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THE EFFECTS OF INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION ON RELATIONSHIP  
OPTIMISM AND ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE

By

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Dissertation

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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Missoula, MT

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The Effects of Intimate Relationship Education on Relationship Optimism and Attitudes toward Marriage

Chairperson: John Sommers-Flanagan

Abstract Content:

This study evaluated the effects of relationship education on undergraduate students' optimism about relationships and attitudes toward marriage. Participants included undergraduate students enrolled in an Intimate and Family Relations class and students enrolled in a comparison class at the University of Montana. Students were assessed during the first week of the fall semester, 2008, and again at the conclusion of fall semester, 2008. Students' attitudes and optimism towards marriage and intimate relationships were assessed using the Optimism about Relationships scale (Carnelly & Janoff-Bulman, 1992), the Family-of-Origin scale (Hovestadt, Anderson, Piercy, Cochran, & Fine, 1985), and the Marital Attitude Scale (Braaten & Rosèn, 1998). This study focused on whether taking an Intimate and Family Relations class had differential effects on students whose parents previously divorced as compared with students from non-divorced families. Analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were used to determine assessment score differences from pre- to post-test between students in the Intimate and Family Relations class and students in the comparison class. Conclusions and recommendations for future research are provided.

## Acknowledgments

This completed work would not have come to be without the support, encouragement, and thoughtful editing of my chair, John Sommers-Flanagan. The Counselor Education faculty saw something in me that I did not see in myself, and that is what has brought me to this place in my professional life. Special thanks to John Sommers-Flanagan, Rita Sommers-Flanagan, and Cathy Jenni for the kind words, constant encouragement, and belief in my potential.

I would not have come this far without the love and support of my husband, Eric. He has been walking beside me through this entire journey, and I am so excited to embark on our next adventure. As long as he is by my side, I can do anything.

I would like to thank my parents, Berni, Walt, and Stacey, for their constant support. No matter what, I know that I can count on them to support me in so many ways towards achieving my goals. I have always counted on their love and they are always eager to tell me how proud they are of my accomplishments. Finally, I want to thank my friends who have been there through thick and thin. Without all of these people, I do not believe that I would be half the person I am today.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2005, divorce rates were estimated at 48 percent (United States Census Bureau, 2001). Although there are a great number of marriages that withstand the test of time, young people entering into marriage today may not have the preparation necessary to improve their chances of having a long-lasting and healthy relationship. In particular, for those whose family history places them at greater risk of relationship dissolution, the optimism that their relationships can be successful may be lacking.

Premarital and marital counseling are available for most who seek them, either through religious organizations or independent helping professionals. However, many couples may choose not to seek these services, perhaps because of cost, ambivalence towards counseling, perceived lack of necessity, or other reasons. Relationship education programs or experiences that target young people who may or may not be involved in an intimate relationship are not as well known or prevalent as premarital or marital counseling. These programs could play a pivotal role in the development of healthy relationship skills, realistic relationship expectations, healthy attitudes towards marriage, and increased relationship optimism in young people, especially young people who, due to personal experiences with familial divorce, may have more negative beliefs about marriage.

There are undoubtedly many factors contributing to young adults' attitudes towards marriage, relationship optimism, and relationship skill acquisition. These factors include, but are not limited to, the media, parental influence, a person's own relationship experiences, and gender.

### *Media Influences*

The American media consistently portrays marriage as involving little commitment. For example, many if not most media personalities appear to engage in spontaneous unions and even more spontaneous dissolutions. Immunity from the messages society and the media send regarding intimate relationships, marriage, and divorce, especially to adolescents and young adults, is impossible. Unstable marriages are not only accepted within the mainstream media, they seem to be the norm.

Not only do the media portray marriage and intimacy as unstable, researchers suggest that television and movies may contribute to unrealistic and idealized beliefs about marriage. Segrin and Nabi (2002) conducted a study examining college students' beliefs about marriage in association with the amount and genre of television viewed. They found that genre of television viewed (romantic comedies, soap operas) was positively associated with unrealistic and idealized beliefs about marriage. While the authors cautioned that young people holding already unrealistic beliefs about marriage may seek this kind of media exposure, it is perhaps more likely that media input either contributes to unrealistic and idealized marital beliefs, or, at the very least, inhibits the development of more sophisticated and realistic relationship attitudes.

### *Parental Influences*

Parental influence on children's beliefs and attitudes about marriage is paramount, and is a substantial focus of the current study. Children naturally experience the relationships that their caregivers cultivate, both with the children themselves and with significant others. These relationships contribute to the foundation of relationship beliefs that a child will develop and carry into adult relationships. The attachment literature

supports this suggestion, conceptualizing that the ways in which adults bond with romantic partners are very similar to the ways in which adults bonded with their primary caregivers as young children (Stackert & Bursik, 2003). Bowlby (1973, p. 235) is quoted in Hazan and Shaver (1987) as stating that “. . . confidence in the availability of attachment figures, or lack of it, is built up slowly during the years of immaturity – and that whatever expectations are developed during those years tend to persist relatively unchanged throughout the rest of life” (p. 512).

Bowlby’s position is supported in Hazan and Shaver’s (1987) findings that adults falling into the three categories of secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent attachment styles demonstrated marked differences in their self-report of experiences in loving relationships. Specifically, adults rated as securely attached reported their relationships as happy, friendly and trusting, and reported longer term relationships as compared to adults fitting into the other two categories. Adults identified as having an avoidant attachment style characterized their style in loving relationships as fearing intimacy, experiencing emotional highs and lows, and feeling jealous. Those categorized as having an anxious/ambivalent attachment style experienced love as involving obsession, extreme sexual attraction, jealousy, emotional extremes, and a strong desire for closeness and reciprocation. In their study, Hazan and Shaver found that parental divorce did not predict attachment style of offspring, however, it was found that participants’ perception of their relationship with their parents and their perception of their parent’s relationship with each other was predictive of attachment style.

### *Personal Relationship Experiences*

While attachment style seems quite influential in the development of beliefs and expectations of loving relationships, an individual's direct, personal experiences in loving relationships also has been shown to have an effect on the formation of relationship attitudes and beliefs. For example, Carnelly and Janoff-Bulman (1992) conducted a study looking at attachment styles and personal experiences in love relationships. As mentioned previously, attachment style and relationship with parental figures influenced participants' optimism and beliefs about love. However, the older the participant, the more beliefs were based on personal experiences in loving relationships, while beliefs about marriage specifically were influenced by parental relationships. This makes intuitive sense because as individuals age their experiences continue to grow, expanding their individual perceptions of the world and conceptualizations of their relationships with others.

### *The Influence of Gender*

It is important to also consider the potentially influential effects of gender on the development and maintenance of relationship beliefs and attitudes. Prior research has suggested that men may hold more unrealistic expectations for relationships and marriage than women, and also have more reluctance to modify their beliefs when presented with information targeted at fostering more realistic attitudes (Lin & Raghurir, 2005). There are a number of explanations as to why this is so. Lin and Raghurir suggest from their review of prior research in the area of relationship beliefs that one possible explanation for men's unrealistic optimism in regards to relationships is their perception of control. Control and optimism have been linked in that those perceiving themselves as having

more control over a situation are more optimistic of the outcome (McKenna, 1993). Men have been shown to demonstrate perceptions of control and overconfidence (Barber & Odean, 2001), potentially leading them to be unrealistic in their beliefs and expectations about relationships.

Differences in the kinds of relationships that men and women foster are another potential explanation for why men tend to demonstrate unrealistic optimism about relationships and women tend to be more realistic. Women typically have closer, more intimate relationships with others than men, which could serve to provide women with specific knowledge about the relationships their friends and family cultivate (Shek, 1995), while men appear to be generally more independent and less knowledgeable and/or influenced by outside sources (Cross & Madson, 1997).

A recent study conducted with a Taiwanese population evaluated the differences in relationship optimism between men and women (Lin & Raghurir, 2005). In contrast to prior research, both men and women in this study were unrealistically optimistic about their future relationships, although men did appear slightly more optimistic than women. Further, men demonstrating unrealistic optimism about relationships were quite reluctant to change their beliefs after being given information obtained by the researchers from the *Government Statistical Reports: Monthly Bulletin of Statistics* about divorce prevalence and a percentage of happy marriages, while women were more likely to change their expectations. It was found, however, that men and women who exhibited low levels of optimism about the success of their future relationships were more influenced by the base rate information given, and subsequently altered their beliefs, exhibiting more optimism about their future relationships at the conclusion of the study (Lin & Raghurir, 2005).

While this study was conducted with a Taiwanese population, the authors suggest that unrealistic optimism about relationships is a universal phenomenon that exists in both individualistic and collectivist cultures, although perhaps to differing degrees.

The Virginia Longitudinal study of over 1,400 families over the past 30 years supports the prior finding that men are more unrealistic in their relationship beliefs than women:

Women approach love as informed consumers; metaphorically speaking, they kick the tires, look under the hood, run the motor, check the mileage. Women love love; but being practical minded, not enough to ignore potential defects. . .

Despite a reputation for practicality, males come off as hopeless romantics. They are much more prone to fall head-over-heels in love . . . and also more prone to idealize the object of their affection. If the bodywork is good and the grille pretty, often a man will buy on the spot, no questions asked (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002, p. 24).

### *The Researcher*

Having experienced my own parents' divorce as a child, I have a particular interest in how this occurrence affects beliefs about romantic relationships and marriage. I have approached my own marriage with what I believe to be a realistic optimism, however, there were times in my life that I wondered about the permanence of marriage while still desiring to achieve the "happily ever after" ideal. I pursue this issue out of a natural curiosity about the effects of parental divorce on adult romantic relationships, and about the ways in which people change, or don't change their beliefs as a result of participating in relationship education courses. I also hope to support others in my field

in offering relationship education to all who are interested, because I believe that regardless of the results of this study, relationship education is an important subject to teach. Whatever our past histories may be, I believe that all individuals can benefit on some level from participating in opportunities that allow for personal growth.

### *Research Purpose*

Based on media input, parental influences, personal experiences, and gender, all humans develop implicit and explicit beliefs about romantic relationships and marriage. These developed or existing beliefs may exert a positive or negative influence on an individual's ability to initiate and maintain a successful marriage. The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether a semester-long intimate and family relationships course influenced or changed existing relationship beliefs among college students.

Several marriage and family researchers have recognized the importance of relationship education for young adults and have implemented relationship education programs targeting beliefs about intimate relationships and marriage (Adler-Baeder, Kerpelman, Schramm, Higginbotham, & Paulk, 2007; Nielsen, Pinsof, Rampage, Solomon, & Goldstein, 2004; Hawkins, Carroll, Doherty, & Willoughby, 2004; Laner & Russell, 1994). Hawkins et al. (2004) suggest there is: “. . . the need to take marriage education beyond a valuable helping profession – and even an expanding educational service integrated into the human services – to a vibrant social movement” (p. 547).

The current study examines the effects of intimate and family relationship education on relationship optimism and attitudes towards marriage, particularly focusing on how relationship education affects the beliefs of young adults whose parents were divorced as children. Factors contributing to acquired relationship beliefs and attitudes,

such as familial factors and the media were also examined in hopes that realistic beliefs about marriage could be fostered.

## Chapter II: Review of Literature

Trends in the development and research of relationship education are summarized below, with a special focus on the repeated finding that young adults hold unrealistic and idealized expectations for marriage. Research reporting the idealistic nature of adults' expectations for marriage, and relationship education programs aimed at fostering more realistic beliefs about marriage are reviewed. Other factors that may play a role in the effectiveness of relationship education are also addressed.

Following the relationship education and marriage expectation literature reviews, existing literature on adult children of divorce is summarized, specifically focusing on the intergenerational transmission of divorce that is extensively researched in the marriage and family field. Optimism and attitudes towards marriage among adult children of divorce are discussed, followed by a brief overview of the findings that relationship ideals appear different among adult children of divorce from relationship ideals held by adults from non-divorced families. The long-term effects of parental divorce on adult relationships are considered, followed by multicultural considerations in the development of relationship attitudes and beliefs.

The design and implementation of existing relationship education programs provided the foundation from which the current Intimate and Family Relations course was built. Input from educators in the counseling field was paramount in the development of the current study, as well as a working knowledge of what kinds of relationship education designs foster the most student responsiveness. The attitudes towards marriage and optimism about relationships among adult children of divorce are a particular focus of the current study, as family history may predispose this population to a different

perspective on relationships and marriage than the family history of their counterparts from non-divorced homes.

### *Relationship Education Research*

Although relationship education programs are underutilized and understudied, a number of relationship education programs have been developed and evaluated for their effectiveness. Adler-Baeder and colleagues (2007) assessed the effects of a relationship education program with adolescents and found a significant increase in relationship knowledge from pre-test to post-test. These researchers acknowledge that, to date, research on the effects of relationship education, especially with adults, is lacking.

Existing programs that focus on educating young people about relationships provide minimal quantitative data evaluating the effects of the programs on participants. For example, Nielsen et al. (2004) developed a course for undergraduate students titled Marriage 101. In developing Marriage 101, researchers explored what students wanted to learn, incorporated student's wants with information from trusted professionals in the field about what students should learn about relationships, and used this information to develop an instructional and experiential course offered at the university level. Researchers collected qualitative and anecdotal data suggesting that this approach was not only informative, but practical and useful. Nielsen et al. conclude that “. . . marriage education is an important, value-laden, emotionally-charged subject that is not well-taught at home, but that should not be neglected by educators solely because it is value-laden, emotionally-charged, or otherwise difficult to teach” (p. 492).

### *Unrealistic Marriage Expectations*

Relationship education research and research examining relationship belief formation have identified the problem of young adults holding unrealistic and inflated expectations for marriage (Hawkins et al., 2004; Laner & Russell, 1994; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Sharp & Ganong, 2000). Researchers acknowledge that while young adults may have unrealistically inflated expectations for marriage, at the same time, optimism for relationship success may be low as a result of parental divorce and other familial factors (Gabardi & Rosèn, 1991; Hawkins et al., 2004; Tasker, 1992). In terms of organization, relationship expectations are addressed here, while relationship optimism is addressed specifically in regards to adult children of divorce. For the purposes of this study, it will be important to recognize that unrealistic marriage expectations and low relationship optimism are not mutually exclusive.

### *Relationship Education and Unrealistic Marriage Expectations.*

Hawkins et al. (2004) outlined a comprehensive framework for marriage education adaptable for use with a variety of populations of varying age and social status. The content included in their model encompasses three dimensions: relational skills, awareness/knowledge/attitudes, and motivation/virtues. The authors urge helping professionals to expand their knowledge beyond working with individual clients and couples to a broader spectrum of people. The conclusions drawn from this study illustrate the need to expand relationship education programs to specifically address unrealistic and inflated beliefs about relationships among young people.

Hawkins and colleagues emphasize that unmarried adults hold a clear and sometimes idealistic image of what marriage should be like (2004). It may be that

individuals who are too idealistic in their marriage expectations quickly experience relationship disappointments that then contribute to marriage failure. With this in mind, adults holding a “happily ever after” ideal of marriage might benefit from learning basic skills and more realistic attitudes that could assist them in initiating and maintaining healthy relationships. This can be accomplished through basic knowledge acquisition about marriage’s institutional and societal features, as well an understanding of how healthy marriages contribute to community and societal well-being. Laner and Russell (1994) support Hawkins and colleagues (2003) suggestion in stating that “. . . society does not prepare individuals for the kinds of marriages they expect (in terms of knowledge, attitudes, and skills), and problems of inflated marital expectations are prominent in the marital therapy literature” (p. 10).

Other researchers have developed and evaluated relationship education courses aimed at reducing young adults’ unrealistic beliefs about marriage and presenting a more realistic look at married life (Laner & Russell, 1994; Sharp & Ganong, 2000). In two different studies, researchers found that relationship education courses did not significantly lower unrealistic beliefs, however, some changes were observed among female students in the studies.

Laner and Russell (1994) used a pretest-posttest design to assess changes in relationship expectation on the Expectations Level Index (Sabatelli & Pearce, 1986) between 70 college students enrolled in a courtship and marriage course and 53 students who served as a control group. These researchers suggested that while the courtship and marriage course focused on reducing unrealistic marriage expectations, perhaps the expectations themselves needed to be addressed more directly with students in the course

in order to produce the desired effect, or, as the researchers state, teaching “to the test” (p. 14).

Sharp and Ganong (2000) took a slightly different approach in addressing unrealistic relationship expectations by using an interactive approach to teaching in two sections of a university relationships course, and using the third section of the same course as a comparison group, teaching in a lecture-only format as opposed to an interactive teaching style. In comparing pretest and posttest scores on the Romantic Beliefs Scale (Sprecher & Metts, 1989), Sharp and Ganong found a moderate reduction in romantic beliefs among interactive teaching groups as compared with the lecture group, but did not show a significant reduction in relationship ideals on the Relationship Belief Inventory (Kurdeck, 1992).

These findings support Hawkins and colleagues’ (2004) suggestion that young people have many steadfast relationship ideals that are not easily modified. Therefore, it may be more realistic to focus on relationship skill development in a manner that helps young adults act in ways that make it more possible for them to attain their relationship ideals. Hawkins et al. state,

Educated youth possess an appetite for reliable information to help them prepare for their life goal of a healthy marriage. The more marriage educators can reach these eager students with solid information before they begin forming intimate relationships, the more they will encourage attitudes and behavior patterns that lead to healthy marriages (p. 554).

*Other Factors Associated with Relationship Education Effectiveness.*

Credibility of the marriage educator is very important, not only for ethical reasons, but also from the perspective of the learner (Hawkins et al., 2004). In Duncan and Wood's (2003) study examining motivation to participate in relationship education, adults from divorced homes were less likely to choose clergy or parental advice, preferring instead a person whom the students viewed as more credible. Additionally, Hawkins and colleagues suggest that relationship educators need proper training in multicultural awareness to adequately address obstacles present in mixed culture relationships. It is also suggested that a male-female team may be more effective in teaching marriage education in order to relate on a personal level to both men and women (2004).

*Adult Children of Divorce*

New developments in relationship education have encouraged interest in exploring the differing impacts of intimate relationship education on young adults who face greater risk of relationship dissolution. All adults could potentially benefit from relationship education, however, adult children of divorce (ACOD) may have different outlooks and differing attitudes and expectations regarding intimate relationships and marriage than their counterparts who did not experience parental divorce.

The literature on marriage, divorce, and remarriage has long suggested that adult children of divorce face greater relationship difficulties and a greater risk of divorce than their counterparts from non-divorced homes (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Boyer-Pennington, Pennington, & Spink, 2001; Christensen & Brooks, 2000; Conway, Christensen, & Herlihy, 2003; Feng, Giarrusso, Bengtson & Frye, 1999; Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, &

Roberts, 1990; Jacquet & Surra, 2001; Kahl et al. 2007; Kunz, 2000; Wallerstein, 1991; Yu & Adler-Baeder, 2007). There are many suggestions as to why this is so, such as differing commitment levels between those from divorced homes versus non-divorced homes, differing levels of self-esteem and self-worth (Kahl et al. 2007), differing levels of optimism regarding future relationships (Boyer-Pennington et al., 2001; Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, & Roberts, 1990; Yu & Adler-Baeder, 2007), and parental modeling (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Kunz, 2001; Yu & Adler-Baeder, 2007). More specifically, Cristensen and Brooks (2001) have identified several factors that appear to contribute to the increased likelihood of negative outcomes for adult children of divorce. These factors include age at time of divorce, gender, length of time since the divorce, beliefs about trust, extent of family conflict, and frequency of sexual behavior.

#### *Intergenerational Transmission of Divorce*

Amato and DeBoer (2001) suggest that parental divorce is a causal factor that increases divorce rates among offspring. In their longitudinal study of 2,033 individuals from divorced and non-divorced homes, Amato and DeBoer reported that adult children of divorce scored significantly higher on measures of rates of divorce and thoughts of divorce compared with adults from non-divorced homes. It was also found that the degree of parental marital discord was linked to offspring's thoughts of divorce, but did not contribute to higher divorce rates in adults from non-divorced homes. It is suggested that a potential reason for this relationship is that, as previously suggested, children learn relationship skills and behaviors from their parental models. Inadequate conflict resolution skills may be modeled to children, and subsequently lead them to contemplate divorce as adults. Children from non-divorced homes, however, may be more committed

to their adult relationships as a result of their parents remaining married despite significant marital discord.

Amato and DeBoer (2001) hypothesized that relationship skills are learned from parents and transmitted into adult interpersonal relationships, but a high degree of marital discord may not lead to divorce if a strong sense of commitment exists. Consequently, the researchers conclude that it is the divorce event, and not only the magnitude of marital discord that leads offspring to divorce in adulthood. From this remarkable data the authors conclude that the dissolution of marriage is far more predictive of offspring divorce than high levels of marital discord. In fact, this study showed that the largest effect on offspring was the case in which parents displayed low levels of discord that led to divorce, which supports the authors' explanation that "the important mechanism is not parents' problematic interpersonal behavior, but parents' demonstration that the marital contract can be broken" (Amato & DeBoer, 2001, p. 1040).

In contrast to Amato and DeBoer (2001), Benson, Larson, Wilson, and Demo (1993) view the intergenerational transmission of relationship quality in terms of Bowenian theory. In their study of young adults between the ages of 17 and 21, it was suggested that dynamics of fused families (emotionally dependent, lacking autonomy, use of double binds) create anxiety in the child which can later result in interpersonal relationship anxiety, thereby affecting communication in an aversive manner. Adult children from fused families will supposedly perceive threats in their interpersonal relationships where the threat may or may not exist. In the event that a threat does not exist, the anxious partner's behavior may perpetuate and escalate an already aversive interaction (Benson et al., 1993).

Other researchers have suggested that perhaps personality and genetic factors contribute more to adult intimate relationship success than parental divorce. Burns and Dunlop (2000) cite Jockin et al. (1996) in stating that “. . . personality predicts divorce risk, and more specifically, it does so largely because of the genetic rather than the environmental influences they share” (p. 296). This brings to light the issue of nature versus nurture. While there may be genetic factors that contribute to the intimate relationships one forms and maintains, one cannot discount the environmental factors that contribute to relationship success or failure.

Kunz (2000) proposes, and cites research supporting a genetic explanation for intergenerational transmission of divorce. Twin studies apparently have shown that identical twins in which one twin divorces increases the chances of the other twin divorcing by six times. This suggests that there could be a genetic factor that influences individual ability to maintain lifelong partnerships. It is acknowledged, however, that this concept is much more complicated than a “divorce gene.”

Hetherington and Kelly (2002) suggest that challenging personality characteristics such as irritability, impulsivity, antisocial behavior, and depression can be inherited, leading to difficulties in intimate relationships. The family climate a young person is exposed to, however, also dramatically influences their behavior in future relationships. Young men and women from both divorced and hostile, non-divorced families showed a deficit in relationship skills in the Virginia Longitudinal Study, lacking the ability to negotiate and compromise, control their emotions, express appreciation for their partner, and use humor to defuse hostility. Many of these young adults seemed to have acquired poor relationship skills from their parents.

*ACOD and Relationship Optimism and Attitudes toward Marriage*

Researchers suggest that adult children of divorce will have more negative attitudes about marriage and less optimism for their own marriage success (Gabardi & Rosèn, 1991; Tasker, 1992). Optimism can generally be defined in terms of expectations. A person's positive or negative expectations for the future are synonymous with their optimism level. Carver & Scheier (2003) examine optimism in the context of positive psychology, linking optimism and pessimism to the expectancy-value motivation model. This model suggests that expectations are directly linked with goals. Goals can be viewed as values or end states that people either evaluate as desirable or undesirable. Perceptions of an undesirable outcome are associated with lower optimism, and therefore motivation. Expectancy can also be linked with confidence. The less confident an individual is about the outcome of an action, the less likely he/she will be to put effort into the outcome. "When people are confident about an eventual outcome, effort continues even in the face of great adversity" (Carver & Scheier, 2003, p. 76).

Carver and Scheier (2003) continue to define optimism as a factor that can be both specific and general: both an assessment of life in general and an assessment of a particular area or event in one's life. In terms of intimate relationships, it makes sense that a person's optimism about his/her future relationship success would directly influence the effort that he/she puts into the relationship. Carver and Scheier emphasize that optimistic individuals do not sit waiting for good things to happen to them. Optimists recognize that their beliefs are tied to the amount of effort they exert towards achieving their goals. Whether the goal is achieved as a result of the effort, or the effort provides an

impetus for the individual to take advantage of opportunities is unknown. The point is that optimists actively pursue their goals.

Duncan and Wood (2003) studied motivation to participate in marriage preparation among college-aged young adults. They reported, consistent with Carver and Sheier's (2003) formulation, that optimism towards future relationships was associated with motivation to participate in marriage preparation. These researchers did not find significant differences in motivation to participate in marriage preparation between adults whose parents were divorced versus those whose parents were not. It was found, however, that in both divorced family and non-divorced family groups, optimism for future relationship success was correlated with motivation to participate in marriage preparation activities. These authors suggest that a more personalized approach to relationship education was preferred, with the divorced group favoring teachings by community marriage educators and/or marriage professionals, perhaps whose parents had marital problems themselves. Young adults from divorced homes also showed preference for university based teaching over religious/clergy based relationship education.

Amato and DeBoer (2001) describe marital optimism in terms of commitment. Those with a weak sense of commitment perceive relationship troubles as unsolvable, and look at divorce as an acceptable alternative to remaining in a troubled union. Those with a strong sense of commitment will view marriage as a permanent state, be optimistic about the resolution of problems, and remain in the marriage not because they feel trapped, but because they are optimistic about the possibility of relationship renewal. Therefore, adult children of divorce are expected to have a weaker sense of commitment

as a result of witnessing their parents' divorce, and be more pessimistic about the long-term success of their own future relationships.

Axinn and Thornton (1996) suggest that attitudes adult children adopt are often consistent with the attitudes that their parents held regarding marriage and family, specifically their mothers' experiences and attitudes. Parents naturally socialize their children to adopt certain beliefs and values, some intended, many unintended. This suggests that while children may absorb or imitate interpersonal behaviors from parental modeling, more importantly they absorb attitudes about intimacy, cohabitation, marriage, family, and divorce, which by their very nature affect the adult's behavior in intimate relationships.

Riggio and Weiser (2008) examined the strength of attitude toward marriage among college students, termed embeddedness of attitude, and its association with expected relationship outcome. Embeddedness was determined through a word association exercise, where participants were given a word that was meant to elicit an attitudinal response. The number of responses a participant listed for each term determined the participant's level of attitude embeddedness. Riggio and Weiser found that stronger, or more embedded attitudes towards marriage, both positive and negative, were predictive of relationship outcomes. Those holding embedded negative attitudes towards marriage experienced more conflict, less satisfaction, and less commitment in current relationships, as well as lower expectations for relationship success.

This finding provides support to the expectancy-value model of motivation outlined by Carver and Scheier (2003) in that those having lower expectations for marriage and

intimate relationships will be less motivated to achieve relationship quality, and may in fact perpetuate relationship dissatisfaction.

Other researchers have found that differences in attitudes and optimism between adults from non-divorced homes and adult children of divorce appear mostly in regards to marriage specifically, and not necessarily to relationships in general. In their study comparing college students from divorced families with those from non-divorced families, Franklin et al. (1990) found that college students from divorced families did not differ in their trust of others in general. However, specific to potential marriage partners, college students from divorced families differed significantly on measures of generalized trust. The interesting aspect of this particular study is that college students from divorced families did not differ from those from non-divorced families on partner trust, or on current relationship optimism. In regards to marriage specifically, students from divorced families differed remarkably in their expected level of trust in their spouse, and on levels of optimism for marriage success from their counterparts from non-divorced homes (Franklin et al., 1990).

An identical finding was obtained in Carnelly and Janoff-Bulman's (1992) study examining optimism in love relationships among college students. College students' ratings of optimism toward future love relationships were best predicted by their own relationship experiences in past and current loving relationships. Optimism towards marriage specifically, however, was best predicted by whether or not the participants' parents were divorced. Participants whose parents were divorced showed lower levels of optimism towards their own future marriages than those whose parents were not divorced. A possible explanation for this finding is that never-married college students

only have the experience of witnessing their parents' marriage, and have no experience with marriage themselves. While optimism about marriage is strongly associated with parental marital status, optimism about romantic relationships can be shown to be linked not only to experiences with romantic partners, but also to attachment style, as mentioned previously.

### *ACOD and Relationship Ideals*

Relationship ideals, or specific beliefs and values concerning relationship intimacy, loyalty, and passion, also appear to be different between adult children of divorce and adults from non-divorced families (Conway et al., 2003). Conway and colleagues found an overall difference in relationship ideals between adult children of divorce and those from non-divorced homes, with the divorced group rating both intimacy and passion ideals significantly higher than the non-divorced group. The specific intimacy/loyalty ideals that emerged among the divorced group were commitment, affection, stability, support, and acceptance, which the researchers identified as a trend among those from divorced families. In comparing the relationship ideals of the participants, the authors found that Generation X participants (those born between 1965 and 1980) rated relationship ideals higher than participants from an older generation, suggesting that this population may be significantly affected by parental divorce in their intimate relationships. The authors found no association between child's age at parental divorce and relationship ideals. The suggestion was made that adult children of divorce may view certain aspects of their relationships as more important because either they saw the aspects missing from their parents' relationships, and/or

because they tend to seek those missing aspects for themselves in their relationships, both in healthy and unhealthy ways.

Gabardi and Rosèn (1991) found in an earlier study that adult children from divorced homes had more sexual partners than those from non-divorced homes, suggesting that perhaps college students from divorced homes use sexual partners as a way of exploring identity and intimacy issues that may not have been addressed in their families of origin.

#### *Long-term Effects of Parental Divorce on Adult Relationships*

Boyer-Pennington et al. (2001) investigated the effects of parental divorce on expectations of future relationship success among college students. They assessed relationship optimism both in regards to expectations for one's own future relationships and that of others. Participants came from either non-divorced homes, homes in which participants witnessed one parental divorce, and homes in which participants witnessed more than one parental divorce. Boyer-Pennington and colleagues assessed the degree to which students perceived their own future relationships as at risk, and the degree to which students viewed other's future relationships at risk as a function of parental divorce. The authors also looked at perceived control in relationships and how this perceived control could potentially serve as a self-fulfilling prophesy in terms of relationship success. In terms of control, the authors predicted, and were able to support in their findings, that students in all three groups perceived other students in the same and in different groups as having a greater risk of divorce than themselves. These findings support that some people may perceive others as having a greater risk of experiencing negative events than they do. These findings may support the idea that young adults hold

unrealistic relationship expectations for themselves, but more realistic expectations when evaluating others.

Through their longitudinal research with young adults, Kahl et al. (2007) found that satisfaction with self, a factor affected by parental divorce, was associated with risk of divorce. The study hypothesized that mental outlook, comprised of (a) marital commitment, (b) feeling sure life will work out as wanted, (c) believing oneself to be a person of worth, equal to others, (d) satisfied with self, and (e) able to do things as well as others, would act as mediators for parental divorce effects. Only self-satisfaction, however, functioned as a mediator to the effects of parental divorce. Parental divorce has been shown to have an influence on offspring's level of satisfaction with self. Therefore, it is likely that those coming from divorced homes will have lower self-satisfaction, potentially putting these individuals at a higher divorce risk.

According to Hetherington and colleagues (2002), children from divorced homes often mature to be well-adjusted, competent, and successful adults in relationships and in life. The most important component identified as a protective factor for children from divorced homes was the presence of a caring, responsible, dependable adult who offered consistent, authoritative guidance. Divorce can affect children in many ways, both negative and positive, but if children have at least one stable and nurturing adult figure in their lives, the damaging effects of divorce can be minimized for the long-term.

### *Multicultural Considerations*

Cultural differences are important factors to consider in assessing relationship beliefs and attitudes about marriage among young adults. Some key differences between diverse cultural groups will be reviewed here, but as South (1993) states: "Most young

persons of both sexes and of all races and ethnicities desire to marry, and most eventually do” (p. 368). It is interesting to examine the dissimilarities that exist between those from individualistic versus collectivist cultures. Little research has been done in this area – the most relevant research to the topic pertaining to relationship expectations and optimism (Heine & Lehman, 1995; Lin & Raghurir, 2005).

#### *Collectivist versus Individualist Cultures*

Lin and Raghurir (2005) suggest that unrealistic optimism about relationship success is a universal phenomenon. Other researchers suggest, however, that individuals from collectivist cultures will show less unrealistic optimism than their counterparts from individualistic cultures (Heine & Lehman, 1995). The explanation for this occurrence is somewhat complex. It would seem that individuals belonging to collectivist cultures are less concerned with autonomy and individuality, and may accept more influence from significant others around them, thereby fostering realistic beliefs about relationships. Individuals belonging to individualistic cultures, however, value autonomy and individuality so much that they are less likely to accept influence from others and tend to focus more on their own individual successes.

#### *Situational Factors and Desire to Marry*

Other researchers suggest that differences in attitudes towards marriage have more to do with economic and social differences between races and cultures (Bennet, Bloom, & Craig, 1989; Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; South, 1993). For example, Bulcroft and Bulcroft (1993) suggest that several distal and proximal factors were associated with motivations to marry among African American men and women such as (a) place of residence, (b) parental background, (c) current socioeconomic status, (d) current life

course status, and (e) kinship network embeddedness. These factors undoubtedly affect the desire to marry in many, if not most cultural groups. The differences between cultures are important to acknowledge in this context because different cultures will experience the above factors in unique ways, leading them to have different beliefs and attitudes about marriage.

Researchers also compare the differing perspectives of gender within particular racial and ethnic groups (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; South, 1993). For example, previous research has shown African American men as having less desire to marry than their White American counterparts. This divergence is attributed largely to the close-knit peer groups which African American men often belong. Men in this culture are reluctant to marry because marriage inevitably signals a departure from the peer group which has served as their major source of social support. African American women, on the other hand, differ from their White American counterparts in that they are more motivated to marry for economic reasons in early adulthood than White American women, whereas White American women do not seem to value the economic benefits of marriage until later adulthood. Gender differences exist between Native Americans and Whites as well, with Native American women displaying as many masculine qualities as feminine qualities in regards to traditional marriage role expectations (Bischoff, 2007). Hispanic or Latino Americans, both men and women, have been shown to be the most desiring of marriage, perhaps because of the values placed on the institution of marriage in this culture (Bulcroft & Bulcroft, 1993; South, 1993). In addition, remaining single is discouraged more in Hispanic/Latino culture than in any other culture (Trent & South, 1992).

Gay and lesbian individuals may also have differing views about relationships and marriage than heterosexual individuals. Like other cultural groups, most gays and lesbians report desiring long-term, intimate relationships (Williams, Sawyer, & Wahlstrom, 2008). The differences emerge, however, in regards to attitudes and beliefs about marriage. A recent study investigating the meaning of same-sex marriage for gays and lesbians revealed interesting results (Lannutti, 2005). Lannutti found several themes among respondents in terms of the meaning they assigned to same-sex marriage, the first of which was equality. Participants in this study recognized that same sex relationships have been recognized civilly, but not legally. Another theme that emerged through this study is that gays and lesbians believed their relationships would be stronger if they were able to enter into a legal union, therefore making the gay and lesbian community stronger. On the flip side, some respondents viewed same-sex marriage as negative in that it assimilates gays and lesbians into heterosexual culture. Others saw same-sex marriage as weakening the GLBT community by stigmatizing those who choose not to marry.

In short, the influences that help to shape the beliefs and attitudes about marriage and intimate relationships are obviously salient for the gay and lesbian population. However, there are other and perhaps more primary issues to consider with this population when assessing beliefs and attitudes about relationships and marriage that are cultural and societal.

While differences among cultures exist, similarities seem to outweigh the disparities. Of course, factors like socioeconomic status, family history, and culture, among many other factors contribute to the beliefs and attitudes that young adults

develop about intimate relationships and marriage. The primary group assessed in this study consisted of primarily White females and males, however, issues of ethnicity, race, culture, and sexual orientation are worthy of recognition.

#### *Rationale for the Proposed Study*

Previous research indicates that many young adults have unrealistic expectations about marriage. At the same time, research suggests that young adults who experienced a family of origin divorce are likely to be less optimistic about marital success. Previous research is also somewhat equivocal regarding the effectiveness of relationship education on changing marriage expectations and optimism; in some cases and using particular teaching strategies, relationship education may reduce unrealistic expectations and increase optimism. However, to date, research has not directly examined the potential differential effects of relationship education on marital expectations and optimism among adult children of divorce as compared to adults from non-divorced families.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine whether a semester-long intimate relationships course had a differential effect on (a) relationship optimism and (b) attitudes towards marriage among young adults whose parents were divorced as children as compared with young adults raised in non-divorced families. Based on information obtained through the preceding literature review, the following hypotheses were formulated:

#### *Hypothesis 1*

There will be a difference in relationship optimism, as measured by the Optimism about Relationships questionnaire (Carnelly & Janoff-Bulman, 1992), between students

in the Intimate and Family Relations class and students in the control group from pretest to posttest.

*Hypothesis 2*

Young adults whose parents are divorced initially will be less optimistic towards marriage than young adults whose parents remain married on pretest measures in both the control and experimental groups.

*Hypothesis 3*

Students whose parents divorced and who complete the Intimate and Family Relations class will show a significantly greater increase in relationship optimism than students whose parents remain married and who complete the Intimate and Family Relations class.

*Hypothesis 4*

Students who complete the Intimate and Family Relations class will show more realistic attitudes towards marriage (lowered relationship expectations) than the control group, as measured by the Marital Attitude Scale (Braaten & Rosèn, 1998).

*Hypothesis 5*

Students who complete the Intimate and Family Relations class and who initially perceived their families of origin as unhealthy, as measured by the Family-of-Origin scale (Hovestadt et al., 1985), will show, upon completion of the Intimate and Family Relations class, significantly improved attitudes towards marriage and relationship optimism (as measured by the Marital Attitude Scale and the Optimism about Relationships scale), as compared with students who initially rated their families of origin as healthy.

## Chapter III: Method

### *Participants*

Participants consisted of students enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations, COUN/WS/PSYC 295, and a comparison class (Fundamentals of Learning, PSYC 260) at the University of Montana, Missoula. There were a total of 108 participants who completed both pretest and posttest assessments. The Intimate and Family Relations class, the experimental group in this study, consisted of 47 students, while 61 Fundamentals of Learning students comprised the comparison group. Of the total 108 participants, 83.3% were female, with a mean age of 23 years. Seventy five percent of the participants were either junior or senior status. As expected, 87% of the sample was White, followed by 4.6% Native American, 1.9% Asian, and 6.5% other. The “other” category consisted of participants who endorsed more than one ethnicity on the demographic questionnaire, or selected the “other” category. The majority of the sample identified as heterosexual (88%), while 5.6% identified as homosexual, and 6.5% identified as bisexual. Thirty seven students reported coming from divorced homes, whereas 70 students reported that their parents were not divorced. One student in the sample did not respond to whether or not his/her parents were divorced. An interesting demographic that appeared in the sample is that 40.4% of the students enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations came from divorced homes, whereas only 29.5% of students in the comparison course reported coming from a divorced home. This demographic could suggest that students who have experienced certain family circumstances that place them at greater risk for divorce are seeking marriage and relationship education.

### *Materials*

The text used to instruct the Intimate and Family Relations course was entitled *Marriages, Families, and Intimate Relationships* (Williams, Sawyer, & Wahlstrom, 2008). Additional course materials consisted of journal articles and current events that coincided with class topics, as well as audiovisual materials obtained from the internet and as displayed in popular media. Films representing media influences on society such as *Dreamworlds 3* (Media Education Foundation, 2007) and *Killing Us Softly 3* (Media Education Foundation, 2002) were shown. Guest speakers from the Missoula community were asked to speak about special topics such as the effects of love on the brain and human sexuality.

### *Instruments*

During the first week of Fall semester, 2008, participants in both Intimate and Family Relations and the control group were administered a battery of assessments including questionnaires focusing on (a) demographic information (See Appendix E), (b) perspectives on family climate, (c) attitudes towards marriage, and (d) relationship optimism. Students in the Intimate and Family Relations class were asked to complete an additional questionnaire at the end of the course focusing on evaluating the course and its value to the students (See Appendix A). Demographic information included questions regarding age of participant, gender, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, parental marital status, and age at time of parental divorce (if applicable). An additional question was added to the demographic data collected at the end of the semester asking students whose parents were divorced to rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating very

unpleasant and 5 indicating very pleasant, how their experience of their parents' divorce was for them.

#### *Optimism about Relationships*

A questionnaire developed by Carnelly and Janoff-Bulman (1992) was used to measure relationship optimism (See Appendix B). This questionnaire was developed for use in Carnelly and Janoff-Bulman's (1992) research exploring optimism in close relationships and was obtained with permission from the authors (email communication, March 31, 2008). The authors were not able to provide any psychometric properties on this measure other than the results obtained from their original study (email communication, April 15, 2008). The Optimism about Relationships questionnaire was first used to assess relationship optimism in undergraduate students with a mean age of 21.8 years. The questionnaire consists of six questions related to optimism in future love relationships. Participants respond to these questions on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 0 representing 'not at all' and 4 representing 'extremely.' Scores on this measure range from 4-20, with higher scores indicating higher levels of optimism about relationships.

#### *Family-of-Origin Scale*

The Family-of-Origin Scale (FOS; Hovestadt, Anderson, Piercy, Cochran, and Fine, 1985; See Appendix C) was developed to assess the perceived family health in regards to intimacy and autonomy. Specific scale dimensions include (a) clarity of expression, (b) responsibility, (c) respect for others, (d) openness to others, and (e) acceptance of separation and loss (Fischer & Corcoran, 2007). The authors define a healthy family as one that develops intimacy by encouraging expression of a range of feelings, creates an atmosphere of warmth in the home, has the ability to handle conflict

without undue stress, promotes sensitivity and empathy, and develops trust in humans as inherently good. In correspondence with the primary author of this measure, it was suggested that the measure be treated as a single uni-dimensional factor, rather than as representing conceptually separate subscales. Hovestadt (personal communication, April 15, 2008) suggests that the instrument is best used in research in this manner, and looking at individual subscales may be more useful in clinical work, however not necessarily in applied research.

The Family-of-Origin Scale is a 40 item, 5 point Likert-type scale, with a response of 1 indicating strong disagreement and a 5 indicating strong agreement. High scores (160-200) on this scale indicate higher perceived family of origin health, while low scores (40-80) indicate lower perceived health. The scale was originally normed on 278 college students in the southern United States. Fischer and Corcoran (2007) report the internal consistency of the Family-of-Origin Scale as .75, and a test-retest reliability of .77 for measures of autonomy, and .73 for measures of intimacy. The scale has shown good discriminate validity. While the Family-of-Origin Scale has been questioned as to its value in applied research (Kline & Newman, 1994; Lee, Gordon, & O'Dell, 1989) due to differences in scoring from those belonging to different populations (adult children of alcoholics, incarcerated persons, gay and bisexual men, those in psychotherapy at the time of testing, a non-clinical sample, and college students), the current study tested a similar sample as the population the test was normed on. Manley, Searight, Skitka, and Russon (1990) are cited in Mazer, Mangrum, Hovestadt, and Brashear (1990) as having tested the Family-of-Origin Scale with 407 adolescents and concluded that the scale is a multidimensional instrument with value and validity for clinical application.

### *Marital Attitude Scale*

The Marital Attitude Scale (MAS; Braaten and Rosèn 1998; See Appendix D) is a 23-item scale intended to measure individuals' attitudes toward marriage. Participants rated their responses to each item on a Likert-type scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree (Strongly Agree = 0, Agree = 1, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 3). The measure has a range of scores from 24 to 69, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes towards marriage. The scale was developed to overcome shortcomings in other measures of attitudes towards marriage. Braaten and Rosèn developed this scale in hopes that it would prove useful in marriage and relationship research. The MAS was normed on 499 undergraduate students in an introductory psychology course. The measure has shown to measure similar constructs as other assessments of attitudes toward marriage such as the Attitudes Toward Marriage Scale (Gibaldi & Rosèn, 1991), which correlates highly with this measure,  $r = .77$ . Certain scales of the Relationships Beliefs Inventory (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982) measuring 'disagreement as destructive' and 'ability of partners to change' were also shown to be correlated with the MAS. The authors report internal consistency of the MAS with a Coefficient alpha of .82. In the norming sample, a main effect of parents' marital status on MAS scores was indicated. Students from divorced homes scored lower on the MAS, indicating more negative attitudes towards marriage than students from non-divorced homes, suggesting good discriminate validity.

In a follow-up study examining the test-retest reliability of the MAS (Bassett, Braaten, & Rosèn, 1999) a test-retest reliability of .85 was obtained when students were tested six weeks apart. Two hundred six undergraduate students participated in this study.

The authors also assessed test-retest reliability for males and females separately and found that test-retest reliability for males was .81, and for females, .87. Dr. Lee Rosèn granted permission to use this instrument in the current study (email communication, March 31, 2008).

### *Procedure*

Students enrolled in the Intimate and Family Relations class at the University of Montana-Missoula were offered the option of participating in this research study for extra credit towards their final grade. Other opportunities for earning extra credit were provided to students who did not participate in the study. A Fundamentals of Learning course (PSYC 260) participated as a comparison group. Steps were taken to assure that students enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations were not simultaneously enrolled in the comparison course. In the event that a student was enrolled in both courses, his or her information was included in the experimental group data set and omitted from the comparison group data set.

Informed consent was unnecessary in this study as no identifying information was collected. Students were only asked to provide a code name that they would remember from pretest to posttest, such as their mother's maiden name. During the first week of classes of fall semester 2008, participants were asked to complete the assessments described above. The assessment order was counterbalanced to control for order effects. Pre-test measures were administered and retained for comparison with post-test scores obtained during the last week of the fall semester, 2008.

Course content consisted of material from the text, as well as supplemental materials. The class was interactive; the instructor encouraged students to voice their

opinions and reactions to materials presented. The instructor led discussions relevant to the course material, allowing students to get involved with the material and apply it to their own lives and relationships. Students were encouraged to (a) examine their past, present and future intimate relationships, (b) recognize their personal relationship beliefs and expectations, and (c) develop their own perspective about what intimacy entails and how they can work towards healthy intimacy. Professionals in the field of marriage and family from the Missoula, Montana community were invited periodically to speak to the class about topics such as biological theories of love, sexuality, and parenting.

Students were tested three times during the semester to assess retention and comprehension of materials presented in class and in the text. Students had one written assignment that focused on analyzing one of a variety of films chosen by the instructor. Analysis included recognition of concepts learned in class and a display of adequate understanding of the material as applied to the student's chosen film. Students were given the option of writing more than one film analysis for extra credit. Other extra credit options included attendance at campus events relevant to class topics such as "*Day of Dialogue*." The major assignment for this course was to choose between two options of relationship self-exploration. One option was to attend five sessions of relationship consultation with a Counselor Education Practicum Student exploring relationship experiences, hopes, expectations, and anything else the student wished to explore. The other option was to write five self-reflection papers at different times during the semester exploring the same concepts.

During the last week of the semester, students again completed the battery of assessments completed at the beginning of the semester. Comparisons were made from

the resulting data between students enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations and students enrolled in the comparison course.

## Chapter IV: Results

A series of Analyses of Covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted on the data for each of the following hypotheses, with the exception of hypothesis 2, for which an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine significance for all statistical tests.

The first hypothesis predicted that there would be a difference in relationship optimism, as measured by the Optimism About Relationships scale (Carnelly & Janoff-Bulman, 1992), between students in the Intimate and Family Relations class and the comparison group from pretest to posttest. A one-way between-subjects ANCOVA was calculated to examine the effect of completing the Intimate and Family Relations course on relationship optimism, covarying out the effect of pretest scores on the Optimism About Relationships scale. Pretest scores on the Optimism About Relationships scale were significantly related to posttest scores on the same measure [ $F(1,102) = 171.98, p < .05$ ]. The main effect for group (Intimate and Family Relations, comparison course) was not statistically significant [ $F(1,102) = 0.064, p = .80$ ], with students in the Intimate and Family Relations course not having significantly different scores on the Optimism About Relationships scale ( $m = 13.27, sd = 3.83$ ) from students enrolled in Fundamentals of Learning ( $m = 14.18, sd = 3.82$ ), even after covarying out the effect of pretest scores on the Optimism About Relationships measure. Effect size was remarkable in this analysis, however, with adjusted R squared equaling .626, indicating that group membership accounted for nearly 63% of the variability in this sample. Table 1 displays the ANCOVA results for Optimism About Relationships scores for both groups from pretest to posttest.

Table 1

*Analysis of Covariance for Optimism About Relationships Posttest Scores*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2_p$
OAR pretest	1	171.98*	.00	.628
Group	1	.064	.80	.001
Error	102	(5.489)		

*Note.* Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square error. OAR pretest = Optimism About Relationships pretest scores. Group indicates membership in either Intimate and Family Relations or Fundamentals of Learning.

\* $p < .05$ .

The second hypothesis predicted that adult children of divorce (ACOD) would be less optimistic about relationships overall than adults from non-divorced homes in both the Intimate and Family Relations course and the comparison course on pretest measures on the Optimism About Relationships scale. An independent samples *t*-test was calculated comparing the mean score on the Optimism About Relationships scale of adult children of divorce and adults from non-divorced homes. No significant difference was found [ $t(103) = -.676, p = .48$ ]. The mean Optimism About Relationships score of adult children of divorce ( $m = 13.81, sd = 3.58$ ) was not significantly different from the mean of adult children from non-divorced homes ( $m = 14.35, sd = 4.06$ ). Table 2 displays mean, standard deviation, and sample size values for both adult children of divorce (ACOD) and adults from non-divorced homes (non-ACOD) on the Optimism About Relationships pretest measure.

Table 2

*Pretest Optimism About Relationships Scores of ACOD and Non-ACOD*

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample size	<i>p</i> -value
ACOD	13.81	3.57	36	
Non-ACOD	14.34	4.05	69	<i>p</i> = .48

*Note.* ACOD = Adult children of divorce; Non-ACOD = Adults from non-divorced homes.

The third hypothesis predicted that students who completed Intimate and Family Relations whose parents were divorced would show a greater increase in relationship optimism, as measured by the Optimism About Relationships scale, than students whose parents were not divorced and who completed Intimate and Family Relations. A one-way between subjects ANCOVA was calculated to examine the effects of parental divorce on measures of relationship optimism, covarying out the effect of pretest scores on the Optimism About Relationships scale. Pretest scores on the Optimism About Relationships scale were significantly related to posttest scores on the same measure [ $F(1,41) = 38.72, p < .05$ ]. The main effect for parental divorce was not significant [ $F(1,41) = 3.36, p = .074$ ], with adult children of divorce not scoring significantly higher on the Optimism About Relationships scale ( $m = 14.06, sd = 3.63$ ) than adults from non-divorced homes ( $m = 12.85, sd = 3.99$ ), even after covarying out the effect of pretest scores on the Optimism About Relationships measure. However, this main effect for parental divorce showed a trend toward statistical significance, suggesting there may be differences in relationship optimism between ACOD and adults from non-divorced homes. Table 3 displays the ANCOVA results for Optimism About Relationships scores for ACOD and Non-ACOD who completed Intimate and Family Relations.

Table 3

*Analysis of Covariance for ACOD and Non-ACOD Optimism About Relationships Posttest Scores*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2_p$
OAR pretest	1	38.72*	.00	.486
Divorced	1	3.36	.07	.076
Error	41	(7.832)		

*Note.* Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square error. OAR pretest = Optimism About Relationships pretest scores. Divorced indicates adult children of divorce as compared with adults from non-divorced homes. ACOD = Adult children of divorce; Non-ACOD = Adults from non-divorced homes. \* $p < .05$ .

The fourth hypothesis predicted that students who completed Intimate and Family Relations would show more realistic attitudes towards marriage (lowered relationship expectations), as measured by the Marital Attitude Scale (Braaten & Rosèn, 1998) than students enrolled in the comparison course. A one-way between subjects ANCOVA was calculated to examine the effects of group (Intimate and Family Relations, Fundamentals of Learning) on attitude towards marriage, covarying out the effect of pretest scores on the Marital Attitude Scale. Pretest scores on the Marital Attitude Scale were significantly related to posttest scores on the same measure [ $F(1,101) = 66.64, p < .05$ ]. The main effect for group was not significant [ $F(1,101) = .089, p = .76$ ], with students completing Intimate and Family Relations not displaying more realistic attitudes towards marriage (lowered relationship expectations;  $m = 42.63, sd = 9.12$ ) than students enrolled in the comparison course ( $m = 44.97, sd = 8.49$ ), even after covarying out the effect of pretest scores on the Marital Attitude Scale. Table 4 displays the ANCOVA results for Marital

Attitude Scale scores for students enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations and Fundamentals of Learning.

Table 4

*Analysis of Covariance for Marital Attitude Scale Posttest Scores*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2_p$
MAS pretest	1	66.64*	.00	.398
Group	1	.089	.77	.001
Error	101	(46.84)		

*Note.* Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square error. MAS pretest = Marital Attitude Scale pretest scores. Group indicates membership in either Intimate and Family Relations or Fundamentals of Learning.

\* $p < .05$ .

The fifth hypothesis predicted that students who completed Intimate and Family Relations and who initially perceived their families of origin as unhealthy, as measured by the Family of Origin Scale (Hovestadt et al., 1985) would show, upon completion of the course, significantly improved attitudes towards marriage and relationship optimism (as measured by the Marital Attitude Scale and the Optimism About Relationships scale), as compared with students who initially perceived their families of origin as healthy. Based on the distribution of scores on the Family-of-Origin Scale, quadrants were collapsed to divide perceptions of family health into two categories of “healthy” and “unhealthy” perceptions as opposed to dividing the scale into four quadrants. First, a one-way ANCOVA was calculated examining the effect of perceptions of family health (unhealthy, healthy) on attitudes towards marriage, covarying out the effect of pretest scores on the Marital Attitude Scale. Marital Attitude Scale pretest scores were

significantly related to posttest scores on the same measure [ $F(1,43) = 23.73, p < .05$ ]. The main effect for perceptions of family health was not significant [ $F(1,43) = .94, p = .34$ ], with individuals perceiving their families of origin as unhealthy not scoring significantly higher on the Marital Attitude Scale ( $m = 41.47, sd = 7.19$ ) than individuals perceiving their families of origin as healthy ( $m = 43.44, sd = 10.32$ ), even after covarying out the effect of pretest scores. Table 5 displays the ANCOVA results for Marital Attitude Scale scores for individuals perceiving their families of origin as healthy and unhealthy as measured by the Family of Origin Scale.

Table 5

*Analysis of Covariance for Marital Attitude Scale Posttest Scores by Perceived Family Health*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2_p$
MAS pretest	1	23.73*	.00	.356
FOS Group	1	.936	.34	.021
Error	43	(55.44)		

*Note.* Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square error. MAS pretest = Marital Attitude Scale pretest scores. FOS Group indicates Family of Origin scores that determine perceived family of origin health. Groups are defined as healthy or unhealthy perceptions of family of origin.

\* $p < .05$ .

Next, another one-way ANCOVA was calculated examining the effect of perceptions of family health (unhealthy, healthy) on relationship optimism, covarying out the effect of pretest scores on the Optimism About Relationships scale. Optimism About Relationships pretest scores were significantly related to posttest scores on the same measure [ $F(1,42) = 19.41, p < .05$ ]. The main effect for perceptions of family health was not significant [ $F(1,42) = .34, p = .56$ ], with individuals perceiving their families of

origin as unhealthy not scoring significantly higher on the Optimism About Relationships scale ( $m = 11.00, sd = 3.12$ ) than individuals perceiving their families of origin as healthy ( $m = 14.48, sd = 3.59$ ), even after covarying out the effect of pretest scores.

Neither Optimism About Relationships scores or Marital Attitude Scale scores were significantly influenced by participants' perceptions of family health. Table 6 displays the ANCOVA results for Optimism About Relationships scores for individuals perceiving their families of origin as healthy and unhealthy as measured by the Family of Origin Scale.

Table 6

*Analysis of Covariance for Optimism About Relationships Posttest Scores by Perceived Family Health*

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2_p$
OAR pretest	1	19.41*	.00	.316
FOS Group	1	.339	.56	.008
Error	42	(8.21)		

*Note.* Value enclosed in parentheses represents mean square error. OAR pretest = Optimism About Relationships scale pretest scores. FOS Group indicates Family of Origin scores that determine perceived family of origin health. Groups are defined as healthy or unhealthy perceptions of family of origin.

\* $p < .05$ .

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the mean scores from pretest to posttest on the Marital Attitude Scale and the Optimism About Relationships scale, respectively, between participants who perceived their families of origin as healthy and those who perceived their families of origin as unhealthy (as measured by the Family of Origin Scale, Hovestadt, et al., 1985) and who completed the Intimate and Family Relations course. It is worth noticing the trend that seems to have emerged in these figures. Figure 1 indicates

a remarkable difference in Marital Attitude Scale pretest scores between those perceiving their families of origin as healthy as compared with those perceiving their families of origin as unhealthy. On posttest scores, those perceiving their families of origin as healthy evidenced decreased scores on the Marital Attitude Scale, perhaps indicating the formation of more realistic attitudes, while those perceiving their families of origin as unhealthy displayed an increase in scores, indicating improved attitudes towards marriage. The same trend, although to a lesser degree, can be seen in Figure 2 which displays the changes in Optimism About Relationships scores from pretest to posttest for those who perceived their families of origin as healthy as compared with those who perceived their families of origin as unhealthy.

Figure 1

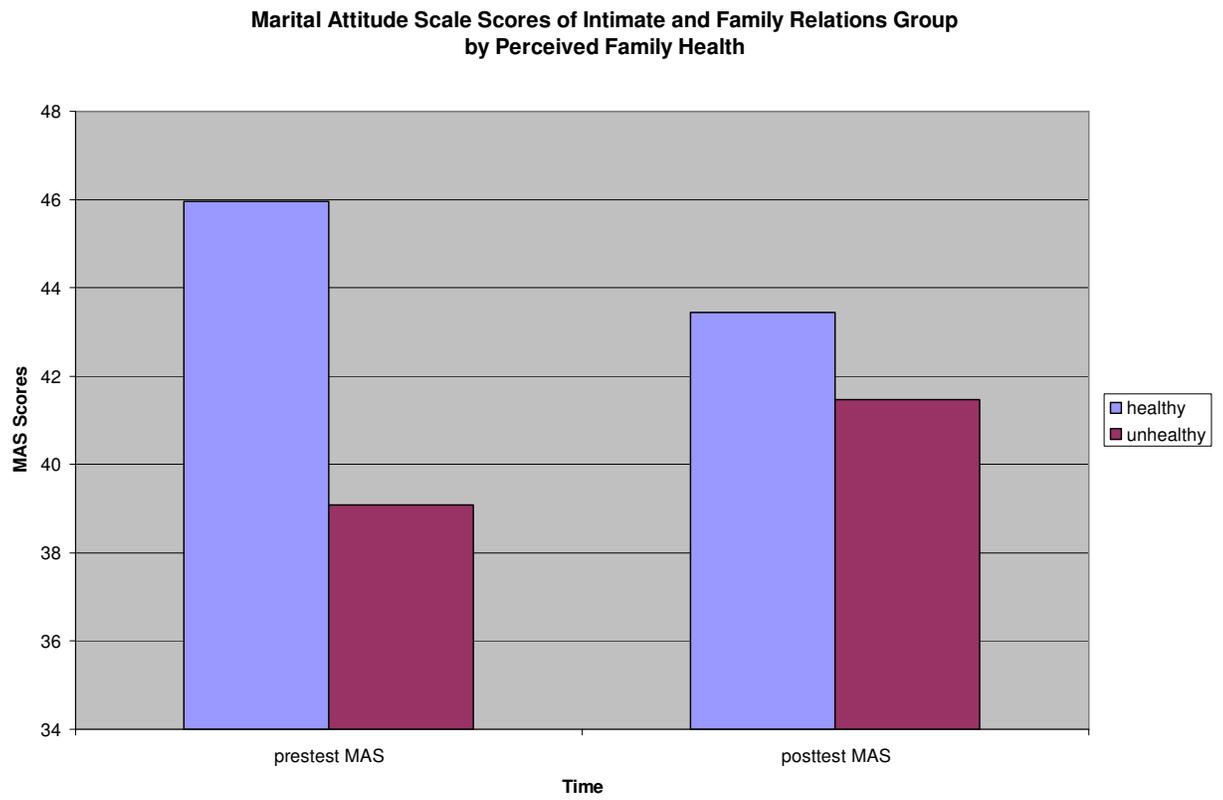


Figure 2

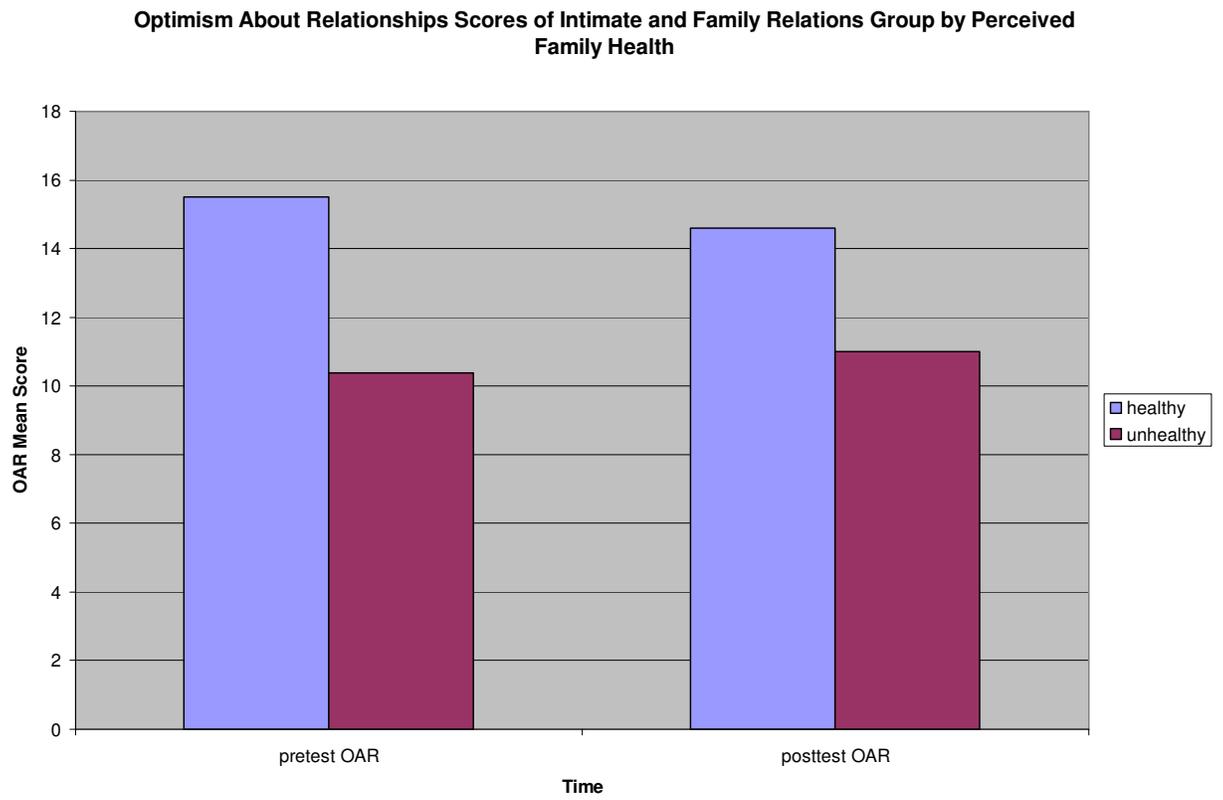


Table 7 summarizes the differences observed in scores on both the Marital Attitude Scale and the Optimism About Relationships scale between students enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations and the comparison course from pretest to posttest.

Table 7

*Mean Optimism About Relationships and Marital Attitude Scale Scores*

	Intimate and Family Relations			Fundamentals of Learning		
	Pretest	Posttest	<i>r</i>	Pretest	Posttest	<i>r</i>
MAS	42.92	42.63	.59	45.84	44.97	.67
OAR	13.56	13.27	.68	14.58	14.18	.89

*Note.* MAS = Marital Attitude Scale; OAR = Optimism About Relationships scale

## Chapter V: Discussion

Overall, the results generated from the preceding analyses indicate that relationship optimism and attitudes towards marriage are, in fact, difficult to change. Previous research has indicated that beliefs about relationships are fairly ingrained (Hawkins, et al, 2004; Lin & Raghurir, 2005; Segrin & Nabi, 2002) even in young adults, and specific studies have shown that even when change is evidenced, it is minor at best (Laner & Russel, 1994; Sharp & Ganong, 2000). The general outcome of this study supports this conclusion that relationship beliefs are stable over time and difficult to change.

In the following pages, results associated with each hypothesis will be examined in more detail. Additionally, limitations of the study that could have influenced the results will be explored and suggestions for future research will be provided.

Hypothesis one predicted that students who completed Intimate and Family Relations would show increased levels of relationship optimism, as measured by the Optimism About Relationships scale (Carnelly & Janoff-Bulman, 1992), as compared with students enrolled in Fundamentals of Learning. This hypothesis was not supported. Optimism About Relationships scores remained stable from pretest to posttest in both groups. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationship between pretest to posttest scores for each assessment for both groups. Strong positive correlations were found between pretest and posttest scores on the Marital Attitude Scale and the Optimism About Relationships scale for students enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations and Fundamentals of Learning (see Table 7). One possible explanation for this stability in scores is that the measures were perhaps not sensitive enough to detect

differences in relationship optimism. The measures contained a limited number of questions and perhaps did not allow participants to provide enough depth regarding their beliefs about future relationships in order to detect changes. It is also possible that the measures are extremely stable and reliable and not particularly sensitive to change. As there were no psychometric properties available for the Optimism About Relationships measure, it is difficult to ascertain whether the measure is a reliable one, or whether the results are a reflection of the lack of sensitivity of the test itself. The effect size indicated in the analysis of this hypothesis is worth mentioning. The comparison of Optimism About Relationships mean scores in this analysis was not significant, however an effect size of .626 was reported, indicating that the model accounted for nearly 63% of the variance in the sample. In other words, 63% is the proportion of variance in Optimism About Relationships posttest scores that is attributable to group membership.

The second hypothesis offers support to the idea that the Optimism About Relationships measure perhaps was not sensitive enough to detect differences in relationship beliefs. The hypothesis predicted that Adult Children of Divorce (ACOD) would display lower levels of relationship optimism on pretest measures than adults from non-divorced homes. This was expected to be a replication of the previous research findings that ACOD have less optimism about their future success in relationships than adults from non-divorced homes (Boyer-Pennington et al., 2001; Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, & Roberts, 1990; Yu & Adler-Baeder, 2007). This hypothesis was not supported in the current study. While the results showed a slight difference in mean scores on the Optimism About Relationships measure between ACOD and adults from non-divorced homes, the difference was not statistically significant, and could simply be a result of

error variability. It is also possible that there are differences in levels of optimism about relationships between ACOD and non-ACOD, but the sample size in this study was not large enough to accurately display such a difference. Perhaps given a larger sample size, statistical significance could have been achieved.

Upon further exploration of this finding, another independent samples *t*-test was conducted calculating the difference in means on pretest measures of the Marital Attitude Scale (Braaten & Rosèn, 1998) between ACOD and adults from non-divorced homes. Again, there were no statistically significant differences in mean scores on the Marital Attitude Scale between ACOD and adults from non-divorced homes on pretest measures. The results approached statistical significance, however, with ACOD scoring a mean of 42.9 on the Marital Attitude Scale and adults from non-divorced homes scoring a mean of 45.9, with a resulting *p* value of .09. Had additional and more comprehensive assessments been utilized to measure relationship beliefs and attitudes towards marriage, in addition to assessing a larger sample, it is possible that greater disparities would have been discovered between ACOD and adults from non-divorced homes. The Marital Attitude Scale has previously been shown to distinguish between ACOD and non-ACOD, with adult children of divorce scoring significantly lower than adults from non-divorced homes ( $F(3,451) = 6.75, p < .0001$ ; Braaten & Rosèn, 1998).

Hypothesis three predicted that students enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations whose parents were divorced would show, upon completion of the course, increased relationship optimism, as measured by the Optimism About Relationships scale (Carnelly & Janoff-Bulman, 1992), as compared with students who completed Intimate and Family Relations who came from non-divorced homes. This hypothesis was not supported. It is

notable, however, that the difference between ACOD and non-ACOD scores on the Optimism About Relationships posttest measure approached statistical significance, achieving a  $p$  value of .07. This finding suggests that perhaps individuals coming from divorced homes may be more inclined to change their beliefs about relationships as a result of enrolling in a relationship education course. Individuals who came from non-divorced homes, however, may have entered the course with a reasonable degree of optimism about their future relationships, and may therefore have been less likely to change their beliefs. Again, the sensitivity of the measure as well as sample size are important considerations when making inferences about the meaning of these results.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that students who completed Intimate and Family Relations would show lowered relationship expectations, as measured by the Marital Attitude Scale (Braaten & Rosèn, 1998), as compared with students enrolled in Fundamentals of Learning. This hypothesis in particular addressed the concept of changing beliefs and expectations about relationships by way of introducing information and challenging existing beliefs through relationship education. This hypothesis was not supported. Mean posttest scores on the Marital Attitude Scale were almost identical to pretest scores in both groups, suggesting that the addition of relationship education was not effective in reducing perhaps unrealistic attitudes towards marriage. It is possible that the changes produced by completing Intimate and Family Relations were not evident by the completion of the course, and perhaps the information needed more time to “sink in.” All things considered, if changes were observed after more time had passed, it would be difficult to determine whether the changes could be attributed to completion of Intimate and Family Relations or to other life factors that have been known to influence

relationship beliefs, such as personal relationship experience and maturation, among other factors.

Laner and Russel (1994) designed a course focusing on courtship and marriage that had reduction of unrealistic expectations about marriage as one of its primary goals. After achieving little success in their endeavor, they suggested that perhaps relationship expectations needed to be addressed more directly in the course, or in other words, perhaps if the course had been taught “to the test,” the desired results might have been obtained. In the current study, relationship expectations were addressed very directly and students had several opportunities to both discuss and challenge their beliefs and expectations about relationships in the larger class and individually. Students remained steadfast in their beliefs about relationships nonetheless.

One possible explanation as to why students remained so steadfast in their relationship beliefs is that, as Boyer-Pennington et al. (2001) suggest, individuals are more likely to view others as being at a greater risk of experiencing unfortunate events than themselves. When participants who experienced parental divorce were asked about their perceptions of their own risk of divorcing in the future as compared to others with similar familial characteristics, individuals rated others as being much more "at risk" than themselves (Boyer-Pennington, et al., 2001). This suggests that perhaps the beliefs that individuals hold, both about relationships and about life in general, could serve as a form of self-preservation, allowing people to carry on with everyday life relatively free from preoccupying thoughts about the inherent risk of being human. Perhaps young adults hold unrealistic expectations about relationships without even realizing it, and possibly for the purpose of preserving the image they might hold for their futures.

The last hypothesis predicted that students who completed Intimate and Family Relations and who initially perceived their families of origin as unhealthy, as measured by the Family of Origin Scale (Hovestadt et al., 1985), would show improved attitudes towards marriage and increased relationship optimism, as measured by the Marital Attitude Scale and the Optimism About Relationships scale, respectively, as compared with students who completed Intimate and Family Relations and who initially perceived their families of origin as healthy. This hypothesis was not supported. Neither Marital Attitude Scale scores nor Optimism About Relationships scores were significantly changed for students who completed Intimate and Family Relations, regardless of perceptions of family health.

An interesting finding did come from this data, however, in terms of how perceptions of family health seemed to influence pretest scores on both the Marital Attitude Scale and the Optimism About Relationships scale. Hypothesis two predicted there to be a difference in relationship optimism and attitudes towards marriage based on parental divorce. While this hypothesis was not supported, there were statistically significant differences between students perceiving their families of origin as unhealthy on measures of relationship optimism and attitudes towards marriage as compared with students who perceived their families of origin as healthy. Of the 108 total participants in this study, thirty-four scored below 135 on the Family of Origin Scale, indicating that they perceived their families of origin as unhealthy. The remaining seventy-four participants scored above 135 on the Family of Origin Scale, indicating that they perceived their families of origin as healthy. Independent samples *t*-tests comparing these two groups on pretest measures on both the Marital Attitude Scale and the Optimism

About Relationships scale produced statistically significant results ( $p < .05$ ), indicating that there are statistically significant differences on measures of relationship optimism and attitudes towards marriage between those perceiving their families of origin as unhealthy and those perceiving their families of origin as healthy, regardless of whether or not the participants' parents were divorced. This result runs counter to Amato and DeBoer's (2001) claim that parental divorce is the key factor influencing thoughts about marriage, and not the family climate. Support for this finding comes from the longitudinal research of Hetherington and Kelly (2002), who emphasize that having at least one strong, nurturing role model contributes more to development and resiliency than whether or not an individual's parents were divorced.

Exploring this idea further, another post-hoc independent samples *t*-test was conducted looking at the differences in mean scores on the Family of Origin Scale between participants whose parents were divorced versus those whose parents were not divorced. Participants whose parents were divorced scored significantly lower on the Family of Origin Scale ( $m = 132.73$ ,  $sd = 30.85$ ) than participants from non-divorced homes ( $m = 150.66$ ,  $sd = 29.32$ ) ( $p < .05$ ). This finding suggests that adult children of divorce, on average, perceive their families of origin as less healthy than those coming from non-divorced homes.

There are several limitations to the current study that could have contributed to the results. First, sample size was relatively small, and power analyses indicated a low to moderate degree of power. Perhaps had the sample been larger, real differences in assessment scores could have been detected. The sample enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations was also a self-selected group. It is possible that there were characteristics

about this sample that led the participants to enroll in the course, such as family histories that placed them at a greater risk for experiencing relationship difficulties. Along this same vein, the comparison group was selected assuming that students enrolled in Fundamentals of Learning would be similar to students enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations. Specifically, both courses were listed within the Department of Psychology, and therefore could have attracted a certain student profile. It is possible that students enrolled in social science courses possess characteristics (like unique family and relationship experiences) that lead them to pursue education in the field of psychology or counseling. Perhaps these students already had firm beliefs about relationships, but were seeking knowledge and skills that could aid them in their future relationships endeavors, which this study did not specifically measure.

Another limitation related to the sample itself is that the majority of students enrolled in both courses were female. Therefore, it is difficult to make inferences about the meaning of these results for both sexes, since males were not adequately represented. Lin and Raghubir (2005) suggested that men typically hold more unrealistic beliefs about relationships than women, and that these beliefs are even more difficult to change. It would have been interesting to explore specific gender differences in relationship optimism and attitudes towards marriage had the current sample been more gender-balanced.

The obvious limitation which was previously mentioned is the assessments themselves. While the Marital Attitude Scale had acceptable psychometric properties, there were no psychometric properties available for the Optimism About Relationships measure. In addition, the Likert scales on these two measures that participants were

reporting on were opposite. For example, the Optimism About Relationships scale asked participants to respond on a scale ranging from 0 to 4, with 0 representing “Not at all” and 4 representing “Extremely.” On the Marital Attitude Scale, however, participants were asked to respond on a scale from 0 to 3 with 0 representing “Strongly Agree” and 3 representing “Strongly Disagree.” Measures were counterbalanced in the study to control for order effects, but even so, it is possible that participants did not respond accurately as a result of not paying attention to the responses their chosen numbers represented, and there is no way to determine whether or not this was the case.

After a comprehensive literature review, it is apparent that quantitative inquiry in the area of relationship belief formation has not been particularly productive. However, it seems that a qualitative approach may be a more comprehensive and authentic way of gathering information from adults that could inform researchers about the development of relationship beliefs, expectations, and how personal and familial influences have contributed to this development. It is possible that through a different means of gathering information, more clear and complete themes could be drawn that could inform researchers of what is needed in terms of relationship education, what adults benefit from learning from a university or community-based course, and what measures to use in future quantitative studies. The importance of providing the education that young adults may be lacking in terms of relationship skill and knowledge is undeniable. The direction that educators take in this realm may need to focus more on developing healthy relationship skills and encouraging self-awareness in intimate relationships, and perhaps focus less on trying to change the relationship beliefs and expectations that students present with.

There are obviously many factors that contribute to individuals' formations of relationship beliefs and expectations about relationships and marriage. It is nearly impossible to pinpoint what is contributing most to individuals' development of beliefs about relationships, and further, how these beliefs will play out in their future relationships. If relationship beliefs and expectations cannot be altered, at the very least, perhaps individuals can develop a greater awareness of their beliefs and expectations. Through this self-awareness, perhaps individuals can enter into intimate relationships with a clear idea of what they expect, and some awareness that their partner will not always be able to meet those expectations. Creating a dialogue around expectations and "standards" for relationships is an important piece of this complicated puzzle.

Baucom and colleagues provide a different perspective on relationship expectations than other researchers in the area of relationship beliefs and expectations (Baucom, Epstein, Rankin & Burnett, 1996). They suggest that perhaps having high expectations and standards of what one expects from an intimate relationship is not necessarily detrimental to the relationship. Making efforts to communicate these expectations to one's partner, and exhibiting flexibility in working through different expectations that each partner brings are keys that contribute to success in relationships. Implying that individuals should lower their expectations in order to avoid disappointment is perhaps the wrong path to follow. In light of the findings of the current study, questions emerge as to the importance of altering beliefs and expectations about relationships. Researchers have offered several attempts at changing idealized relationship beliefs, to no avail. Perhaps it is time that we question how we can work with the sometimes inflated expectations about marriage and intimate relationships in order to

assist individuals and couples in fostering successful and healthy relationships without altering their belief systems.

There are other aspects of this course which were perceived to be meaningful and valuable to students, such as having the opportunity to talk with other students about relationship issues, meeting one-on-one with a Counselor Education Practicum student to discuss relationship issues, and being exposed to various learning opportunities both in and out of class.

While the chosen assessments did not produce results that evidenced changes in these students over the course of the semester, it is possible that this course is one small piece of the vast number of experiences these individuals will have that will help them prepare for their future relationships. As a self-selected group, perhaps the students who enrolled in Intimate and Family Relations will be more open to relationship education in the future. The motivation to participate in a relationship education course perhaps will contribute to the individual's personal journey towards achieving the ideal: a healthy and happy marriage.

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## Appendix A

## Course Evaluation

Please circle the number that best corresponds with how valuable or meaningful you found certain aspects of this course. Your responses are for evaluative purposes only and will not in any way effect your grade in this course.

	Not at all valuable or meaningful			Very valuable or meaningful	
1. Watching films that depict the effects of the media on societal values and norms:	1	2	3	4	5
2. Biweekly class lectures focusing on intimate and family relationships:	1	2	3	4	5
3. Class discussion – sharing my own perspectives and hearing the views of my classmates:	1	2	3	4	5
4. Individual or group consultation with a Counselor Ed practicum student related to relationship issues:	1	2	3	4	5
5. Guest lectures on special topics from professionals in the community:	1	2	3	4	5
6. Small group work – discussing with classmates topics related to intimate and family relationships:	1	2	3	4	5
7. Please comment on any other aspects of this course that were either not valuable or meaningful, or that were especially valuable or meaningful.					

## Appendix B

## Optimism about Relationships

Please circle the number that best corresponds to your response to each of the following questions:

1. How confident are you that you will have successful love relationships in the future?

Not at all    somewhat    moderately    very    extremely  
0            1            2            3            4

2. Do you want to get married in the future?    \_\_\_\_yes    \_\_\_\_no

3. How likely is it that you will get married?

Not at all    somewhat    moderately    very    extremely  
0            1            2            3            4

4. How likely is it that you will have a successful marriage?

Not at all    somewhat    moderately    very    extremely  
0            1            2            3            4

5. How likely is it that you will get divorced some time in your life?\*

Not at all    somewhat    moderately    very    extremely  
0            1            2            3            4

6. In general how optimistic do you feel about the success of your love relationships in the future?

Not at all    somewhat    moderately    very    extremely  
0            1            2            3            4

\*Reverse-keyed items

(Carnelly & Janoff-Bulman, 1992)

## Appendix C

## Family-of-Origin Scale

The family of origin is the family with which you spent most or all of your childhood years. This scale is designed to help you recall how your family of origin functioned.

Each family is unique and has its own way of doing things. Thus, there are *no right or wrong choices* in this scale. What is important is that you respond as *honestly* as you can.

In reading the following statements, apply them to your family of origin, *as you remember it*. Using the following scale, circle the appropriate number. Please respond to each statement.

5 (SA) = Strongly agree that it describes my family of origin.

4 (A) = Agree that it describes my family of origin.

3 (N) = Neutral.

2 (D) = Disagree that it describes my family of origin.

1 (SD) = Strongly disagree that it describes my family of origin.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. In my family, It was normal to show both positive and negative feelings.	5	4	3	2	1
2. The atmosphere in my family usually was unpleasant.*	5	4	3	2	1
3. In my family, we encouraged one another to develop new friendships.	5	4	3	2	1

4. Differences of opinion in my family were discouraged.*	5	4	3	2	1
5. People in my family often made excuses for their mistakes.*	5	4	3	2	1
6. My parents encouraged family members to listen to one another.	5	4	3	2	1
7. Conflicts in my family never got resolved.*	5	4	3	2	1
8. My family taught me that people were basically good.	5	4	3	2	1
9. I found it difficult to understand what other family members said and how they felt.*	5	4	3	2	1
10. We talked about our sadness when a relative or family friend died.	5	4	3	2	1
11. My parents openly admitted it when they were wrong.	5	4	3	2	1
12. In my family, I expressed just about any feeling I had.	5	4	3	2	1
13. Resolving conflicts in my family was a very stressful experience.*	5	4	3	2	1
14. My family was receptive to the different ways various family members viewed life.	5	4	3	2	1

15. My parents encouraged me to express my views openly.	5	4	3	2	1
16. I often had to guess at what other family members thought or how they felt.*	5	4	3	2	1
17. My attitudes and my feelings frequently were ignored or criticized in my family.*	5	4	3	2	1
18. My family members rarely expressed responsibility for their actions.*	5	4	3	2	1
19. In my family, I felt free to express my own opinions.	5	4	3	2	1
20. We never talked about our grief when a relative or family friend died.*	5	4	3	2	1
21. Sometimes in my family, I did not have to say anything, but I felt understood.	5	4	3	2	1
22. The atmosphere in my family was cold and negative.*	5	4	3	2	1
23. The members of my family were not very receptive to one another's views.*	5	4	3	2	1
24. I found it easy to understand what other family members said and how they felt.	5	4	3	2	1
25. If a family friend moved away, we never discussed our feelings of sadness.*	5	4	3	2	1

26. In my family, I learned to be suspicious of others.*	5	4	3	2	1
27. In my family, I felt that I could talk things out and settle conflicts.	5	4	3	2	1
28. I found it difficult to express my own opinions in my family.*	5	4	3	2	1
29. Mealtimes in my home usually were friendly and pleasant.	5	4	3	2	1
30. In my family, no one cared about the feelings of other family members.*	5	4	3	2	1
31. We usually were able to work out conflicts in my family.	5	4	3	2	1
32. In my family, certain feelings were not allowed to be expressed.*	5	4	3	2	1
33. My family believed that people usually took advantage of you.*	5	4	3	2	1
34. I found it easy in my family to express what I thought and how I felt.	5	4	3	2	1
35. My family members usually were sensitive to one another's feelings.	5	4	3	2	1
36. When someone important to us moved away, our family discussed our feelings of loss.	5	4	3	2	1
37. My parents discouraged us from expressing					

views different from theirs.*	5	4	3	2	1
38. In my family, people took responsibility for what they did.	5	4	3	2	1
39. My family had an unwritten rule: Don't express your feelings.*	5	4	3	2	1
40. I remember my family as being warm and supportive	5	4	3	2	1

\*Reverse-keyed items

(Hovestadt et al., 1985)

## Appendix D

## Marital Attitude Scale

Instructions: Please indicate by circling how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding marriage.

ANSWER KEY: 0=Strongly Agree; 1=Agree; 2=Disagree; 3=Strongly Disagree

1. People should marry.\*

0     1     2     3

2. I have little confidence that my marriage will be a success.

0     1     2     3

3. People should stay married to their spouses for the rest of their lives.\*

0     1     2     3

4. Most couples are either unhappy in their marriage or are divorced.

0     1     2     3

5. I will be satisfied when I get married.\*

0     1     2     3

6. I am fearful of marriage.

0     1     2     3

7. I have doubts about marriage.

0     1     2     3

8. People should only get married if they are sure that it will last forever.\*

0     1     2     3

9. People should feel very cautious about entering into a marriage.

0     1     2     3

10. Most marriages are unhappy situations.

0      1      2      3

11. Marriage is only a legal contract.

0      1      2      3

12. Marriage is a sacred act.\*

0      1      2      3

13. Most marriages aren't equal partnerships.

0      1      2      3

14. Most people have to sacrifice too much in marriage.

0      1      2      3

15. Because half of all marriages end in divorce, marriage seems futile.

0      1      2      3

16. If I divorce, I would probably remarry.\*

0      1      2      3

17. When people don't get along, I believe they should divorce.

0      1      2      3

18. I believe a relationship can be just as strong without having to go through the

marriage      ceremony.

0      1      2      3

19. My lifelong dream includes a happy marriage.\*

0      1      2      3

20. There is not such a thing as a happy marriage.

0      1      2      3

21. Marriage restricts individuals from achieving their goals.

0      1      2      3

22. People weren't meant to stay in one relationship for their entire lives.

0      1      2      3

23. Marriage provides companionship that is missing from other types of relationships.\*

0      1      2      3

\*Reverse-keyed items.

(Braaten & Rosèn, 1998)

## Appendix E

## Demographic Questionnaire

Please respond to the following questions either by writing in your response or circling the option that best fits your response.

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ (if you are under 18, please do not continue completing the questionnaires)

2. What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

3. What year are you in college?

Freshman      Sophomore      Junior      Senior      Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What is your sexual orientation?

Heterosexual      Homosexual      Bisexual      Transgendered

5. What is your ethnicity?

White \_\_\_\_\_      Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_  
 African American \_\_\_\_\_      Asian \_\_\_\_\_  
 Native American \_\_\_\_\_      Other (please identify) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Were your biological parents divorced when you were under the age of 18? **If no, please skip the following questions and proceed to the next page.**

Yes      No

7. What was your age when your parents were divorced? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Did you live with one biological parent?      Yes      No

If "Yes," which parent did you live with after the divorce? \_\_\_\_\_

9. Did either of your parents remarry after their divorce?      Yes      No

10. What is the current marital status of each of your biological parents?

**Mother:**      Married      Divorced      Widowed      Separated      Unknown

**Father:**      Married      Divorced      Widowed      Separated      Unknown