



Recollections of parent characteristics and attachment patterns for college women of intact vs. non-intact families[☆]

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Abstract

This study contrasted offsprings' attachment patterns and recollections of parent characteristics in two college samples: 147 females from intact biological parents and 157 females of parental divorce. Secure females from intact or non-intact families rated parents positively, while insecure females rated parents as absent, distant, and demanding. In contrast to females from intact families, females of parental divorce reported a less secure attachment, lower self-esteem, a greater fearful avoidance pattern, and rated their biological fathers and mothers more negatively.

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Introduction

Attachment theory, based upon the early work of Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), holds that early childhood experiences with caregivers form internal working mental models of self and others that guide subsequent adult relationships. Children who feel secure believe that attachment figures are available, responsive, and reliable. Children who do not perceive attachment figures in this

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manner do not develop a sense of “felt security”. As a consequence, they question their self-worth and the extent to which others can be trusted to meet their needs. Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, and Wall (1978) identified three prominent patterns of attachment in infants’ and young children’s behaviour: “secure attachment”, which she suggested is related to the primary caregivers being consistently available and responsive to the child’s needs; “avoidant attachment”, in which parents basically were unresponsive or overly rejecting; and “anxious/ambivalent attachment”, in which the child’s parents sometimes were available and responsive to needs and sometimes unavailable, and sometimes created obstacles to the child’s needs.

The initial model of infant attachment proposed by Ainsworth et al. (1978) was applied by Hazan & Shaver (1987) to three adult attachment types: secure, anxious/ambivalent, and avoidant. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) extended this model into four attachment categories (secure, preoccupied, fearful avoidant, and dismissive avoidant). Individuals with a secure attachment pattern think positively of themselves and are comfortable with intimacy and autonomy. Preoccupieds are overly dependent and overly concerned about abandonment; they hold others in higher regard than themselves and tend to make unreasonable demands for reassurance and nurturance. Those with a fearful-avoidant attachment pattern fear rejection, have difficulty trusting others, and avoid intimacy. Dismissive-avoidant individuals hold a positive self-image while avoiding intimacy to experience autonomy and self-sufficiency.

Studies have found links between offsprings’ attachment patterns and recollections of their parent figures. Secures reported close and accepting relationships with parents (Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Hazen & Shaver, 1987; Brennan & Shaver, 1998; Carranza & Kilmann, 2000), while insecurely attached individuals rated parents in negative terms (Brennan & Shaver, 1998; Carranza & Kilmann, 2000). Bringle and Bagby (1992) found that individuals with an avoidant attachment pattern described their parents as cold and rejecting. Other research (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Levy, Blatt, & Shaver, 1998) found that preoccupieds perceived their parents as not being a consistent source of support.

Attachment theory would predict that particular parent characteristics, such as psychological control, coercion, autonomy granting, warmth, distance, absence, and expressions of affection, should have differential effects on offsprings’ orientation to close relationships. However, most existing definitions and models of parenting styles (e.g. Baumrind, 1967, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Darling & Steinberg, 1993) do not sufficiently address these characteristics. In her descriptions of father–daughter relationships, Secunda (1992) distinguished between six “father styles” that can have differential effects on their offsprings’ attachment pattern. The “good enough father” does not have to be “perfect” but does convey significant interest and involvement in his daughter’s life coupled with a dependable and caring approach. Secunda identified five additional father styles which she considered predictive of future adjustment difficulties: the doting father, who wants to be the adoring centre of her life; the Distant Father, who is a passive or silent presence within the family; the Demanding Father, who dominates through rules, rigidity, or violence; the Seductive Father, who puts his love on a suggestive or erotic basis; and the Absent Father, who seldom sees his daughter, or abandons her, or who dies” (p. 103).

Carranza and Kilmann (2000) tested the meaningfulness of Secunda’s (1992) framework of parent characteristics as related to attachment variables. From items which described the six father styles, women from intact families (biological parents still married to each other) rated the

parenting characteristics of *both* parents. Positive associations were found between a secure attachment pattern and “good father” and “doting mother” characteristics. An insecure attachment pattern was linked with distant and demanding father characteristics, and with absent mother characteristics. Distant father and absent mother characteristics were linked to a fearful avoidant attachment pattern. Absent, seductive, and demanding father characteristics, and demanding mother characteristics were linked to a preoccupied attachment pattern. Distant father characteristics were linked to a dismissive avoidant attachment pattern. Subsequently, Carranza, Kilmann, and Vendemia (2005) used the same items derived from Secunda’s (1992) framework to explore links between recalled parenting characteristics and attachment patterns for college women and men of parental divorce. Women who did not rate their same-sex parent positively were more likely to report an insecure attachment pattern. A preoccupied attachment style was predicted from a distant father style and a stepfather’s demanding style. A fearful avoidant attachment pattern was predicted from more distant and less doting father styles. The findings of these two studies provided more specific information about qualitative features of parent characteristics and their link with offsprings’ attachment patterns in intact families than derived from previous studies.

The primary purpose of this research report is to contrast college women from intact families with those who experienced parental divorce with respect to their attachment patterns and recollections of parent characteristics. In general, compared to children from intact families, children of divorced parents are less securely attached, are less adjusted, and report greater relationship problems (McCabe, 1997; Brennan & Shaver, 1998). The negative emotional effects of parental divorce on children also include lingering feelings of abandonment, rejection, guilt, and low self-esteem (e.g. Kurdek, Blisk, & Siesky, 1981; Clifford & Clark, 1995). Our first hypothesis is derived from these collective findings:

1. College females from intact and divorced families will differ in their attachment patterns. Females of intact families will report a more secure attachment pattern.

Attachment theory would predict that the lessened involvement of parents and their emotional unavailability for their children during separation and divorce would have a negative impact on parent–child bonds. Secure individuals report more passive relationships with parents than their insecure counterparts (e.g. Brennan & Shaver, 1998; Carranza & Kilmann, 2000). Thus, links between parenting characteristics and offsprings’ attachment patterns should differ as a function of the particular parent–child context. We formulated our second hypothesis based on this prediction:

2. Family status (intact vs. divorced families) and attachment pattern in combination will be associated with ratings of mother and father parenting characteristics. Females from intact families will rate both biological parents in more positive terms than females from divorced families.

In contrast to intact families, the role demands placed on one or both parents in divorced families typically lessen the extent and quality of contact that children have with each parent. As such, irrespective of personality differences between marital partners, mothers and fathers in intact families typically have more opportunities to reflect a greater congruence in characteristics related to parenting than their divorced counterparts. Our third hypothesis was designed to test this notion:

3. Family status (intact vs. divorced families) and attachment pattern in combination will be associated with differences in the congruence between ratings of mother and father parenting characteristics. Females from intact families will report greater congruence in their ratings of these characteristics.

Prior research has found that, compared to children from intact families, children of divorced families have greater difficulty making emotional commitments and have lower trust (Booth, Brinkerhoff, & White, 1984; Southworth & Schwarz, 1987; Wallerstein, 1987; Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989; Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, & Robert, 1990; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993). Thus, our fourth hypothesis:

4. Family status and attachment pattern in combination will be associated with differences in the level of interpersonal trust. Women of intact families will report higher interpersonal trust.

Method

Participants

The sample of college women from intact families was taken from a study by Carranza and Kilmann (2000). This sample consisted of 147 female undergraduates at a large southeastern university who met the following criteria: (1) they had never been married nor had children, (2) they reported a heterosexual orientation, and (3) their biological parents were still married to each other. The females' mean age was 19.3 years and their age range was 18–24 years. Approximately 77% were Caucasian, 16% African American, 3% Asian, and 2% were Hispanic. Approximately 66% of their fathers were professionals and 17% were employed in trades or in unskilled labor. Of their mothers, approximately 47% were professionals and 20% held clerical positions. The average age that the women started one-to-one dating was 15 years, with a range of 11–20 years. The average number of one-on-one monthly dates was 3.5, with a range of 0–20.

The sample of college women who had experienced parental divorce was taken from a study by Carranza et al. (2005). This sample consisted of 157 female undergraduates at the same southeastern university who met the following criteria: (1) they had never been married nor had children, (2) they reported a heterosexual orientation, and (3) their biological parents were divorced. Their mean age was 20 years, ranging from 18 to 24 years. Approximately 64% were Caucasian, 30% African American, 2.5% Asian, and 3.2% Hispanic. Approximately 61% of their fathers were professionals, and 39% were employed in trades or unskilled labor. Approximately 56% of their mothers were professionals and 15% held clerical positions. The women were between 0 and 22 years of age when their parents separated ($M = 9.42$, $s.d. = 5.66$). Mothers had sole custody of 61.1%, fathers had sole custody of 3.2%, 26.8% were in joint custody, and other custody arrangements had been made for 8.9%. Approximately 26% of the women had stepparents, 12% had only stepfathers, 16% had only stepmothers, and 46% were without stepparents. The average age that the women started one-to-one dating was 15 years, with a range from 10 to 18 years; the average number of one-to-one dates each month during college was 4, with a range from 0 to 30. Thus, the women in both samples reflected similar demographics with the exception that the non-intact sample reflected a lower and higher percentage of Caucasian and African American participants, respectively.

Measures

Relationship Scales Questionnaire (RSQ): The RSQ (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994), is a 30-item self-report measure with items taken from Hazen and Shaver's (1987) attachment measure, Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) Relationship Questionnaire, and from Collins and Read's (1990) Adult Attachment Scale. Respondents are asked to rate themselves on a five-point scale on statements about their approach to close relationships. The RSQ indirectly measures four attachment patterns: secure, fearful-avoidant, preoccupied, and dismissive avoidant. The highest score, after items within each subscale are averaged, is considered the best-fitting attachment category, although most respondents reflect features of more than one category. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) found that it is not unusual for respondents to fit more than one attachment pattern to the same extent. In the present study, the RSQ scores for females of intact parents indicated that 38% rated as secure, 20% as dismissive avoidant, 19% as preoccupied, 16% as fearful avoidant, 6% as unspecified. For females of parental divorce, 31% rated as secure, 24% as dismissive avoidant, 18% as preoccupied, 17% as fearful avoidant, and 11% as unspecified.

It should be noted that Griffin and Bartholomew (1994) defined adult attachment patterns by the intersection of two dimensions, the positivity of self (overall level of self-esteem) and the positivity of others (overall level of interpersonal trust): (1) secure = positive self + positive other, (2) fearful = negative self + negative other, (3) preoccupied = negative self + positive other, and (4) dismissive = positive self + negative other. Thus, a "self score" = (secure + dismissive) – (fearful + preoccupied) and "other score" = (secure + preoccupied) – (dismissive + fearful) also can be derived from the RSQ.

The RSQ has a Cronbach's alpha of .41 for the secure attachment pattern and .70 for the dismissive-avoidant attachment pattern. Internal consistencies can be low because two orthogonal dimensions (model of self and model of others) are combined to create each pattern (e.g. secure attachment reflects positive self-model and positive other-model quadrant). Construct validity of the two underlying dimensions has been shown. Multitrait–multimethod matrices and confirmatory factor analyses have shown the convergent and discriminant validity of the two dimensions (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Convergent validity between the RSQ scores and interview ratings has been demonstrated (Griffin & Bartholomew, 1994). Schafer and Bartholomew (1994) demonstrated moderate to high test–retest reliability and stability over an eight-month period of time, ranging from .81 to .84 for "perception of self", and from .72 to .85 for "perception of other".

Parenting Characteristics Questionnaire (PCQ). The PCQ (Kilmann, Faucette, Rayburn, Suffoletta, & Laughlin, 1995; Kilmann & Carranza, 1997) seeks retrospective information about parent–child interactions. Respondents are asked to rate statements on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". These statements (see Carranza & Kilmann, 2000) reflect the six father and mother parenting characteristics derived from Secunda's (1992) framework: doting, distant, absent, seductive, good, and demanding. Prior research (Carranza & Kilmann, 2000; Carranza et al., 2005) has found differences between secure and insecure female college students in recalled parenting characteristics on the PCQ that were consistent with attachment theory expectations.

Interpersonal Trust Scale (ITS). The ITS (Rotter, 1967) is a 25-item questionnaire that measures trust of peers or other familial social agents as well as trust in those whom one has little

direct contact. Split-half reliability for the ITS was .76 and test–retest reliability after three months was .68.

Procedure

Both samples were recruited within 1 year apart from the human participant pool at a large southeastern university. Participants in both samples volunteered for a study on “parent–child interactions and dating”. After signing an informed consent form, the participants responded to the measures anonymously in a group setting. All participants received course credit for their participation.

Results

We first assessed whether any links existed between custody arrangements and attachment style and parenting characteristics for the women of non-intact families. A MANOVA of custody (mother vs. other) with age at separation as a covariate revealed no impact of either variable on the “self” vs. “other” ratings on the RSQ. A second MANOVA using attachment styles also was non-significant. A MANOVA of custody (mother vs. other) with age at separation as a covariate found significant differences for age of separation on ratings of mother parenting characteristics $F(6,116) = 3.16, p < .007, \eta_p^2 = .044$. Women who were younger at the age of separation rated their mothers higher on “distant” $F(1,116) = 6.20, p < .014, \eta_p^2 = .05$, and higher on “demanding” $F(1,116) = 3.72, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .044$. A MANOVA of custody (mother vs. other) with age at separation as a covariate found no significant effects of either variable on ratings of father parenting characteristics.

Our first hypothesis was that females of intact families would report a more secure attachment pattern than females from divorced families. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a MANOVA analysis using RSQ “self” and “other” scores as the dependent variables with follow-up analysis. The MANOVA revealed significant differences in self and other ratings between females from intact and divorced families $F(2, 279) = 5.28, p < .004, \eta_p^2 = .10$ (see Fig. 1). Specifically, females from intact families rated themselves significantly higher on the self, $F(1, 281) = 8.44, p = .004, \eta_p^2 = .03$, and other $F(1, 281) = 4.32, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .02$ RSQ subscales. It should be noted that a 2 (family status) \times 4 (attachment style) chi square revealed no significant frequency of attachment patterns between females from intact and non-intact families $\chi^2 = 1.76, p = .63$. Table 1 shows the mean scores on attachment styles of women from both groups.

Our second hypothesis was that females from intact families would rate both parents more positively than females of non-intact families. A 2 \times 4 MANOVA analyzed the impact of parental divorce and attachment style on ratings of mother parenting characteristics. As predicted, women from intact families rated mother characteristics more positively than did women from non-intact families $F(6, 247) = 5.85, p = .0001, \eta_p^2 = .12$. As Table 2 shows, women from intact families rated their mothers higher on “good” $F(1,274) = 12.33, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$, lower on “absent” $F(1, 274) = 14.40, p = .0001, \eta_p^2 = .05$, lower on “seductive” $F(1, 274) = 4.49, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .02$, and lower on “demanding” $F(1, 274) = 6.58, p = .011, \eta_p^2 = .02$. There were no main effects for attachment style or interaction effects.

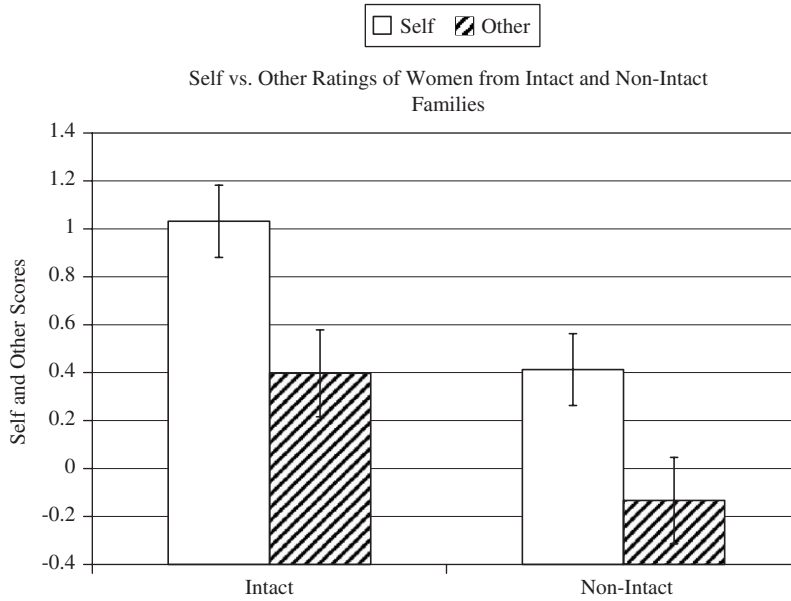


Fig. 1. Self vs. other ratings of women from intact and non-intact families.

Table 1
Mean scores of women’s attachment patterns as measured by the RSQ ($N = 299$)

Variable	Parental marital status	
	Married	Divorced
Secure		
<i>M</i>	3.44	3.25
s.d.	.72	.75
Fearful		
<i>M</i>	2.81	3.10
s.d.	.93	.92
Preoccupied		
<i>M</i>	2.96	3.06
s.d.	.74	.81
Dismissive		
<i>M</i>	3.22	3.34
s.d.	.65	.78

Note. $N = 299$ consists of 143 women from intact families and 156 women of parental divorce. Higher scores = high secure, fearful, preoccupied, or dismissive attachment pattern.

Next, we used a 2×4 MANOVA to analyze the impact of divorce and attachment style on ratings of father parenting characteristics. As predicted, women from intact families rated father characteristics more positively than did women from non-intact families $F(6, 252) = 8.46$,

Table 2
Mean scores of women's perceived mother styles measured by the PCQ

Parenting style	Parental marital status	
	Intact	Non-intact
Good mother		
<i>M</i> **	3.96	3.73
s.d.	.66	.85
Doting mother		
<i>M</i>	3.80	3.76
s.d.	.74	.95
Distant mother		
<i>M</i>	2.32	2.52
s.d.	.69	.74
Absent mother		
<i>M</i> ***	1.82	2.36
s.d.	.94	1.12
Seductive mother		
<i>M</i>	1.05	1.11
s.d.	.16	.32
Demanding mother		
<i>M</i> *	2.06	2.36
s.d.	.60	.82

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$.

Note Higher scores = high doting, distant, absent, seductive, good, or demanding mother.

$p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$. As Table 3 shows, women from intact families rated fathers higher on “good” $F(1, 252) = 30.32$, $p = .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, higher on “doting” $F(1, 252) = 19.74$, $p = .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, lower on “absent” $F(1, 252) = 9.63$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, higher on “seductive” $F(1, 252) = 10.04$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, and lower on “demanding” $F(1, 252) = 15.06$, $p = .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$.

The MANOVA also revealed a main effect of attachment pattern on ratings of parenting characteristics, $F(18, 732) = 1.87$, $p = .015$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Attachment pattern effected women's ratings of the father characteristics of “doting” $F(3, 252) = 2.98$, $p = .032$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, “distant” $F(3, 252) = 5.32$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, “absent” $F(3, 252) = 3.53$, $p = .016$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, and “good” $F(3, 252) = 3.57$, $p = .015$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Specifically, women with a secure attachment style rated fathers higher on “doting” than did women with a dismissive attachment style $F(252) = .47$, $p = .002$. Women with a secure attachment style rated fathers lower on “distant” than did women with a fearful, preoccupied or dismissive attachment style ($t(252) = .45$, $p = .001$, $.37$, $p = .008$, and $.41$, $p = .002$, respectively). Women with a secure attachment style rated fathers lower on “absent” than did women with fearful, preoccupied, and dismissive attachment styles ($t(252) = .48$, $p = .011$ and $.41$, $p = .026$ and $.51$, and $p = .004$, respectively). Women with a secure attachment style rated fathers higher on “good” than did women with either fearful or

Table 3
Mean Scores of Women's Perceived Father Styles Measured by the PCQ

Parenting style	Parental marital status	
	Married	Divorced
Good father		
<i>M</i> ***	3.90	3.23
s.d.	.76	1.08
Doting father		
<i>M</i> ***	3.31	2.69
s.d.	.76	1.05
Distant father		
<i>M</i>	2.87	2.92
s.d.	.82	.81
Absent father		
<i>M</i> *	2.24	2.71
s.d.	1.00	1.12
Seductive father		
<i>M</i> *	1.06	1.21
s.d.	.20	.55
Demanding father		
<i>M</i> ***	2.24	2.56
s.d.	.75	.87

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$.

Note. Higher scores = high doting, absent, seductive, good, or demanding father.

dismissive attachment styles ($t(252) = .38$, $p = .018$ and $.44$, and $p = .003$, respectively). Additionally, women with a preoccupied attachment style rated fathers higher on “good” than did women with a dismissive attachment style $t(252) = .44$, $p = .018$. There were no significant effects of attachment pattern on ratings of mother parenting characteristics. Fig. 2 shows ratings of parenting characteristics from women from intact and non-intact families with secure and insecure attachment styles.

To test our third hypothesis, a 2×4 MANOVA examined the impact of family status and attachment pattern on congruence between daughters' ratings of mother and father characteristics. The congruence was calculated by subtracting ratings of mother characteristics from father characteristics for each of the five parent scales. A main effect of family status was identified $F(6, 295) = 2.67$, $p = .016$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. As expected, women from intact families reported greater congruence in their ratings of the parenting characteristics of “good” $F(1, 300) = 8.21$, $p = .004$, $\eta_p^2 = .027$, “doting” $F(1, 300) = 5.24$, $p = .023$, $\eta_p^2 = .017$, and “distant” $F(1, 300) = 5.17$, $p = .024$, $\eta_p^2 = .017$.

Our fourth hypothesis predicted that women from intact families would report greater interpersonal trust than women from divorced families. This hypothesis was not supported. A

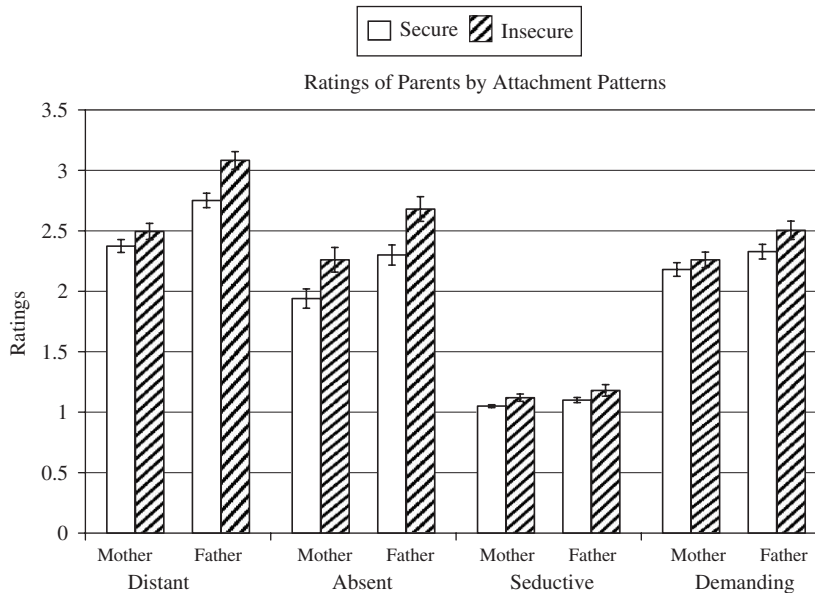


Fig. 2. Ratings of parents by attachment patterns.

one-way ANOVA demonstrated that women from intact and divorced families did not differ in the level of interpersonal trust.

Discussion

It should be noted that a methodological strength of the present study is that both samples were recruited in the same manner using the same criteria with the exception of parents' marital status. However, the women of parental divorce were heterogeneous with regard to their age when their parents divorced, whether one or both of their biological parents remarried, the presence of stepfathers and/or stepmothers, and in the number of biological and stepsiblings. Although mothers had full custody in the majority of families, the particular custody arrangements, such as the extent of visitations with the non-custodial parent, also varied. The effect of this variability on the findings for the women of parental divorce cannot be determined. Furthermore, the participants' perceptions of their parents in both samples are subjective and may not be consistent with how their parents actually responded to them.

Our first hypothesis, that women of intact families would report a more secure attachment pattern than their non-intact counterparts, was supported. This finding is consistent with prior findings (Brennan & Shaver, 1998). Within an attachment theory framework, this finding suggests that women from intact families reflected a higher self-regard and a higher expectation that others can be relied upon, than women of parental divorce.

As predicted in our second hypothesis, women from intact families rated their biological fathers and mothers more positively than did women of parental divorce. In this regard, prior research

has found that parental divorce fosters emotional vulnerability and stress in children, feelings of anger, conflicting loyalties, and a more negative parent–child relationship (e.g. Cooney, Smyer, Hagestad, & Klock, 1986; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1997). Our third hypothesis (i.e. women of intact families would report greater congruence in their ratings of mother and father characteristics than women from divorced families) was supported on the parent characteristics of “good”, “doting”, and “distant”. These findings make intuitive sense. Many children of parental divorce experience a decrease in the quality and quantity of contact time with both parents (Amato & Rezac, 1994; Cooney, 1994; Clifford & Clark, 1995). This factor, coupled with the difficult emotional, financial, and social changes that accompany the typical divorce, suggests that divorced parents would be less likely to demonstrate a unified and consistent level of support and emotional availability as perceived by their children.

It should be noted that we found similar links between women’s attachment patterns and ratings of their parents in both samples. That is, secure women from intact or non-intact families rated parents positively, while insecure women rated parents as absent, distant, and demanding. These results are consistent with prior findings. For instance, Brennan & Shaver (1998) found that, in contrast with insecurities, securities recalled that their mothers and fathers were more accepting of them, and that they fostered greater personal independence. Levy et al. (1998) also found that securities described their parents in more positive terms than did insecurities. Our additional finding that women who were younger at the age of separation rated their mothers as more distant and demanding may be a consequence of the negative impact of separation on mothers who are responsible for younger children.

Our fourth hypothesis, that women of intact families would report greater interpersonal trust than females of parental divorce, was not supported on the ITS. As noted above, females of parental divorce reported less trust of others on the RSQ. One explanation for this apparent discrepancy is that the relevant items on the RSQ assess trust in close relationships, while numerous ITS items involve trust in “social agents and in those with whom one has little direct contact.” Thus, the ITS and RSQ appear to measure different aspects of interpersonal trust.

Future research should determine whether the same associations between parenting recollections of offspring from intact vs. non-intact families exist for men. In this regard, parental divorce may foster a qualitatively different kind of father–daughter emotional distancing or “detachment” than that which occurs between fathers and sons. Traditionally, fathers spend more time with their sons than their daughters, and most of the parenting is done by mothers (Secunda, 1992). Some evidence indicates that parental divorce places the father–daughter relationship at greater risk for disruption (Cooney et al., 1986).

It would seem fruitful for future studies to contrast parents’ perspectives of their own parenting characteristics with offsprings’ recollections of these characteristics. In this regard, as an outgrowth of their own unresolved attachment issues, insecure parents would be expected to engage in more negative parenting behaviours (e.g. rejection, inconsistent discipline) in contrast with their secure counterparts. Offsprings’ recollections of parent characteristics likely represent a composite of the parent–child experience that occurred or still exists on various dimensions. Such a composite might include agreement with the manner of discipline, time and activity involvement or non-involvement, the extent of emotional sharing, and feelings of safety and trust. It would seem fruitful to obtain college students’ recollections of parent characteristics and accompanying

parenting behaviours at different age-related developmental stages, such as in early childhood (e.g. 4–7), late childhood (e.g. 8–11), and adolescence (e.g. 12–17). Those who experienced positive parenting seemingly would perceive their parents as having been sufficiently involved in their lives throughout these stages. The time and type of parental involvement would be expected to shift across these developmental periods to correspond to changing developmental needs.

It should be noted that not much is known about the variables that mediate the transmission of attachment patterns from parents to offspring (Rholes, Simpson, & Blakely, 1995). Some research has suggested that the particular attachment pairing in the marital dyad is linked with marital quality. Matched secure couples report higher marital satisfaction and less conflict than matched insecure couples (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992; Senchak & Leonard, 1992; Kilmann, Finch, Parnell, & Downer, under review). Thus, the marital interaction of matched secure parents (secure/secure pairing) should provide a positive model of close relationships for their offspring. In contrast, matched insecure or mismatched parents (secure/insecure pairing) should mirror a less positive marital interaction that should be a factor in fostering offsprings' attachment insecurity. In addition to the quality of the parental marriage, particular "non-parenting" parent characteristics should be influential in shaping offsprings' attachment patterns. For instance, parents who reflect less emotional adjustment and who hold more dysfunctional relationship beliefs would be more likely to foster an insecure attachment pattern in their female offspring. Further research should explore the relative influence of each of these parent variables on daughters' attachment patterns.

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