birth was not required for the purpose of maintaining participant confidentiality. The 15th day of each month was used to calculate participants' ages.

Sex. Participants were asked to indicate their sex on a single item: "What is your sex?" Responses were coded as "1 = male" and "2 = female."

Race. Participants were asked to indicate their ethnic background on a single item: "What is your ethnic/racial background or heritage with which you most identify?" For the purposes of the current study, only data from "1 = Caucasian" and "2 = African American" young adults was used due to insufficient representation for other racial/ethnic groups (i.e., Hispanic, Asian, Native American).

Family structure. The following item assessed young adults' current family structure: "Please describe your family background." Responses included, "1 = biological/adoptive parents never married," "2 = both biological parents are alive and married to each other," "3 = both biological parents are alive but separated," "4 = both biological parents are alive but divorced," "5 = my biological/adoptive mother is deceased," "6 = my biological/adoptive father is deceased," "7 = my biological/adoptive mother is remarried," "8 = my biological/adoptive father is remarried," and " 9 = other." For the purposes of this study, participants' current family situation was coded based on the following three categories: "1 = traditional two-parent," "2 = divorced/separated," and "3 = remarried." Both divorced and separated parents who did not remarry were

grouped into the "divorced" category, and those who divorced and remarried (mother and/or father) were coded as "remarried."

Further, young adults' primary residence for the majority of their life before the age of 18 was assessed by asking the following question, "Which of the following home situations did you spend the majority of your time prior to the age of 18?" Response choices included, "1 = lived with biological/adoptive parents," "2 = lived with biological/adoptive mother only," "3 = lived with biological/adoptive father only," "4 = lived with biological mother and stepfather," "5 = lived with biological father and stepmother," "6 = lived with biological mother and boyfriend/partner," "7 = lived with biological father and girlfriend/partner," and "8 = other." This question was used to determine the family situation that young adults resided in the majority of their lives for the remarried group analyses.

Dating Status. Two questions were asked to assess current dating status and length of current relationship. Dating status was determined by the following question: "You are presently 1 = casually dating; 2 = seriously dating; 3 = engaged; 4 = cohabiting; 5 = married; 6 = not dating." For the purposes of this study, participants in marital relationships were excluded. The second question, "If you are in a serious romantic relationship, how long have you been in this relationship," was recorded by length of time in months.

Parent-Young Adult Relationship Quality. The Parental Attachment Questionnaire (PAQ) is a 52-item self-reported measure that includes three subscales asking about relationships with mothers, fathers, stepmothers, and stepfathers,

respectively. The subscales allowed participants to assess parents on dimensions of affective quality, facilitation of independence, and supportive behaviors (Kenny, 1987). Mean scores were computed for each of the three subscales, and reliability estimates for each of these scales is presented in Table 2. Responses for each parental figure on the affective quality subscale (25 items: e.g., "is someone I can count on to listen to me when I feel upset," "has no idea what I am thinking or feeling," "is sensitive to my feelings and needs"), the facilitation of independence subscale (14 items: e.g., "respects my privacy," "tells me what to think or how to feel," "has trust and confidence in me"), and the support subscale (13 items: e.g., "gives me advice when I ask for it," "sees the world differently than I do," "protects me from danger and difficulty") were rated on the following 5-point Likert-type response scale: "1 = not at all," "2 = somewhat," "3 = a moderate amount," "4 = quite a bit," and "5 = very much." Responses were reverse scored for several items, with higher scores indicating greater levels of affect, independence, and support from parental figures. Reliability estimates for the subscales ranged from $\alpha = .81$ to $\alpha = .92$ for biological mothers, $\alpha = .76$ to $\alpha = .94$ for biological fathers, $\alpha = .74$ to $\alpha = .94$ for stepmothers, and $\alpha = .82$ to $\alpha = .94$ for stepfathers. Reliability estimates for overall relationship quality for biological mothers, biological fathers, stepmothers, and stepfathers were $\alpha = .95$ for each of the four parental relationships (see Table 2 for more information).

Anxiety and Avoidance. The Experiences in Close Relationships measure (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) is a 36-item inventory used to assess the adult romantic attachment characteristics of anxiety and avoidance. The anxiety subscale (18 items: e.g., "I worry about being abandoned," "I worry a fair amount about losing my partner," "If I can't get my partner to show interest in me, I get upset or angry") and the avoidance subscale (18 items: e.g., "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down," "I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners," "I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners") were coded on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "1 = disagree strongly" to "7 = agree strongly." Items were reversed coded, with higher scores on each subscale indicating greater levels of relationship anxiety and avoidance. The reliability estimates for the anxiety subscale (α = .91) and the avoidance subscale (α = .94) are presented in Table 2.

Intimacy. The Miller Social Intimacy Scale (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982) is a 17-item measure consisting of questions that assess the frequency and intensity of intimacy with a romantic partner. Questions included, "When you have leisure time how often do you choose to spend it with him/her alone," and "How much damage is caused by a typical disagreement in your relationship with him/her?" Responses were given on a 10-point Likert-type scale, ranging from "1 = very rarely" to "10 = almost always," and "1 = not much" to "10 = a great deal." Two items were reverse coded, with higher scores indicating greater levels of intimacy with romantic partners. The reliability estimate for this scale is presented in Table 2 (α = .90).

Trust. The Dyadic Trust Scale (Larselere & Huston, 1980) is an 8-item measure that assesses trust in close relationships. Participants were given the option to respond to a current or their most recent past relationship. Items included, "My partner is/was primarily interested in his/her own welfare," and "My partner is/was perfectly honest and truthful with me." Responses were given on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from "1 = strongly agree" to "7 = strongly disagree." Five items were reverse coded, with higher scores indicating a greater amount of trust in the relationship. The reliability estimate for this scale is presented in Table 2 ($\alpha = .89$).

Plan of Analysis

The purpose of this study is to examine processes inherent to parent-child relationships, including relationships between biological parents and young adult children, and when applicable stepparents and young adult children, and the effect of parental figures on young adults' interpersonal outcomes in traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures. To test Research Question (RQ) 1a, will biological mother-young adult relationships be higher in affectionate and supportive behaviors as compared to biological father-young adult relationships, and will biological father-young adult relationships be higher in independence-promoting behaviors as compared to biological mother-young adult relationships, paired t-test analyses will be completed in order to compare group means to determine if there are significant differences on young adults' ratings of relationship quality with biological mothers and biological fathers.

To test RQ 1b, will the quality of biological mother-young adult and biological father-young adult relationships, as indicated by affectionate, independence-promoting and supportive behaviors, have a statistically significant positive association with trust and intimacy, and a statistically significant negative relationship with avoidance and anxiety in young adults' romantic relationships, Pearson-product correlations will be completed to determine the strength and direction of relationships between parent-young adult relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes for the total sample. Further, in order to determine if the quality of relationships with biological mothers and biological fathers uniquely contribute to young adult children's reports of trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety in intimate relationships, hierarchical regression analyses will be used.

To answer Research Question 2a, will the quality of biological parent-young adult relationships differ across traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures, one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) will be used to assess whether young adults from traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures differ on dimensions of parental relationship quality with biological mothers and biological fathers.

To test RQ 2b, will young adults' reports of romantic relationship trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety differ across traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures, one-way ANOVA will be used to compare across groups on indicators of romantic competencies.

For Research Question 3a, in remarried family structures will the quality of biological mother-young adult and biological father-young adult relationships, as well as stepmother-young adult and stepfather-young adult relationships, as indicated by affectionate, independence-promoting and supportive behaviors, have a statistically significant positive association with trust and intimacy, and a statistically significant negative relationship with avoidance and anxiety in young adults' romantic relationships, Pearson-product correlations will be completed to determine the strength and direction of relationships between parent-young adult relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes.

To test RQ 3b, in addition to the contribution of biological mothers and biological fathers toward young adults' romantic relationship outcomes, will the quality of relationships with stepmothers and stepfathers affect stepchildren's interpersonal outcomes, as indicated by trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety, hierarchical regression analyses will be used in order to determine the contributions of the quality of relationships for both biological parents and stepparents on young adults' romantic outcomes. All statistical analyses will be performed using SPSS 12.0 for Windows.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive statistics were completed for the total sample, and also for the sample split by traditional, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures. These statistics are presented in Table 1. In addition, reliability estimates, mean scores, and standard deviations for all scales and subscales are presented in Table 2. Also, t-tests were completed to determine mean levels of trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety for young adults that were currently in a romantic relationship as compared to those who were not in a romantic relationship at the time of the survey. Results indicated that young adults in a current romantic relationship reported significantly higher levels of trust ($t = 11.86$, $p < .001$) and intimacy ($t = 13.55$, $p < .001$) and significantly lower levels of avoidance ($t = -10.90$, $p < .001$) and anxiety ($t = -.3.64$, $p < .001$) as compared to young adults that were not in a romantic relationship.

Research Question 1a: Comparison of Biological Mothers and Biological Fathers on Parental Relationship Quality

The first research question investigated whether biological mother-young adult relationships would be higher in affectionate and supportive behaviors as compared to biological father-young adult relationships, and whether biological father-young adult relationships would be higher in independence-promoting behaviors as compared to biological mother-young adult relationships. Paired t-test analyses compared group

means for biological mothers and biological fathers on the three relationship quality indicators, and found significant differences on affection ($t = 8.74$, $p < .001$) and support ($t = 9.65$, $p < .001$). As expected, biological mothers were rated significantly higher on affection ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .65$) as compared with biological fathers ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .75$). In addition, biological mothers were rated significantly higher on supportive behaviors ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .61$) as compared with biological fathers ($M = 3.54$, $SD = .64$). Contrary to expectations, young adult children reported no significant differences on levels of independence-promoting behaviors for biological mothers ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .72$) and biological fathers ($M = 3.91$, $SD = .69$) (see Table 3 for further details on paired t-test analyses).

Table 2. *Reliability Estimates of Scales, Mean Scores, and Standard Deviations for Parent-Young Adult Relationship Quality and Romantic Indicators by Traditional, Divorced/Separated, and Remarried Family Structures*

Variable	Reliabilities			Traditional (n = 523)		Divorced/Separated (n = 48)		Remarried (n = 176)	
	N	Items	α	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Biological Mother (1-5 scale)									
Overall Quality	676	52	.95	3.96	.56	3.83	.64	3.83	.64
Affective Quality	705	25	.92	4.11	.62	3.96	.75	3.98	.72
Independence	726	14	.89	3.92	.71	3.91	.70	3.89	.78
Source of Support	727	13	.81	3.73	.57	3.51	.70	3.46	.67
Biological Father (1-5 scale)									
Overall Quality	630	52	.95	3.89	.57	3.37	.74	3.52	.63
Affective Quality	666	25	.94	3.97	.67	3.31	.92	3.54	.81
Independence	687	14	.86	3.97	.67	3.69	.73	3.76	.71
Source of Support	690	13	.76	3.65	.59	3.19	.67	3.23	.66
Stepmother (1-5 scale)									
Overall Quality	72	52	.95	-	-	-	-	3.38	.70
Affective Quality	75	25	.94	-	-	-	-	3.36	.89
Independence	83	14	.86	-	-	-	-	3.71	.81
Source of Support	85	13	.74	-	-	-	-	3.12	.62
Stepfather (1-5 scale)									
Overall Quality	72	52	.95	-	-	-	-	3.53	.67
Affective Quality	75	25	.94	-	-	-	-	3.59	.82
Independence	83	14	.86	-	-	-	-	3.82	.76
Source of Support	91	13	.82	-	-	-	-	3.17	.68
Avoidance (1-7 scale)	702	18	.94	2.91	1.08	3.06	1.04	3.01	1.04
Anxiety (1-7 scale)	692	18	.91	3.69	1.02	3.82	1.00	3.67	.99
Social Intimacy (1-10 scale)	734	17	.90	8.12	1.26	7.98	1.14	8.17	1.21
Dyadic Trust (1-7 scale)	758	8	.89	4.88	1.50	4.97	1.25	5.11	1.35

Table 3. *Paired T-Test Comparing Biological Mothers and Biological Fathers on PAQ Variables of Affection, Independence, and Support*

Scale = 1 – 5	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	Sig.
Biological Mother Affection	718	4.08	.65	8.74	.00***
Biological Father Affection	718	3.85	.75		
Biological Mother Independence	711	3.92	.72	.45	.65
Biological Father Independence	711	3.91	.69		
Biological Mother Support	718	3.67	.61	9.65	.00***
Biological Father Support	718	3.54	.64		

*** $p < .001$, two-tailed.

Research Question 1b: Biological Mothers, Biological Fathers, and Young Adults' Romantic Relationship Indicators

The next research questions investigated the association between biological parent-child relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes, as well as the unique contributions of maternal and paternal relationships on young adults' intimate relationships. Specifically, young adults' reports of affection, independence-promoting and supportive behaviors with biological parents were expected to be positively associated with trust and intimacy, and negatively associated with avoidance and anxiety in young adults' romantic relationships. Pearson-product correlations were performed to determine the strength and direction of relationships between parent-young adult relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes. As expected, significant positive relationships were found between ratings of biological mother affection and independence and young adults' romantic relationship trust and intimacy, and significant negative relationships were displayed with young adults' avoidance and anxiety. Specifically, biological mother affection was positively associated with trust ($r = .11$, $p < .01$) and intimacy ($r = .24$, $p < .01$), and negatively associated with avoidance ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = -.15$, $p < .01$). Similarly, biological mother independence-promoting behaviors were positively related to trust ($r = .10$, $p < .01$) and intimacy ($r = .17$, $p < .01$), and negatively related to avoidance ($r = -.12$, $p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = -.17$, $p < .01$). Contrary to expectations, ratings of biological mothers' supportive behaviors were not significantly associated with trust or anxiety, although as expected, biological

mothers' support had a significant positive relationship with intimacy ($r = .18$, $p < .01$) and a significant negative relationship with avoidance ($r = -.24$, $p < .01$).

Similarly, ratings of biological fathers' affection and independence-promoting behaviors displayed a significant positive association with romantic relationship trust and intimacy, and a significant negative association with avoidance and anxiety. Specifically, biological fathers' affection was positively related to trust ($r = .14$, $p < .01$) and intimacy ($r = .16$, $p < .01$), and negatively related to avoidance ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$). In addition, ratings of biological fathers' independence-promoting behaviors were positively related to trust ($r = .15$, $p < .01$) and intimacy ($r = .13$, $p < .01$), and negatively related to avoidance ($r = -.16$, $p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = -.27$, $p < .01$). Finally, ratings of biological father support were not significantly related to trust or anxiety in romantic relationships, although fathers' support did have a significant positive relationship with intimacy ($r = .13$, $p < .01$) and a significant negative relationship with avoidance ($r = -.22$, $p < .01$) in the context of young adults' romantic relationships. Both biological mother and biological father relationship quality indicators revealed similar patterns of association with young adults' romantic outcomes (see Table 4 for further information).

Further, the unique contributions of both biological mothers and biological fathers on young adults' reports of trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety were assessed. Hierarchical regression analyses were used in order to determine if biological mothers and biological fathers distinctly impacted young adults' romantic relationships. Before completing the analyses, correlations were computed to determine the relationships

between participant demographics, biological mother and biological father affection, independence, and support, and young adults' romantic relationship indicators (see Table 4 for more information). Due to the high intercorrelations between the parental variables and in order to simplify the variables used in the analyses, the decision was made to combine maternal affection, independence, and support, as well as paternal affection, independence, and support into respective global measures of overall relationship quality for biological mothers and for biological fathers. For biological mothers, correlations between the global parental relationship quality variable and young adults' romantic relationship indicators demonstrated a significant positive relationship with trust ($r = .09$, $p < .05$) and intimacy ($r = .23$, $p < .01$), and had a significant negative association with avoidance ($r = -.21$, $p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = -.14$, $p < .01$). Similarly, biological fathers' overall relationship quality had a significant positive relationship with trust ($r = .13$, $p < .01$) and intimacy ($r = .17$, $p < .01$), and had a significant negative association with avoidance ($r = -.23$, $p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = -.24$, $p < .01$). The reliability estimates for the global relationship quality scales were $\alpha = .95$. Further, initial correlation analyses indicated that age at divorce/separation was not significantly related to the romantic relationship indicators of trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety, and therefore, was not used in subsequent regression analyses. However, age, sex, race, and length of relationship (i.e., relationship status) were significantly correlated with the relationship indicators, and therefore, were included in subsequent regression analyses as controls.

In the hierarchical regression analyses, the first step was entered using age, sex, race, and relationship status as controls. For step two, biological mothers' and biological

fathers' overall relationship quality measures were entered. Lastly, family structure was entered in the regression analyses to determine if family type had a significant impact on young adults' relationship outcomes beyond parental relationship quality. Due to the results from the mean level comparisons of parental relationship quality that no found significant differences between divorced/separated and remarried family structures (see Table 6), the decision was made to code family structure as a dichotomous variable in the regression analyses (0 = nontraditional, 1 = traditional).

For the relationship outcome of trust, the control variables of age, sex, race, and relationship status accounted for 6% of the variance. Further, sex ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$) and race ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .001$) reached statistical significance. The parenting quality variables predicted an additional 2% of the variance, with biological father relationship quality demonstrating a significant association with young adults' romantic relationship trust ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). In addition, family structure predicted an additional 1% of the variance beyond the parenting variables ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .05$). There was a significant positive interaction effect between biological father relationship quality and family structure ($\beta = .74$, $p < .05$). Upon further investigation, biological father relationship quality had a significant association with trust in traditional two-parent families only ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$) and predicted an additional 5% of the variance in this model. No effects were found for nontraditional family structures. For the relationship outcome of intimacy, the control variables predicted 9% of the variance. Both sex ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$) and race ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .05$) reached statistical significance. Parental relationship quality predicted an additional 3% of the variance, with biological mother relationship quality demonstrating

a significant positive relationship with young adults' romantic intimacy ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$). For the relationship indicator of avoidance, the control variables predicted 11% of the variance, with the variables of age ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$), sex ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .01$), race ($\beta = .10$, $p < .05$), and relationship status ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .001$) reaching statistical significance. Neither maternal or paternal relationship quality was significantly associated with young adults' reports of romantic relationship avoidance. Finally, for romantic relationship anxiety, the parenting variables accounted for an additional 8% of the variance beyond the control variables, with biological father relationship quality reaching statistical significance ($\beta = -.28$, $p < .001$) (see Table 5 for further information).

Table 4. *Correlations Between Demographics, Biological Mother and Biological Father Affection, Independence, Support, and Romantic Relationship Indicators*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Age															
2. Sex	-.14**														
3. Race	.11**	-.04													
4. Family Structure	-.10**	.04	-.16**												
5. Relationship Status	.12*	.04	.05	.01											
6. Age at Divorce	-.03	-.07	-.03	-	.09										
7. Bio Mom Affection	-.01	.13**	-.01	.10*	-.01	.02									
8. Bio Mom Independence	.00	.08*	-.06	.02	.01	.13	.77**								
9. Bio Mom Support	-.06	.14**	.01	.18**	-.04	-.03	.66**	.44**							
10. Bio Dad Affection	-.04	.06	-.15**	.29**	.01	-.10	.50**	.39**	.38**						
11. Bio Dad Independence	.01	-.01	-.07	.15**	.02	-.06	.46**	.56**	.32**	.72**					
12. Bio Dad Support	-.07*	.10*	-.09*	.30**	-.05	-.09	.47**	.30**	.83**	.63**	.43**				
13. Trust	-.01	.08*	-.14**	-.05	-.10*	-.10	.11**	.10**	-.01	.14**	.15**	.01			
14. Intimacy	-.05	.21**	-.12**	.01	.02	-.05	.24**	.17**	.18**	.16**	.13**	.13**	.44**		
15. Avoidance	.06	-.08*	.12**	-.05	-.17**	.01	-.21**	-.12**	-.24**	-.22**	-.16**	-.22**	-.35**	-.63**	
16. Anxiety	-.08*	.04	-.00	-.02	-.08	.02	-.15**	-.17**	-.01	-.25**	-.27**	-.03	-.28**	-.06	.16**

* $p < .05$, two-tailed. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Table 5. *Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Romantic Relationship Indicators by Biological Mother-Young Adult and Biological Father-Young Adult Overall Relationship Quality*

	Trust					Intimacy					Avoidance					Anxiety				
Steps:	*b*	*SE*	*β*	R^2	$R^2\Delta$	*b*	*SE*	*β*	R^2	$R^2\Delta$	*b*	*SE*	*β*	R^2	$R^2\Delta$	*b*	*SE*	*β*	R^2	$R^2\Delta$
1. Age	-.00	.05	-.00	.06	.06***	-.04	.03	-.06	.09	.09***	.11	.03	.17***	.11	.11***	-.07	.04	-.10	.02	.02
Sex	.36	.16	.12*			.49	.11	.24***			-.32	.11	-.15**			.05	.13	.02		
Race	-.78	.23	-.18***			-.36	.16	-.12*			.33	.17	.10*			-.11	.18	-.03		
Relationship Status	-.01	.00	-.09			.00	.00	.03			-.01	.00	-.19***			-.00	.00	-.07		
2. Bio Mom Rel Quality	-.00	.14	-.00	.07	.02*	.20	.10	.13*	.12	.03***	-.14	.10	-.09	.14	.03**	-.07	.11	-.04	.10	.08***
Bio Dad Rel Quality	.37	.15	.17*			.12	.10	.08			-.19	.11	-.12			-.48	.12	-.28***		
3. Family Structure	-.34	.16	-.12*	.09	.01*	-.06	.11	-.03	.13	.00	.10	.12	.05	.14	.00	.11	.13	.05	.10	.00

* $p < .05$, two-tailed. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed. *** $p < .001$, two-tailed.

Research Question 2a: Parent-Young Adult Relationship Quality and Family Structure

The next research question focused on the quality of biological parent-young adult relationships in traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were used to assess whether young adults from either traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, or remarried family structures reported differences in dimensions of parental relationship quality with biological mothers and biological fathers. Results indicated that relationships with biological mothers differed significantly by family structure on levels of support ($p < .001$). Specifically, Scheffe post hoc tests revealed that young adults with married, biological parents reported a significantly higher level of support from biological mothers ($M = 3.73$, $SD = .57$) as compared to young adults with remarried parents ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .67$). There were no significant differences in ratings of biological mother support between young adults with married parents and divorced/separated parents and no significant differences between divorced/separated and remarried parents on ratings of supportive behaviors from biological mothers. Further, young adults reported no significant differences in affection and independence-promoting behaviors for biological mothers across traditional, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures.

Looking at relationships with biological fathers, there were significant differences in levels of affection ($p < .001$), independence-promoting ($p < .001$), and supportive behaviors ($p < .001$) across the three family structures. Specifically, Scheffe post hoc tests confirmed that young adult children from traditional two-parent families reported significantly higher levels of affection with biological fathers ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .67$) as

compared to young adults with divorced/separated (M = 3.31, SD = .92) and remarried parents (M = 3.54, SD = .81). In addition, young adults from two-parent married families reported significantly higher levels of independence-promoting behaviors from biological fathers (M = 3.97, SD = .67) as compared to young adult children with divorced/separated (M = 3.69, SD = .73) and remarried parents (M = 3.76, SD = .71). Lastly, young adults with traditional two-parent married parents reported significantly higher levels of support from biological fathers (M = 3.65, SD = .59) as compared to young adult children with divorced/separated (M = 3.19, SD = .67) and remarried parents (M = 3.23, SD = .66). There were no significant differences between young adults with divorced/separated and remarried parents on reports of biological fathers' levels of affection, independence-promoting and supportive behaviors (see Table 6 for additional information).

Research Question 2b: Young Adults' Romantic Outcomes and Family Structure

The next research question focused on young adults' reports of romantic relationship trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety across traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures. ANOVA analyses were used to compare across groups on romantic relationship indicators. Findings revealed no significant differences between traditional, divorced/separated, and remarried groups based on young adults' reports of romantic trust [F (2,726) = 1.66, p = .19 (ns)], intimacy [F (2,729) = .46, p = .63 (ns)], avoidance [F (2,738) = .86, p = .42 (ns)], and anxiety [F (2,738) = .43, p = .65 (ns)] in intimate relationships (see Table 7 for further information).

Table 6. *One-Way ANOVA Comparing Biological Mothers' and Biological Fathers' PAQ Variables of Affection, Independence, and Support in Traditional, Divorced/Separated, and Remarried Family Structures*

	Traditional			Divorced/Separated			Remarried						
Scale = 1 – 5	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	Sig.	Scheffe Post-Hoc	
Biological Mother Affection	518	4.11	.62	44	3.96	.75	157	3.98	.72	2.90	.06		
Biological Mother Independence	518	3.92	.71	44	3.91	.70	156	3.89	.78	.14	.87		
Biological Mother Support	518	3.73	.57	44	3.51	.70	157	3.46	.67	13.05	.00***		2
Biological Father Affection	518	3.98	.67	43	3.31	.92	145	3.54	.81	33.49	.00***	1	2
Biological Father Independence	518	3.97	.67	43	3.69	.73	140	3.76	.71	7.23	.00***	1	2
Biological Father Support	518	3.65	.59	43	3.19	.67	145	3.23	.66	34.35	.00***	1	2

Note. For Scheffe Post-Hoc test: Contrast #1: traditional vs. divorced/separated; Contrast #2: traditional vs. remarried; Contrast #3: divorced/separated vs. remarried.

*** $p < .001$, two-tailed.

Table 7. *One-Way ANOVA Comparing Romantic Indicators in Traditional, Divorced/Separated, and Remarried Family Structures*

	Traditional			Divorced/Separated			Remarried				
	N	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*N*	*M*	*SD*	*F*	Sig.
Avoidance (1 – 7 scale)	518	2.91	1.08	48	3.06	1.04	175	3.01	1.04	.86	.42
Anxiety (1 – 7 scale)	518	3.69	1.02	48	3.82	1.00	175	3.67	.99	.43	.65
Trust (1 – 7 scale)	511	4.88	1.50	46	4.97	1.25	172	5.11	1.35	1.66	.19
Intimacy (1 – 10 scale)	512	8.12	1.26	48	7.98	1.14	172	8.17	1.21	.46	.63

Research Question 3a: Parental Relationships and Young Adults' Romantic Outcomes in Remarried Family Structures

This research question focused on relationships in remarried families only. Specifically, affectionate, independence-promoting, and supportive behaviors with biological parents, as well as stepparents were expected to be positively associated with trust and intimacy, and negatively associated with avoidance and anxiety in young adults' romantic relationships. Pearson-product correlations were performed to determine the strength and direction of relationships between parent-young adult relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes. Findings indicated that the quality of parental relationships were associated with young adults' romantic indicators in the hypothesized direction, although fewer significant relationships were found as compared with biological parents for the total sample. Contrary to expectations, biological parent relationship quality indicators were not significantly associated with young adults' romantic outcomes in the remarried subgroup, with the exception of maternal affection. Specifically, young adults' ratings of biological mother affection were positively related to young adults' reports of romantic relationship intimacy ($r = .17$, $p < .05$). For stepmothers, affection appeared to be the only relationship quality indicator that was related to young adults' romantic relationship anxiety. Specifically, ratings of stepmother affection were negatively associated with young adults' romantic relationship anxiety ($r = -.24$, $p < .05$). Further, stepfather affection and independence-promoting behaviors were positively associated with intimacy and negatively associated with avoidance. Specifically, ratings of stepfather affection were positively related to intimacy

(r = .28, p < .01) and negatively related to avoidance (r = -.38, p < .01). Similarly, young adults' ratings of stepfather independence-promoting behaviors were positively related to intimacy (r = .22, p < .05) and negatively related to avoidance (r = -.23, p < .05). Finally, ratings of stepfather support were negatively associated with young adults' romantic relationship avoidance (r = -.29, p <. 01) (see Table 8 for further information).

Research Question 3b: Biological Mothers, Biological Fathers, Stepmothers, Stepfathers, and Young Adults' Romantic Outcomes in Remarried Family Structures

In addition to Research Question 3a, which investigated the relationship between parental figures and young adult children's romantic relationship competencies in remarried family structures, RQ 3b tested whether the quality of relationships with stepmothers and stepfathers, in addition to biological mothers and biological fathers, would uniquely contribute toward young adults' interpersonal outcomes, as indicated by trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety. Hierarchical regression analyses were used in order to determine the contributions of relationships with both biological parents and stepparents on romantic relationship indicators in remarried family structures. Again, correlation analyses were completed to determine whether age at divorce and age at remarriage were significantly associated with young adults' romantic relationship competencies. Neither variable had a significant effect on young adults' romantic relationship outcomes, and therefore were not used in subsequent analyses. In addition, due to the high intercorrelations between parental relationship quality variables and in order to simplify the variables used in the analyses, the decision was made to combine affection, independence, and support into a global measure of overall parental

relationship quality. This was done for biological mothers, biological fathers, stepmothers, and stepfathers, respectively. Correlations between the global parental relationship quality variables and the romantic relationship indicators displayed a significant positive association with intimacy for biological mothers ($r = .17$, $p < .05$) and stepfathers ($r = .26$, $p < .05$), and demonstrated a significant negative association with avoidance for stepfathers ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$). The reliability estimates for these scales were $\alpha = .95$ (see Table 8 for more information).

In the hierarchical regression analyses ($n = 90$), the control variables of age, sex, race, and relationship status were entered on the first step. For step two, biological mother relationship quality and biological father relationship quality indicators were entered into the regression. For step three, stepmother and stepfather relationship quality indicators were entered into the regression equation. For trust, the control variables predicted 13% of the variance, with both sex ($\beta = .22$, $p < .05$) and race ($\beta = -.22$, $p < .05$) reaching statistical significance. The biological parenting quality indicators and the stepparent quality indicators did not predict a significant amount of additional variance. For intimacy, the control variables predicted 10% of the variance, with race reaching statistical significance ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .05$). The biological parenting variables did not predict a significant amount of additional variance. However, the stepparenting variables predicted 9% additional variance beyond biological parents, with stepfather relationship quality reaching statistical significance ($\beta = .39$, $p < .01$). For avoidance, the control variables and the biological parent indicators did not predict a significant amount of additional variance toward young adults' relationship avoidance. However, the

stepparent quality indicators predicted 20% additional variance, with stepfather relationship quality demonstrating a significant negative relationship with young adults' romantic relationship avoidance ($\beta = -.49$, $p < .001$). Finally, for anxiety, none of the variables reached statistical significance in the remarried sample (see Table 9 for more information).

Table 8. *Correlations Between Demographics, Bio Mother, Bio Father, Stepmother, and Stepfather Affection, Independence, Support, and Romantic Relationship Indicators in Remarried Families*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1. Age																						
2. Sex	-.11																					
3. Race	.07	-.15																				
4. Rel Stat.	.23*	-.03	.08																			
5. Age at Divorce	-.04	-.05	-.08	.01																		
6. Age Mom Rem.	.08	-.11	.05	.22	.72**																	
7. Age Dad Rem.	.26**	-.02	.07	-.16	.61**	.39**																
8. Bio Mom Aff.	.04	.13	-.04	-.25*	.02	-.04	.19															
9. Bio Mom Ind.	.02	.20*	-.19*	-.14	.15	.18	.26**	.80**														
10. Bio Mom Sup.	-.01	.05	.09	-.20	-.06	-.16	.02	.64**	.42**													
11. Bio Dad Aff.	-.03	-.00	-.14	-.07	-.11	-.01	.09	.25**	.17*	.11												
12. Bio Dad Ind.	.05	-.11	.08	.20	-.04	.01	.22*	.22*	.19*	.07	.65**											
13. Bio Dad Sup.	-.02	-.01	.04	-.13	-.13	-.21*	.07	.36**	.21*	.77**	.53**	.28**										
14. Stepmom Aff.	-.12	-.13	-.08	.03	.13	.20	.06	.23*	.18	.07	.47**	.39**	.16									
15. Stepmom Ind.	.01	-.14	.02	.19	.15	.22	.29*	.28*	.19	.14	.42**	.52**	.22*	.82**								
16. Stepmom Sup.	-.15	.06	-.02	-.11	-.06	-.19	.01	.34**	.32**	.77**	.40**	.29**	.83**	.45**	.42**							
17. Stepdad Aff.	.11	.10	-.01	-.06	-.10	-.02	.12	.55**	.43**	.40**	.22*	.39**	.34**	.23	.34*	.41**						
18. Stepdad Ind.	.05	.10	.00	-.26	-.01	.19	.30*	.45**	.50**	.25*	.22	.34**	.29*	.24	.41**	.38**	.77**					
19. Stepdad Sup.	-.01	.04	.07	-.17	-.25*	-.26*	-.10	.53**	.31**	.89**	.12	.27*	.76**	.12	.26	.82**	.65**	.40**				
20. Trust	-.09	.20**	-.13	-.03	-.01	-.02	-.11	-.03	-.03	-.10	.00	.01	-.13	-.13	-.16	-.18	.05	.06	-.07			
21. Intimacy	-.07	.27**	-.10	.01	-.04	.04	-.02	.17*	.15	.11	-.10	-.08	-.12	-.07	-.02	-.08	.28**	.22*	.14	.42**		
22. Avoidance	.08	-.06	.11	-.12	.02	-.05	-.03	-.08	-.09	-.14	-.05	-.16	-.04	-.04	-.08	-.15	-.38**	-.23*	-.29**	-.33**	-.61**	
23. Anxiety	-.09	.03	-.01	-.16	-.16	-.01	-.03	-.05	-.11	.07	.01	-.12	.15	-.24*	-.21	.04	-.11	-.04	.01	-.06	-.06	.09

Table 9. *Hierarchical Regression Analyses Predicting Romantic Relationship Indicators by Biological Mother-Young Adult, Biological Father-Young Adult, Stepmother-Young Adult, and Stepfather-Young Adult Overall Relationship Quality in Remarried Families*

	Trust					Intimacy					Avoidance					Anxiety				
Steps:	*b*	*SE*	*β*	R^2	$R^2\Delta$	*b*	*SE*	*β*	R^2	$R^2\Delta$	*b*	*SE*	*β*	R^2	$R^2\Delta$	*b*	*SE*	*β*	R^2	$R^2\Delta$
1. Age	-.06	.08	-.08	.13	.13*	-.09	.06	-.16	.10	.10*	.09	.06	.16	.07	.07	-.03	.07	-.05	.03	.03
Sex	.63	.30	.22*			.26	.20	.13			-.17	.20	-.08			-.11	.24	-.05		
Race	-.75	.36	-.22*			-.54	.24	-.21*			.30	.24	.12			.06	.29	.02		
Relationship Status	.00	.01	-.01			.00	.01	.08			-.01	.01	-.11			-.01	.01	-.15		
2. Bio Mom Relationship Quality	-.15	.26	-.08	.13	.00	.03	.17	.02	.15	.05	.30	.18	.22	.08	.01	-.12	.21	-.08	.06	.04
Bio Dad Relationship Quality	-.12	.24	-.06			-.22	.16	-.14			.16	.17	.10			.21	.20	.13		
3. Stepmom Relationship Quality	.03	.23	.02	.14	.01	.01	.15	.01	.25	.09**	-.19	.15	-.14	.27	.20***	-.21	.18	-.15	.10	.04
Stepdad Relationship Quality	.24	.31	.11			.62	.21	.39**			-.80	.21	-.49***			-.24	.25	-.14		

* $p < .05$, two-tailed. ** $p < .01$, two-tailed. *** $p < .001$, two-tailed.

DISCUSSION

This study utilized intergenerational transmission theory and the Development of Early Adult Romantic Relationships (DEARR) model (Bryant & Conger, 2002) with the purpose of addressing three sets of goals: (1) to examine the continuing impact of maternal and paternal parental figures on young adults' romantic relationships; (2) to investigate the processes inherent to parent-young adult child relationships and the effect of parenting quality on romantic relationship outcomes in diverse family structures; and (3) to explore how the quality of relationships with both biological parents and stepparents were associated with young adults' reports of intimate relationship indicators. Specifically, this study examined affection, independence-promoting and supportive behaviors for parental figures as reported by their young adult children, and how these behaviors were related to young adults' experiences of trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety in their romantic relationships. Further, this study explored biological parent-child relationships across three family structures, traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried families, and how these relationships varied within different family types to ultimately determine how parental figures were related to young adults' experiences in intimate relationships.

Biological Mothers, Biological Fathers, and Young Adults' Romantic Outcomes

The current study found support for the continuing influence of parental figures in young adults' lives, and specifically, that both maternal and paternal figures exerted a positive influence on young adult children's romantic relationships through the quality of the parent-child relationship, as defined by affection, independence-granting, and support. To begin, this study found that young adults perceived biological mothers as higher on affection and support as compared with biological fathers. These findings supported the research citing that children often report higher relationship quality with their mothers as compared to their fathers (Kawaguchi, Welsh, Powers, & Rostosky, 1998; Miller & Lane, 1991; Russell & Saebel, 1997; Thornton, Orbuch, & Axinn, 1995; Valery, O'Connor, & Jennings, 1997). However, young adults did not perceive differences between biological mothers and biological fathers on independence-promoting behaviors. This was a more unexpected finding, as previous research has found that fathers tend to promote greater autonomy and individuation in their children as compared to mothers (Kalter, 1987; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). However, the current study found that differences between parents in terms of autonomous-promoting behaviors may not be as pronounced during the young adult years. As previously noted, the majority of existing research explores parent-child relationships during adolescence, when independence from the family is especially pronounced and fathers have a more active role in the lives of their children in terms of autonomy-granting behaviors. When children reach young adulthood and possibly move away from home to attend college, as was the case with the current sample, mothers and fathers may not occupy a distinctive

role in promoting independence for their children due to separate residence status inducing a sense of physical independence from parents.

In addition, parallel associations were observed for young adults' ratings of biological mother and biological father relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes. Specifically, significant positive relationships were found between biological mother and biological father affection and independence and young adults' romantic relationship trust and intimacy and significant negative relationships were found with young adults' avoidance and anxiety. Contrary to expectations, ratings of biological mothers' and biological fathers' supportive behaviors were not significantly associated with trust or anxiety, although as expected, ratings of biological mothers' and biological fathers' support had a significant positive relationship with intimacy and a significant negative relationship with avoidance.

Upon further exploration into the unique contributions of biological mothers and biological fathers for young adults' romantic relationships outcomes, perceived relationship quality with biological fathers demonstrated a positive association with young adults' romantic relationship trust, although the relationship was significant in traditional two-parent families only. In addition, perceived relationship quality with biological mothers demonstrated a significant positive relationship with young adults' romantic intimacy, and the quality of relationships with biological fathers had a significant negative relationship with young adults' reports of romantic anxiety. Neither the relationship with biological mothers or biological fathers was uniquely associated with young adults' reports of relationship avoidance.

Previous research has supported many of the above findings. Specifically, both biological mother and biological father support has been associated with trust and intimacy in the context of romantic relationships (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998; Seiffge-Krenke, 2003), although in the current study biological mother and biological father support was related to intimacy only. Further, past research has linked both biological mother and biological father independence to young adults' reports of greater romantic intimacy (Scharf & Mayseless, 2001) and less relationship anxiety (Benson, Larson, Wilson, & Demo, 1993; Kenny and Donaldson, 1991). One explanation for the finding that trust was not associated with maternal or paternal support may lie in the fact that trust is more relationship-specific, and thus shaped more by current romantic relationship experiences over family of origin factors.

From the current findings, it is evident that biological mothers and biological fathers continue to play a small, but pivotal role in young adult children's lives during emerging adulthood. Young adults reported higher relationship quality with biological mothers, and young adults' perceptions of this relationship were related to the positive relationship indicator of intimacy. Conversely, perceptions of the quality of relationships with biological fathers were associated with the negative relationship indicator of anxiety. In addition, ratings of the quality of relationships with biological fathers were linked with romantic relationship trust in traditional two-parent families only. This finding is not particularly surprising considering that biological fathers typically are not as close with their children after divorce or remarriage. We can conclude from the above findings that biological fathers more strongly impacted romantic relationships as compared to

biological mothers during young adulthood, and thus, it is important to stress the continuing involvement of biological fathers in children's lives, particularly in divorced and remarried family structures.

Parenting Processes and Young Adults' Romantic Relationships in Diverse Family Structures

In the current study, young adults reported differences in the quality of relationships with parents across traditional two-parent, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures, although they did not perceive differences in levels of trust, intimacy, avoidance and anxiety in romantic relationships. Specifically, young adults perceived the quality of biological father relationships as higher on levels of affection, independence, and support in traditional two-parent families as compared with young adults from both divorced/separated and remarried family structures. Further, young adults perceived the quality of relationships with biological mothers higher on support in traditional two-parent families as compared with remarried families only. However, young adults did not perceive differences in the quality of their relationships with biological mothers on indicators of affection and independence-promoting behaviors across traditional, divorced/separated, and remarried family structures. Finally, no differences were found for young adults' perceptions of parenting quality between divorced/separated and remarried groups. An explanation for these findings may lie in the fact that support is more relationship-specific to young adults' relationships with biological mothers in traditional two-parent families as compared to young adults with remarried parents, which may have implications for young adults' romantic relationships.

In addition, affection and independence-promotion were not perceived differently across family structures by young adult children, which again may have implications for young adults' romantic relationships.

In support of the above findings, the existing literature has found that parent-young adult relationships are impacted by family structure, with father-child relationships perceived as more positive in traditional, two-parent families as opposed to divorced/separated and remarried family structures (Fine, Voydanoff, & Donnelly, 1993; Love & Murdock, 2004). In addition, research has documented that parenting styles in divorced and remarried family structures have the potential to be more negative in comparison to two-parent married families (Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). The reason for these differences in parenting may largely be due to custody arrangements after marital disruption. Children with divorced parents typically reside with their mothers, while noncustodial fathers tend to become less involved in their child's life following a divorce, especially if a poor co-parenting relationship exists (Booth & Amato, 1994; Riggio, 2004). However, perceived support from biological mothers was perceived as higher by young adults with married parents, implying that maternal relationships may be impacted as a result of remarriage.

Further, the current study found no significant differences between traditional, divorced/separated, and remarried groups based on young adults' reports of trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety in intimate relationships. While past research has alluded to differences in young adults' romantic outcomes on indices of trust, commitment, intimacy, and overall satisfaction in relationships based on family structure

(Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Jacquet & Surra, 2001; Lauer & Lauer, 1991; Wolfinger, 2000), recent statistically sophisticated research techniques have revealed that when differences do occur, effect sizes are small. Although on average, children display better outcomes when raised in a healthy, two-parent family as compared to divorced or remarried family structures, the literature supports that the vast majority of children with divorced parents are well-adjusted (Kelly & Emery, 2003). It appears from the current study that parenting processes within diverse family structures, as compared to family structure alone, are more predictive of children's interpersonal competencies. For instance, existing research found that when divorced parents were accepting and promoted independence in their children earlier in life, young adults later reported feeling more secure and less anxious and avoidant in their romantic relationships (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998). In fact, the presence of a stepparent in remarried family structures may ameliorate the negative effects of family disruption. For example, daughters with a stepfather have reported similar levels of trust and dating satisfaction in romantic relationships as compared to young adults from traditional two-parent families (Clark & Kanoy, 1998). As the majority of the current sample is comprised of stepfather-stepdaughter relationships, these findings may be evident in the current research.

Clearly, positive parenting processes and healthy attachments to parents, over structure alone, more accurately predicted children's long-term adjustment to divorce and appeared to impact attachment in later romantic relationships. The current study found that parent-child relationship quality was perceived as more positive in traditional two-parent families, particularly with biological fathers. However, these findings did not

appear to impact young adults' romantic outcomes, as no differences were noted for young adults' perceptions of trust, intimacy, avoidance, and anxiety across groups. This may be because current romantic relationship experiences impact young adults' romantic relationships beyond the influence of parental figures. Further, recent research has found the greatest variability for parenting processes within groups, rather than comparing across family structures (Sprecher, Cate, & Levin, 1998). In this study, processes within groups provided more specific information related to child outcomes, and thus, more research is necessary that explores variability in family process and how these processes are related to outcomes within traditional two-parent, divorced, and remarried family structures.

Biological Parents, Stepparents, and Young Adults' Romantic Outcomes in Remarried Families

Within the remarried sample, the current study found that biological parents generally did not impact young adults' romantic relationships, with the exception of young adults' perceptions of maternal affection, which were positively related to young adults' romantic relationship intimacy. Alternatively, the quality of relationships with stepparents was significantly related to young adults' romantic outcomes. For stepmothers, young adults' perceptions of affection were negatively related to young adults' romantic relationship anxiety. Further, young adults' perceptions of stepfather affection and independence-promoting behaviors were positively associated with intimacy, and perceptions of stepfather affection, independence, and support were negatively associated with avoidance. Neither the quality of stepmother relationships or

stepfather relationships was related to young adults' romantic trust. Clearly, stepfathers had the most impact on young adults' romantic outcomes in remarried families.

Upon further exploration into the unique contributions of biological mothers, biological fathers, stepmothers, and stepfathers on young adults' romantic outcomes, biological parents did not uniquely impact young adults' romantic relationships in remarried family structures. These results must be interpreted with caution, as the remarried sample was relatively small and young adults' relationships with biological parents may yield more pronounced results if a larger sample with less variability was available. Instead, only stepfathers had a significant association with young adults' intimacy and avoidance. For trust and anxiety, none of the parenting variables reached statistical significance.

The above findings are quite intriguing, especially in light of the fact that no known research exists that explores the direct impact of stepparents on biological parent-child relationships and the effect these relationships have on the development of children's interpersonal competencies (Fine & Kurdek, 1995). However, similar to the current findings, children in stepfamilies have described relationships with biological parents less positively as compared to those in traditional two-parent families (Bray & Berger, 1993; Fine, Voydanoff, & Donnelly, 1993; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). In addition, the spillover from the quality of the biological mother-stepfather relationship may have effectively impacted young adults' romantic relationship indicators, with the positive remarriage relationship serving as a positive influence on the parent-child relationship. Further, relationships with biological parents, primarily mothers, may be

impacted as a result of remarriage, or it may be that the unexpected relationship with stepfathers made an even larger impact on young adults' perceptions of their relationship with this parental figure. Clearly, more research is necessary to explore how processes within remarried families impact young adults' romantic outcomes.

The current research found support for parenting processes over family structure in best predicting child outcomes. Unexpectedly, although relationships with biological parents did not display a significant association with young adults' romantic outcomes in remarried families, these findings support existing research stating that relationships with stepparents can potently impact young adult outcomes (Hines, 1997). Interestingly, in the remarried sample, stepfathers were related to intimacy and avoidance, and in the total sample, biological fathers were related to trust and anxiety. Further research into the mechanisms that explain these connections is necessary in order to best understand and evaluate the present findings.

Study Limitations

Several limitations existed in the current study, and therefore, results must be interpreted with caution. Although the size of the total sample was fairly large, the divorced/separated group was comparably small (n = 48). The remarried group had certain limitations as well, including the small sample size for the analyses (n = 90), as well as the mixed composition of the group, including respondents who reported residing for the majority of their lives with biological mothers and stepfathers (34.1%, n = 60) and 3.4% (n = 6) resided with biological fathers and stepmothers before the age of 18. Although residing with biological mothers is a frequent custody arrangement that is

commonly documented in existing research, additional exploration into the processes inherent to biological father-stepmother families is necessary. The complexities of the remarried sample were further convoluted by the fact that close to half of young adults with stepparents reported living with either their biological mother only (n = 43, 24.4%) or both biological/adoptive parents prior to age 18 (n = 44, 25%). The fact that young adults may not have actually resided with stepparent figures may have impacted results. Further, the current study was comprised of a majority of female participants (n = 514, 65.4%) due to the selective nature of the sample (i.e., participants were students from female-dominated social science departments). Again, a majority of females in a college sample is normative, although future research should attempt to include an equal ratio of male participants to female participants. As noted, the sample was limited to a homogenous geographic background using a college sample, and an attempt to utilize more representative samples in the future is necessary. Further, the sample was not ethnically diverse in nature, with the majority of respondents identifying themselves as Caucasian (n = 654, 83.2%). Parenting processes may differ within varied racial backgrounds, which may have impacted the current results. Finally, there were methodological limitations to the current study. The data were self-reported by young adult children to ascertain their perceptions of parental relationship quality and the research design was cross-sectional in nature. Ideally, longitudinal data from both parents and children would have more accurately gauged the processes inherent to intergenerational transmission, and offered a more causal explanation for how parenting processes influenced young adults' romantic relationship outcomes. Lastly, averaging

the three dimensions of parental relationship quality into one single global indicator may have compromised the results of this study both analytically and conceptually. Much research has documented the unique dimensions that comprise parenting styles and has supported studying these dimensions separately. In the current study, although affection and independence were highly correlated, support was not as highly correlated with the other dimensions. These findings may indicate that the variables used to measure relationship quality were not validly measuring three distinct dimensions, and further consideration into how to measure parenting processes is needed in future research.

Future Research

In addition to the limitations noted above, further research is necessary to examine the unique contributions that stepparents may provide concerning young adults' interpersonal relationship competence. The debate continues over the long-term impact of divorce and remarriage on young adult children's romantic outcomes. The current research suggests that stepparent figures may serve protective roles in the lives of children, especially in regards to the long-term development of romantic relationships. As illustrated in the current study, family structure alone provided little information on the processes that contributed to the development of romantic relationship competence in young adulthood. Clearly, family processes must be studied in further detail using sophisticated, longitudinal designs and rigorous analytic procedures. Future research should also follow the example set by Conger et al. (2000) and utilize more observational techniques to capture family interactions, as well as report data from the perception of parents, young adult children, and young adults' romantic partners in order to obtain a

fuller picture. For instance, qualitative data may provide additional in-depth details that explain the complexities of processes in diverse family structures.

Conclusion

The current study found support for the theory of intergenerational transmission by suggesting that the family of origin continues to influence children's romantic outcomes during emerging adulthood through the quality of the parent-child relationship. This research extends the Development of Early Adult Romantic Relationships (DEARR) model (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000) by supporting the idea that parents' behavioral interactions and processes, including warmth, monitoring, and supportiveness influence young adults' interactions in romantic relationships and young adults' reports of romantic relationship outcomes. Clearly, family processes *within* diverse family structures provided more specific information on how the parent-young adult relationship was related to romantic relationship indicators. In the current study, the quality of relationships with parental figures, including dimensions of affection, independence-promoting and supportive behaviors were consistently associated with trust, intimacy, avoidance and anxiety in young adults' romantic relationships.

Although the current study found a stronger association between father-young adult relationship quality and young adults' romantic outcomes, divorce and remarriage appeared to impact young adults' perceptions of the quality of parental relationships, particularly with biological fathers. Specifically, relationship quality with biological fathers in traditional family structures was significantly higher on levels of affection, independence, and support as compared to both divorced/separated and remarried family

structures. However, in remarried families, a positive relationship with stepfathers was related to higher intimacy and less avoidance in young adults' intimate relationships. This appears to confirm the research suggesting that stepparents can impact child outcomes. Indeed, stepparents may function as complementary, and at times, supplemental figures in young adults' lives. Young adults may find stepparents easier to talk with as opposed to biological parents on matters concerning intimate relationships, and therefore, the stepparent relationship may have greater influence on romantic outcomes despite the presence of biological parents in young adults' lives. Another explanation may be that stepfathers view stepchildren as their own biological children and choose to invest social capital in their stepchildren (see Cooksey & Fondell, 1996). Although the majority of respondents in the current sample were females and past research has alluded to difficulties in the stepfather-stepdaughter relationship (i.e., Vuchinich, Hetherington, Vunchinich, & Clingempeel, 1991), current results supported the positive impact of father figures on young adults' romantic outcomes regardless of family structure.

The current research study has made a contribution to existing literature exploring the impact of the family of origin on young adults' romantic competencies. Specifically, a lack of research exists on the contributions of current parental relationships for young adults' romantic competencies during the new developmental time period of emerging adulthood. This research demonstrated that parental figures continue to occupy an influential role in the lives of their children by having an impact on romantic relationships. Further, multiple indices of both positive (i.e., trust and intimacy) and

negative (i.e., avoidance and anxiety) romantic outcomes were explored, as opposed to past research that has used one-item global indicators of intimate relationship satisfaction (e.g., Conger, et al. 2000). The current research also explored family structure and parenting processes within diverse family backgrounds for both maternal and paternal parental figures, and was able to utilize more sophisticated analyses as compared to past research (e.g., Riggio, 2004) in order to determine the unique variance that maternal and paternal parental figures contributed towards young adults' romantic outcomes. The existence of a remarried sample allowed this study to further investigate processes within diverse family structures, which expanded on previous research that used group comparisons across family structures only (e.g., Wallerstein et al.). Results supported that father figures in particular impacted young adults' romantic outcomes. Although divorce and remarriage appeared to affect young adults' perceptions of the quality of relationships with biological fathers, positive stepfather figures appeared to alleviate some of the negative effects associated with divorce and remarriage.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL FORM

AUBURN UNIVERSITY

Auburn University, Alabama 36849

Office of Human Subjects Research
307 Samford Hall

Telephone, 334-844-5966
Fax: 334-844-4391

March 18, 2005

MEMORANDUM TO: Jacqueline Pfiteger
Human Development and Family Services

PROTOCOL TITLE: "Family Structure, Parental Figures and Young Adults' Romantic Relationships"

IRB File: #05-055 EX 0503

APPROVAL DATE: March 15, 2005
EXPIRATION DATE: March 14, 2006

The referenced protocol was approved "Exempt" from further review under 45 CFR 46.101 (b)(4) by IRB procedure on March 15, 2005. You should retain this letter in your files, along with a copy of the revised protocol and other pertinent information concerning your study. If you should anticipate a change in any of the procedures authorized in protocol #05-055 EX 0503, you must request and receive IRB approval prior to implementation of any revision. Please reference the above IRB File in any correspondence regarding this project.

If you will be unable to file a Final Report on your project before March 14, 2006, you must submit a request for an extension of approval to the IRB no later than February 27, 2006. If your IRB authorization expires and/or you have not received written notice that a request for an extension has been approved prior to March 14, 2006, you must suspend the project immediately and contact the Office of Human Subjects Research for assistance.

A Final Report will be required to close your IRB project file.

If you have any questions concerning this Board action, please contact the Office of Human Subjects Research at 844-5966.

Sincerely,

Niki L. Johnson, JD, MBA, Director
Office of Human Subjects Research
Research Compliance Auburn University

cc: Marilyn R. Bradbard
Donna L. Sollie

APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Parental Attachment Questionnaire (Kenny, 1987)

Affective Quality of Relationships

D.1. Is someone I can count on to listen to me when I feel upset.
D.2. Supports my goals and interests.
D.4. Understands my problems and concerns.
D.14. Has no idea what I am feeling or thinking.
D.16. Is too busy to help me.
D.20. Ignores what I have to say.
D.21. Is sensitive to my feelings and needs.
D.22. Is disappointed in me.
D.26. Is someone whose expectations I feel I have to meet.
D.28. I looked forward to seeing.
D.29. With whom I argued.
D.30. With whom I felt comfortable.
D.31. Who made me angry.
D.32. I wanted to be with all the time.
D.33. Towards whom I felt cool and distant.
D.34. Who got on my nerves.
D.35. Who made me feel guilty and anxious.
D.36. I liked telling about what I have done recently.
D.37. For whom I felt feelings of love.
D.38. I tried to ignore.
D.40. I liked being with.
D.41. I didn't want to tell what has been going on in my life.
D.52. I continue to feel unsure of myself.
D.53. I feel that I would have gotten more understanding from a friend.
D.55. I am disappointed with their response.

Parents as Facilitators of Independence

D.5. Respects my privacy.
D.6. Limits my independence.
D.8. Takes me seriously.
D.9. Likes me to make my own decisions.
D.10. Criticizes me.
D.11. Tells me what to think or how to feel.
D.13. Is someone I can talk to about anything.
D.15. Lets me try new things out and learn on my own.
D.17. Has trust and confidence in me.
D.18. Tries to control my life.
D.23. Gives me advice whether or not I want it.

D.24. Respects my decisions, even if they don't agree.
D.25. Does things for me which I would rather do for myself.
D.27. Treats me like a younger child.

Parents as Source of Support

D.3. Sees the world differently than I do.
D.7. Gives me advice when I ask for it.
D.12. Gives me attention when I want it.
D.19. Protects me from danger and difficulty.
D.39. To whom I told my most personal thoughts and feelings.
D.44. I look to my family for help.
D.46. I think about what my parental figures might say.
D.47. I work it out on my own, without help from anyone.
D.48. I talk it over with a friend.
D.49. I know that my family will know what I should do.
D.50. I ask my family for help if my friends can't help.
D.51. I feel more sure of my ability to handle the problems on my own.
D.54. I feel sure that things will work out as long as I follow my parent's advice.

Experiences in Close Relationships Inventory (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998)

Avoidance

G.1. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.
G.3. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.
G.5. Just when my partner starts to get close to me I find myself pulling away.
G.7. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.
G.9. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.
G.11. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
G.13. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
G.15. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.
G.17. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
G.19. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.
G.21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.
G.23. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.
G.25. I tell my partner just about everything.
G.27. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
G.29. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.
G.31. I don't mind asking romantic partners for comfort, advice, or help.
G.33. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
G.35. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.

Anxiety

G.2. I worry about being abandoned.
G.4. I worry a lot about my relationship.
G.6. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.
G.8. I worry a fair amount about losing my partner.
G.10. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him/her.
G.12. I often want to merge completely with romantic partners, and this sometimes scares them away.
G.14. I worry about being alone.
G.16. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
G.18. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
G.20. Sometimes I feel that I force my partners to show more feelings, more commitment.
G.22. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
G.24. If I can't get my partner to show interest in men, I get upset or angry.
G.26. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
G.28. When I'm not involved in a relationship, I feel somewhat anxious and insecure.

G.30. I get frustrated when my partner is not around as much as I would like.
G.32. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
G.34. When romantic partners disapprove of me, I feel really bad about myself.
G.36. I resent it when my partner spends time away from me.

Social Intimacy Scale (Miller & Lefcourt, 1982)

H.1. When you have leisure time, how often do/did you choose to spend it with him/her alone?
H.2. How often do/did you keep very personal information to yourself and do not share it with him/her?
H.3. How often do/did you show him/her affection?
H.4. How often do/did you confide very personal information to him/her?
H.5. How often are/were you able to understand his/her feelings?
H.6. How often do/did you feel close to him/her?
H.7. How much do/did you like to spend time alone with him/her?
H.8. How much do/did you feel like being encouraging and supportive to him/her when he/she is unhappy?
H.9. How close do/did you feel to him/her most of the time?
H.10. How important is/was it to you to listen to his/her very personal disclosures?
H.11. How satisfying is/was your relationship with him/her?
H.12. How affectionate do/did you feel towards him/her?
H.13. How important is/was it to you that he/she understands your feelings?
H.14. How much damage is/was caused by a typical disagreement in your relationship with him/her?
H.15. How important is/was it to you that he/she be encouraging and supportive to you when you are unhappy?
H.16. How important is/was it to you that he/she show you affection?
H.17. How important is/was your relationship with him/her in your life?

Dyadic Trust Scale (Larselere & Huston, 1980)

I.1. My partner is/was primarily interested in his/her own welfare.
I.2. There are/were times when my partner cannot be trusted.
I.3. My partner is/was perfectly honest and truthful with me.
I.4. I feel/felt that I can/could trust my partner completely.
I.5. My partner is/was truly sincere in his/her promises.
I.6. I feel/felt that my partner does/did not show me enough consideration.
I.7. My partner treats/treated me fairly and justly.
I.8. I feel/felt that my partner can/could be counted on to help me.