

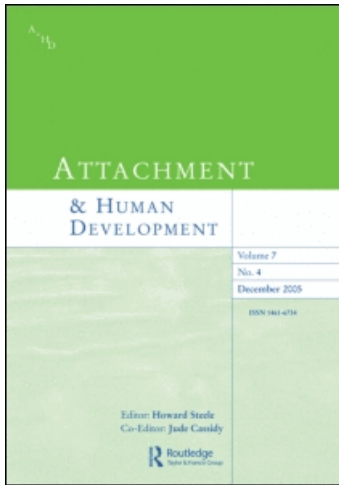
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Judith A. Crowell ^a; Dominique Treboux ^a; Susan Brockmeyer ^a

^a State University of New York at Stony Brook, NY, USA

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Parental divorce and adult children's attachment representations and marital status

Judith A. Crowell*, Dominique Treboux and Susan Brockmeyer

State University of New York at Stony Brook, NY, USA

The purpose of this study was to explore adult attachment as a means of understanding the intergenerational transmission of divorce, that is, the propensity for the children of divorce to end their own marriages. Participants included 157 couples assessed 3 months prior to their weddings and 6 years later. Participants completed the Adult Attachment Interview and questionnaires about their relationships, and were videotaped with their partners in a couple interaction task. Results indicated that, in this sample, adult children of divorce were not more likely to divorce within the first 6 years of marriage. However, parental divorce increased the likelihood of having an insecure adult attachment status. For women, age at the time of their parents' divorce was related to adult attachment status, and the influence on attachment representations may be more enduring. Among adult children of divorce, those who were classified as secure in their attachment representations were less likely to divorce in the early years of marriage than insecure participants.

Keywords: attachment; divorce; parental divorce

Introduction

The intergenerational transmission of divorce, that is, the propensity for the children of divorce to end their own marriages, has been well documented (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991; Teachman, 2002; Wolfinger, 2000). Parental divorce approximately doubles the chance that offspring will divorce at some point in the course of their marriages (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). This phenomenon is observed in both men and women (Pope & Mueller, 1976), but the "parental divorce effect" is strongest for white women (Glenn & Kramer, 1987).

A number of explanations have been offered to explain the intergenerational transmission of divorce. One hypothesis, based on principles of social learning, argues that through the mechanism of social modeling, parents who divorce model poor skills for their children, rather than those necessary to maintain a successful marriage. Indeed, relationships that end in divorce are often marked by poor communication, low self-disclosure, negative emotion, withdrawal from conflict resolution, and problems with jealousy, infidelity, moodiness, and anger (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Gottman, 1994; Leonard & Roberts, 1998; Olson, 1990).

Another explanation for the intergenerational transmission of divorce suggests that divorcing parents convey a low commitment to marriage to their children and impart favorable attitudes toward divorce. Indeed, Amato and DeBoer (2001) report that it is the

*Corresponding author. Email: jcrowell@notes.cc.sunysb.edu; jac19@optonline.net

dissolution of the marriage itself, not parental conflict or discord, that is associated with divorce in the next generation. Children of divorce, perhaps more than others, have an understanding that life can go on after a divorce, and may even improve (Greenberg & Nay, 1982). Individuals from divorced families have been shown to hold less idealized views about marriage, and to be more willing to consider alternatives to the traditional family structure than individuals from intact families (Amato, 1988). Moreover, children of divorce have been shown to be less optimistic about marriage (Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, & Roberts, 1990). The adoption of more favorable attitudes toward divorce in the culture has been linked to lower quality of the marriage (Amato & Rogers, 1999). Nevertheless, in a computerized task of attention versus avoidance, offspring of divorced parents were found to be hypervigilant to loss stimuli compared with those from intact families and those who experienced parental death (Luecken & Appelhans, 2005). This finding runs counter to a low commitment hypothesis, although such a sensitivity may still be problematic within the relationship.

Attachment theory

Attachment theory has been an increasingly useful explanatory framework in both research and clinical investigations of marriage. In part, its value to the field rests in its strong emphasis on how early experience has an impact on later relationship behavior and cognitions (e.g., Bretherton, 1985; Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992b; Creasey, 2002; Crowell et al., 2002a; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Paley, Cox, & Burchinal, 1999; Roisman, 2007; Simpson, Rholes, Orina, & Grich, 2002; Treboux, Crowell, & Waters, 2004), a perspective that may be very helpful in understanding the intergenerational transmission of divorce.

The theory, initially developed to describe parent-child relationships, emphasizes the importance of the caregiver and child attachment relationship as an influence on adult relationships rather than stressing the importance of the model provided by the parents' marital relationship and attitudes imparted. A primary caregiver's consistency in sensitivity and responsiveness to the child's needs leads to the development of a secure attachment relationship, whereas inconsistency and rejection in attachment interactions are associated with insecure patterns of attachment (Bowlby, 1969/1982; Bretherton, 1985). Repeated secure base experiences with the caregiver are hypothesized to coalesce into the child's cognitive representation of attachment (e.g., Bretherton, 1985; Crowell et al., 1996; Crowell et al., 2002a; Sagi et al., 1994; van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 1996). The representation is hypothesized to organize the beliefs, behaviors, and expectations of close relationships including what one is to gain from and give in attachment relationships across the life span (Bowlby, 1969/1982). Longitudinal research has shown that in relatively stable caregiving environments, there is consistency of the attachment pattern formed in childhood and the adult attachment representation (Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000), and furthermore adults whose adult attachment representations are characterized as secure are more likely to respond supportively to a spouse during potentially emotion-arousing discussion of a disagreement (Crowell et al., 2002a).

However, there is evidence that attachment patterns may be altered by changes in the caregiving environment and by the integration of new or different close relationship experiences (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 2002b; Vaughn, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1979; Waters, 1978; Waters et al., 2000). Divorce is a life event that is very likely to be accompanied by a shift in the caregiving environment. Parenting behavior is likely to change in the

wake of a divorce (Clarke-Stewart, Vandell, McCartney, Owen, & Booth, 2000; Emery, 1999; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Martinez & Forgatch, 2002; Nair & Murray, 2005; Shaw, Winslow, & Flanagan, 1999; Wood, Repetti, & Roesch, 2004). Parents who experience a divorce have been found to be less able to control the behavior of their children, less consistent in their parenting techniques, and often less affectionate with their children, and parenting practices are major determinants of child outcome. Indeed, there is empirical evidence that parental divorce is associated with attachment insecurity in late adolescence (Beckwith, Cohen, & Hamilton, 1999; Lewis, Feiring, & Rosenthal, 2000).

In this study, we examined whether the childhood experience of parental divorce was associated with either marital stability or marital quality in the early years of marriage, since many unhappy couples stay together. We compared adult offspring of divorced families with offspring of intact families with respect to their adult attachment representations, their reports of positive feelings and conflict, their behavior as a couple, and their marital status in the early years of marriage. We anticipated that problems with caregiving and the parent-child relationship that frequently co-occur with parental divorce would be evidenced in a greater number of the offspring of divorced families being classified as insecure compared with those from intact families, and that this attachment insecurity might represent a mechanism for the repetition of divorce patterns across generations. Because of the finding that intergenerational transmission of divorce is more likely to occur in women (Glenn & Kramer, 1987) and because of concerns regarding the non-independence of couples' data, we examined gender differences. We further assessed whether the child's age at the time of divorce would be relevant to attachment security and marital status because children of different ages are vulnerable in different ways to parental divorce (Kalter & Rembar, 1981), and because some attachment researchers hypothesize that early attachment relationships are more influential in the development of attachment representations than relationships in late childhood or adolescence (e.g., Main & Goldwyn 1994; Roisman, Padron, Sroufe, & Egeland, 2002).

Method

Participants

This study was part of a larger study designed to examine the development of attachment relationships in marriage (National Institute of Mental Health Grant R01-4493501), and was approved by the Committees on Research Involving Human Subjects. It was conducted in Suffolk County, New York, with a diverse sample of working class to upper middle class couples in a suburban area ($n = 157$ couples, 314 individuals). The mean level of education was 14.8 years. The sample consisted of predominantly White (95%) participants. The mean age of women at the time of the first assessment was 23.5 ($SD = 1.5$) years, and of men, 24.9 ($SD = 2.3$) years. Women over the age of 25 years and men over 27 years, who had children (or known pregnancies) at the time of assessment, or who had been previously married, were excluded from the study. These exclusion criteria were intended to minimize variability in relationship experiences in the sample. The sample was representative of the population of young adults receiving marriage licenses in Suffolk County. The couples were recruited by newspaper advertisements and through a wedding fair, and they were reimbursed for their participation.

Couples were initially seen within the 3 months prior to their weddings. At this assessment, they had been together an average of 51 months ($SD = 25.66$). Forty-eight percent reported no serious involvement with anyone prior to their engagement partner.

Seventy-five individuals were from divorced families (24% of the sample), 31 women and 44 men. At the time of their parents' divorce, 18 (24%) of them were 0–5 years old, 30 (40%) were 6–12 old, 6 (21%) were 13–18 old, and 11 (15%) were over 18 years.

Six years after the initial assessment, the marital status of all but one of the original couples was obtained ($n = 156$ couples). A total of 122 (78%) couples were married ($M = 69.7$ months of marriage, $SD = 15.3$), 30 (19%) had separated or divorced, and 5 (3%) of the couples had never married. The literature indicates similar divorce rates in couples 6–9 years into their marriage (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Houston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2000; Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1998).

At that time, all participants were invited to return for reassessment and 228 individuals completed the 6 year assessment. Seventy-nine percent of the individuals who were married returned and 47% of those who never married or had divorced returned at this stage of assessment. Other studies of marriage have shown similar retention rates (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Fifty-eight of the returning participants (26 women, 32 men) were offspring of divorced families; thus the same proportion of these participants returned as those from intact families.

Participation at the 6 year assessment for the total sample (including married, separated, divorced individuals) was unrelated to AAI coherence, but showed small but significant correlations with the pre-marital variables of IQ, $r(309) = .15$, $p < .01$, and educational level, $r(309) = .10$, $p \leq .05$. In the participants who remained married, the only variable that differentiated those who participated at 6 years from those who did not was IQ score, $r(244) = .13$, $p \leq .05$ (Treboux et al., 2004).

Measures

The Adult Attachment Interview

The Adult Attachment Interview (AAI; George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985; Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985) was administered to the participants before marriage and again at the 6-year follow up. It assesses adults' generalized representations of attachment based on discussion of childhood relationships with their parents and the effects of those experiences on their development as adults, and as parents, if relevant. The AAI has demonstrated excellent discriminant and construct validity (Crowell, Fraley, & Shaver, 1999; Crowell et al., 2002a; Hesse, 1999).

In a semi-structured interview format, the AAI asks for adjectives describing childhood relationships with parents and illustrative incidents supporting those adjectives, and about experiences of being upset, ill, and hurt, and separations, losses, and abuse. Adults are asked about changes in their relationships with their parents since childhood, for descriptions of their current relationships with parents, and for explanations regarding parents' behavior when the participant was a child. They are asked about the effects of their early childhood experiences on adult personality and parenting behavior (if applicable), and hopes for their children.

Past childhood experiences with each parent are rated on 9-point scales for loving behavior, rejection, neglect, pressure to achieve, and involving/role reversing behavior in the coder's opinion. State of mind regarding attachment is rated on a variety of scales including coherence (e.g., believability, clarity, relation to topic), idealization of parents, stated lack of recall, passivity of speech, derogation of attachment, and preoccupying anger toward parents. An attachment classification is given using prototypic descriptions and guided by the rating scales (Main & Goldwyn, 1994).

There are three primary classifications: Secure/autonomous, Insecure/dismissing, or Insecure/preoccupied with respect to attachment. A transcript may also be assigned a "Cannot Classify" category if it contains strong elements that are not typically seen together in a transcript, e.g., high idealization of one parent and high active anger at the other. In addition, a classification of Unresolved with respect to past abuse or loss may be assigned in conjunction with a best-fitting primary classification. In the analyses below, the major classification was used to assign participants to a Secure group or an Insecure Group (Preoccupied, Dismissing, Cannot Classify). Individuals classified as Unresolved were grouped by major classification.¹

Although all the scales are used to guide classification, the coherence scale reflects a general ability to present an integrated, believable account of experiences and their meaning necessary to be classified as Secure. Based upon discriminant function analysis to assess the relative contribution of each scale to security, the coherence score is the best predictor of a continuous security score ($r = .96$) (Waters, Treboux, Fyffe, & Crowell, 2001). Individuals' AAI coherence corresponds to attachment behavior with both children and adult partners (Cohn, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992a; Creasey, 2002; Crowell & Feldman, 1988; Crowell et al., 2002a; Hesse, 1999; Paley et al., 1999; Roisman et al., 2002).

The Adult Attachment Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and scored from transcriptions by two experienced coders fully trained by Mary Main and Eric Hesse, and blind to all other information regarding the participants. Inter-rater agreement was based on a randomly selected sample of all available interviews for each phase. At the premarital phase, 297 interviews were scored; the remaining tapes had technical problems and could not be transcribed. At 6 years of marriage, 227 tapes were scored. Agreement for 4 classifications (Secure, Dismissing, Preoccupied, Cannot Classify) before marriage was 74% on 84 cases ($kappa = .61, p \leq .01$), and at the 6 year assessment, was 88% agreement on 25 cases (11%), $kappa = .81, p \leq .01$. Inter-rater agreement for premarital coherence was $r(84) = .66, p \leq .01$, and $r(25) = .70, p \leq .01$ at 6 years. Disagreements between the coders were settled by conference.

Before marriage, 125 (42%) participants were classified as Secure and 172 (58%) as Insecure (32% Dismissing, 26% Preoccupied). At 6 years, 116 (51%) participants were classified as Secure and 111 (49%) as Insecure (32% Dismissing, 15% Preoccupied, 2% Cannot Classify). The pre-marital distribution differs (trend) from other samples of young adults in that a relatively high proportion was classified as Preoccupied (Treboux et al., 2004). The 6-year distribution does not differ from other samples of adults (Treboux et al., 2004).

Relationship assessments

Several key domains of marital relationships were investigated as outcome variables, including self-reported negative conflict tactics, positive feelings in the relationship, and observed couples' interactions.

Conflict behavior

The Family Behavior Survey (FBS; Posada & Waters, 1988) assesses frequency of discord and aggressive conflict tactics in the past 6 months. The *Frequency of Discord* scale asks respondents to rate on a 5-point scale how often they disagreed with their partners on each of 18 topics (e.g., finances, affection, in-laws). Alpha reliability was .82 at 6 years.

The *Aggression* scale consists of 3 sub-scales of aggressive behaviors that couples may employ during an argument or disagreement: Verbal Aggression, Physical Aggression, and Threats of Abandonment. The *Verbal Aggression* sub-scale consists of 46 items reflecting hostile, but not physical, behaviors ($\alpha = .92$). The *Physical Aggression* sub-scale consists of 12 items assessing mild to moderate physical aggression (Straus, 1979) ($\alpha = .69$). The *Threats of Abandonment* sub-scale consists of 9 items describing threats to leave the relationship ($\alpha = .82$). Respondents indicated how often their partners had engaged in the behaviors, ranging from 0 (never) to 5 (every week or more). The FBS discord and aggression scales were standardized (*z*-scored) and summed to yield a Conflict Behavior dimension.

Feelings about the relationship

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) is a widely used measure of marital adjustment. The total score on the 32-item DAS was used to assess overall marital adjustment ($\alpha = .92$). A score under 100 is an indicator of marital distress, and a score of ≤ 107 represents a more liberal cut-off (Busby, Christensen, Crane, & Larson, 1995). At the 6 year assessment, 21% of the sample ($n = 45$) scored ≤ 107 , and 11% ($n = 24$) scored ≤ 100 .

The Sternberg Triangular Love Scale

The Sternberg Triangular Love Scale-Short Version (STLS-SV; Aron & Westbay, 1996; Sternberg, 1988) is a 21-item scale with 3 sub-scales scored with 7-point Likert scales (1 = not at all true to 7 = extremely true). *Intimacy* refers to feelings of closeness and connection (6 year $\alpha = .88$). *Passion* refers to romance, physical attraction, and sexually related feelings ($\alpha = .94$), and *Decision/Commitment* reflects the commitment to maintain one's love for one's partner ($\alpha = .85$). This scale has been shown to be related to relationship satisfaction, other measures of commitment and trust (Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002) and the AAI and CRI (Treboux et al., 2004). The DAS total score and the 3 scales of the STLS-SV were *z*-scored and summed to yield a Positive Relationship Feelings dimension.

The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale

The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998) is a 36-item Likert-type self-report scale assessing attachment-related feelings and behaviors. Items are summed on 2 dimensions: *Avoidance of closeness* ($\alpha = .89$) and *Anxiety about abandonment* ($\alpha = .87$). Avoidance items indicate avoidant (non-approach) behavior and concern about closeness that is within the participant's awareness, e.g., "I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down." Anxiety items indicate expression of concern about relationships and the need for closeness, e.g., "I worry about being abandoned." Scores on this scale have been associated with self-report attachment scales and relationship satisfaction, and a variety of other relationship domains (Crowell et al., 1999).

Observed behavior

Couples were assessed using a standard observation paradigm (Gottman, 1979; Gottman, Markman, & Notarius, 1977). The Discord scale of the FBS (Posada & Waters, 1988) was

used to select the topic of discussion. The researchers examined each partner's independently generated scale and selected the topic with the highest frequency of conflict reported by both partners. They were asked to discuss this problem for 15 minutes and to try to reach a resolution. The couple's interaction was videotaped and scored with the *Secure Base Scoring System (SBSS) for Adults* (Crowell et al., 1998; Crowell et al., 2002).

The SBSS assesses secure base use and support behaviors of each partner. Behaviors are rated on 7-point scales ranging from high to low. *Secure base use* behaviors are scored on 4 sub-scales and an overall summary scale. Sub-scales are (1) initial signal, (2) maintenance of the signal, (3) approach, and (4) ability to be comforted. In addition, a score is assigned for the Summary of Secure Base Use scale. *Secure base support* is also scored on 4 sub-scales and a summary scale. The sub-scales are (1) interest in the partner, (2) recognition of distress or concern, (3) interpretation of distress, and (4) responsiveness to distress. The Summary of Secure Base Support scale captures the overall secure base support of the participant.

Videotape data were available for 66 couples at the 6 year assessment (132 individuals). Videotape data was not available on 86 individuals who participated at this assessment phase because they had divorced ($n = 38$) or lived too far away to attend the laboratory session ($n = 32$) or refused the videotape session ($n = 16$). No differences were found between those who were taped versus those who were not other than the higher incidence of divorce in those who did not return for the assessment, as described above. Inter-rater agreement between 2 coders was calculated for 75 individuals (57% of the sample). Agreement for the secure base use summary scale was $r = .79$, $p \leq .01$, and for the support summary scale, $r = .64$, $p \leq .01$. Disagreements between coders were settled by conference with a third coder. As the summary scales are highly correlated within individuals $r(132) = .86$, the average of the scales was used to represent overall quality of secure base behavior.

Results

Chi-square analyses were used to address the question of whether parental divorce conferred risk in the form of early divorce in this sample of young adults. Chi-square and analyses of variance were then used to examine whether the offspring of divorced parents were at risk regarding adult attachment insecurity compared with offspring from intact families, and whether there were gender differences in these effects. Finally, using chi-squares and planned comparisons, we examined gender differences, child age at the time of parental divorce, and marital status of the participants who experienced parental divorce.

Because of the possibility of non-independence of couples' data, we examined chi-square data and intraclass correlations for partners for all relevant variables. The marital status of partners' parents was not significantly associated; that is, there was no evidence of assortative mating regarding parental marital status. The correlation for couples' security status was low, intraclass $r(158) = .20$, $F = 1.50$, $p \leq .05$. Marital variables of positive feelings in the relationship and reports of conflict were more highly correlated, positive feelings, $r(158) = .56$, $F = 3.51$, $p \leq .01$, and conflict reports, $r(158) = .59$, $F = 3.90$, $p \leq .01$. The partners' reports of anxiety on the ECR were significantly correlated, $r(158) = .37$, $F = 2.15$, $p \leq .01$, but reports of avoidance were not, $r(158) = .13$, $F = 1.29$, *ns*. For all of the analyses presented below, we took gender into account and/or conducted analyses separately for men and women.

Intergenerational transmission of divorce

At the 6 year follow-up, 35 (22%) of the original couples had either (1) separated just before their scheduled weddings ($n = 5$ couples) or (2) divorced ($n = 30$ couples). Seventeen couples (about half of the total) had divorced within the first 18 months of marriage. Parents were less likely to divorce (9%) than non-parents (36%), $X^2(1, 155) = 15.84, p < .01$. Chi-square analyses were conducted separately for men and women whose parents were either married or separated/divorced, excluding those who experienced parental death before age 18. Neither male nor female offspring of divorced parents were more likely to have divorced than offspring from intact families: men $X^2(1, 146) = .19, ns$; women $X^2(1, 150) = .33, ns$ (see Table 1 for overall sample).

Parental divorce and offspring attachment security

The association between parental divorce and adult attachment status at both time points was examined using (1) the Secure (autonomous) and Insecure (Dismissing, Preoccupied, and Cannot Classify combined) classifications, and (2) the continuous AAI coherence score (Table 2). Chi-squares examining security status and parental marital status were examined separately for men and women. Before marriage, findings were similar for both women and men (women $X^2(1, 144) = 13.58, p \leq .01$; men $X^2(1, 140) = 14.78, p \leq .01$). Sixty-two (54%) women from intact families were classified Secure, whereas only 5 (17%) of those from divorced families were Secure. Forty-nine (49%) of the men from intact families were classified as Secure, whereas 6 (15%) of the men from divorced families were classified as Secure.

Six years after the initial assessment, there was a significant relation between attachment status and parental marital status for women, $X^2(1, n = 117) = 8.32,$

Table 1. Offspring marital status and family of origin marital status at the 6 year assessment (across row percentages are presented).

	Offspring Marital Status	
	Married	Divorce/Sep.
Parents' Marital		
Intact	172 (77%)	50 (23%)
Divorced	57 (77%)	17 (23%)

$X^2(1, 295) = .006, ns.$

Table 2. Parents' marital status and AAI classifications before marriage (across row percentages are presented).

	Attachment Security before Marriage	
	Secure	Insecure
Parents marital status		
Intact	111 (52%)	102 (48%)
Divorced	11 (15%)	60 (85%)

$X^2(1, 283) = 29.14, p \leq .001.$

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$p \leq .05$, with 57 (63%) of those from intact families classified as Secure compared with 8 (31%) from families of divorce. Men from intact versus divorced families of origin did not differ in distribution of security: 35 (54%) of men from intact families were classified as Secure at 6 years and 13 (41%) of men from divorced families were classified as Secure. Chi-squares were conducted to determine whether the distribution of attachment classifications from before marriage to 6 year assessment had changed. More men from divorced families of origin were classified as secure at Time 2 than Time 1 $X^2(1, 72) = 6.31, p \leq 0.05$, but there was no significant change for the women, $X^2(1, 55) = 1.55, ns$.

Coherence

We examined these results more closely using a 2 (gender) X 2 (marital status) X 2 (within: AAI coherence before marriage and at 6 years) ANOVA. There was a significant interaction of parental marital status and coherence over time, $F(1, 203) = 3.62, p \leq .05$, such that the offspring of divorced families showed increased AAI coherence (security) over the 6 years between assessments (before marriage coherence, $M = 3.5, SD = 1.4$, 6 year coherence, $M = 4.0, SD = 1.7$). In contrast, AAI coherence at the 2 assessments did not differ for those from intact families (before marriage, $M = 5.0, SD = 2.1$; 6 years, $M = 5.0, SD = 1.5$).

Adult attachment within children of divorce

Age of offspring at time of divorce

Within the offspring of divorced families, we examined the correlation between the age of the child at the time of the divorce and the AAI coherence score before marriage separately for men and women. Results showed that the older girls were at the time of parental divorce the more coherent they were during their AAI interviews ($r(30) = .40, p \leq .05$). This trend held for women at the 6 year assessment, ($r(30) = .32, p \leq .10$). For men, there was no significant relation between age at time of parental divorce and AAI coherence at either assessment.

Marital status and quality of relationships of the offspring as related to parental marital status

Chi-square analyses were conducted to examine the relations among parental marital status, AAI security classification, and offspring marital status at the 6 year assessment (Table 3). Previously published data indicated that pairing of AAI classifications (secure man with secure woman, secure man with insecure woman, etc.) was not related to marital status in this sample (Crowell & Treboux, 2000). AAI classification was significantly related to marital status in the male offspring of children of divorce, men $X^2(1, 27) = 3.76, p \leq .05$, but not in the offspring of intact families. Overall the pattern was the same as for women but the chi-square did not reach statistical significance. Sixteen percent ($n = 9$) of the offspring of divorced parents classified as Insecure had separated or divorced, a rate close to the divorce rate of male and female offspring of intact families (23%), both Secure and Insecure. In contrast, none of the offspring of divorced parents who were classified as Secure when they entered the study had ended their marriage, either male or female.

Table 3. AAI classification and marital status in offspring of divorced families at the 6 year assessment (across row percentages are presented).

	Participant's marital status	
	Married	Divorced
AAI Classification		
Secure	20 (95%)	1 (5%)
Insecure	28 (75%)	9 (25%)

$\chi^2(1, 58) = 3.59, p \leq .05$.

To explore how feelings and behaviors reported in the marital relationships were related to parental marital status, we conducted 2 (attachment status) X 2 (gender) X 2 (family of origin marital status) planned comparisons of participants who were still married at 6 years. We examined couples' positive feelings about the relationship, self-reported conflict in the relationship, ECR anxiety and avoidance, and observed secure base behavior. Partners' scores were summed for the dependent variables because of non-independence of the dyadic data (Kenny, 2004).

For self-reported positive feelings, there was an interaction effect of gender by parents' marital status, $F(1,133) = 5.35, p \leq .05$, such that men and women did not differ in their reports of positive feelings when their parents were from intact families, but men from divorced families were significantly more positive in their relationship feelings than the women from either group or than men from intact families (men from intact families, $M = -0.3, SD = 6.1$; men from families of divorce, $M = 2.1, SD = 3.6$; women from intact families, $M = -0.8, SD = 4.2$; women from families of divorce, $M = -1.6, SD = 8.5$). Regarding self-reported conflict in the relationship, there was a main effect for parents' marriage such that individuals from divorced families of origin reported more conflict in their relationships (divorced, $M = 0.96, SD = 6.20$; married $M = -0.73, SD = 4.30$). There were no differences for anxiety or avoidant behavior. Regarding secure base behavior, there was a main effect for security, $F(1,133) = 12.68, p \leq .01$ such that Secure individuals had a mean couples' score of 8.2, $SD = 3.0$, Insecure $M = 5.7, SD = 2.0$.

Discussion

Divorce is a life altering experience that is associated with a variety of risks, including the increased chance of divorce in the lives of offspring of divorced parents. Several theories address the phenomenon of intergenerational transmission of divorce. This paper lends support to the hypothesis that one mechanism through which divorce proneness is transmitted is through the offspring's understanding of attachment and close relationships. Although parental divorce was not directly related to divorce of the offspring in the early years of marriage, it was associated with an increased risk of insecure adult attachment representations. Previous research has shown that attachment insecurity is associated with greater functional impairment in adult partnerships, including less effective secure base behavior, more negative feelings regarding relationships, and engaging in more aggressive conflict behaviors (e.g., Cohn et al., 1992; Creasey, 2002; Crowell et al., 2002a; Treboux et al., 2004). Many factors play into these associations, including the dynamic of representations within the couple and factors such as stressful life events

(e.g., Treboux et al., 2004). Indeed, results showed that the divorced offspring reported greater conflict.

Intergenerational transmission of divorce

Importantly, we did not find evidence for direct intergenerational transmission of divorce in this sample. In contrast to most studies that have investigated participants' *long term* risk of divorce, these couples were seen early in their marriages. They were also young, had no previous marriages, and had no children at the time of their weddings. At this developmental stage in their marriages, the offspring of divorced families did not differ in their likelihood of divorcing from those from intact families. It is important to note, however, that although there was no direct link between parental divorce and offspring divorce, but there was a link between parental divorce and offspring security, and between offspring security and offspring divorce, generally supporting the idea that over time such individuals are at higher risk of divorce. Interestingly, our previous work with this sample determined that the group most likely to divorce within the first 6 years of marriage were those who were classified as Secure in their attachment relationships to parents but insecure and unhappy in their relationships with the partner (Treboux et al., 2004). Perhaps secure partners who are unhappy in marriage have higher expectations for the marital relationship and/or are more able to risk the loss of the relationship through divorce. These findings are consistent with the idea that divorce early in marriage is a different phenomenon than later divorce.

Of particular note, the offspring from divorced families who were classified as Secure had a very low rate of divorce, significantly different from Secure and Insecure individuals from intact families and Insecure individuals from families of divorce. Examination of the characteristics of this group compared with other married participants revealed that there was a "movement toward security" over the transition to marriage in the offspring of divorced parents as evident in their higher coherence scores at the 6 year assessment and the link between their secure base behavior and coherence. This suggests that at least within these early years of their relationships with partners, the offspring of divorce may gain awareness/insight regarding their families of origin that has a positive impact on their relationship behavior. The men from families of divorce reported much more positive feelings about their current relationships than men from intact families or women. These feelings, along with their relatively good secure base skills, suggest that this group would be very opposed to divorce as an option (the opposite of a "low commitment" group), at least at this stage in the marriage.

Gender differences

We find interesting gender differences that are consistent with those found in the literature. The women appear to be somewhat more sensitive to the parental divorce experience than the men, especially if they were young at the time of the divorce. They appear less likely than the men to make the shift to greater coherence/security in the context of early marriage.

Limitations

It should be noted that there are several limitations to this study. This was an investigation of attachment relationship development in young couples, and thus it did not follow the

couples beyond these early years of marriage to understand the evolution of their relationships. Almost all of the participants were White and so the results cannot be generalized to partners of other ethnic groups or backgrounds. In addition, the sample of children of divorce is relatively small, a problem partially offset by the fact the sample was not biased by recruitment of children of divorced parents. Indeed, the study was not designed to collect specific data surrounding divorce during childhood. Nevertheless, sample size limits more in depth investigation of the data, including questions regarding the impact of parental divorce when both members of the couple had this experience versus one, the attachment behaviors of the partners, and the impact of having children.

Furthermore, due to the retrospective nature of the study, we relied on adults' recollections of their childhood environments. Thus, it is not possible to determine many potentially pertinent features of the family life before or following the divorce. Finally, given the format of the AAI, it cannot be clearly determined whether the divorce situation itself led to a disruption in the child's caregiving environment, or whether these were families that engendered insecure attachment relationships even prior to the parental divorce, as often appears to be the case (Kelly, 2000).

The study is a step in exploring the attachment system's role in why children from divorced families are at greater risk for divorce themselves. While attachment theory has been increasingly employed in investigations of marriage and close adult relationships, this framework has mainly been directed toward understanding parenting and child outcome in divorce (e.g., Nair & Murray, 2005; Solomon & George, 1999) rather than the phenomena of divorce per se. Findings suggest that this is a fruitful avenue of research, and may provide valuable understanding regarding severed relationships and their aftermath, as well as those relationships that remain intact even under extremely negative circumstances for the partners and their families.

Note

1. We used major classification (Secure, Insecure-Dismissing, Insecure-Preoccupied) excluding the Unresolved classification, as the means to classify individuals as Secure or Insecure. The Unresolved classification, although considered Insecure (Main & Goldwyn, 1994), appears to be distinct from the major classifications: (1) it is not a stable classification comparatively speaking, and the correlates of its stability are different than those of the major classifications (Crowell et al., 2002b); (2) equivalence of the coding based upon the traumatic experiences of loss versus abuse is unclear (Colon-Downs, 1997; Crowell et al., 2002b). Furthermore, the classification appears to have a different meaning when it is paired with a Secure versus an Insecure major classification (Creasey, 2002).

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