

Young Adults' Perceptions of Parents' and Other Couple Relationships and Influences of  
These Perceptions on Their Own Romantic Relationships: An Exploratory Study

by

Fanie Collardeau

B.A., American University of Paris, 2013

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the Department of Psychology

© Fanie Collardeau, 2016

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy  
or other means, without the permission of the author.

**Supervisory Committee**

Young Adults' Perceptions of Parents' and Other Couple Relationships and Influences of  
These Perceptions on Their Own Romantic Relationships: An Exploratory Study

by

Fanie Collardeau

B.A., American University of Paris, 2013

**Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Marion Ehrenberg, Department of Psychology

**Supervisor**

Dr. Danu Stinson, Department of Psychology

**Departmental Member**

## **Supervisory Committee**

Marion Ehrenberg, Ph.D., Department of Psychology

**Supervisor**

Danu Stinson, Ph.D., Department of Psychology

**Departmental Member**

## **Abstract**

Previous research has consistently demonstrated the “inter-generational transmission of divorce.” In comparison to the patterns seen in families with continuously married parents, young adults who experienced their parents’ divorce during childhood are more likely to consider leaving their own romantic partners, including spouses, when medium to low levels of satisfaction are felt. To contextualize under what circumstances and how young adults may be influenced by their perceptions of these family-of-origin dynamics, the present study explored young women’s narratives about their parents’ romantic relationships and another observable romantic relationship in their environment. These narratives included a general description of the romantic relationships, and queried perceptions of efforts invested by the parents in their relationship. Young women were also asked to clarify their expectations regarding how much effort is appropriate in romantic relationships. Twenty-two young women were interviewed and their narratives were analyzed using Charmaz (2006)’s grounded theory approach. Participants were active agents in the creation of meaning about their parents’ romantic relationship and their parents’ divorce. Their narratives were complex, sometimes paradoxical, and suggested participants understood some of the dynamics in their parents’ romantic relationships. The themes, which emerged from the perceptions of their parents’

romantic relationships, their parents' mistakes and what they felt they have learned from witnessing their parents' romantic relationships, provided several avenues of interest for future research and clinical practice.

## Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee .....	2
Abstract.....	3
Table of Contents.....	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
Overview.....	7
Method.....	38
Results and Discussion .....	54
Strengths and Limitations of Study.....	130
Conclusions and Implications .....	132
References.....	138
Appendix A.....	155
Appendix B.....	165

## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Dr. Marion Ehrenberg, for her extensive feedback and her support over the last three years, and Robyn Kilshaw and Samin Modon Haghghi for their help in transcribing the interviews. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Natalee Popadiuk, for her enthusiasm and thorough feedback.

I am grateful to my family and friends for their continued support and encouragement; my grand-mother and Tiphaine Viard for keeping me safe over the years; and my mother and grand-father for doing their best. I am also grateful to Usama Bin Aftab, for his faith in me and the myriad of little ways in which he has helped.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and express thanks to the Nations in whose territories I am living today, the Lkwungen (Songhees and Esquimalt) and WSANEC Peoples.

*“Say not, ‘I have found the truth,’ but rather, ‘I have found a truth.’*

*Say not, ‘I have found the path of the soul,’ but rather, ‘I have met the soul walking upon  
my path.’*

*For the soul walks upon all paths.” – Kahlil Gibran*

## Overview

Arnett (2000) first coined the term “emerging adulthood” to describe the unique developmental challenges and societal expectations faced by individuals between 18 and 25 years of age. Close to the legal age of majority, young adults are typically expected to make long-term choices regarding their education, career plans, and long-term partners. During this developmental phase, emergent adults are becoming more independent while their social roles are still loosely defined and flexible relative to middle and older adults. Arnett (2000) described emerging adulthood as a time of exploration, transition and identity formation, both individually and in the context of interpersonal relationships. Erikson (1968) and Sullivan (1953) similarly identified the negotiation of intimacy as a key challenge in older adolescents’ and young adults’ developmental trajectories. In the wake of a greater developmental capacity for “unselfish love” (Sullivan, 1953), this challenge involves a young person’s exploration of sexuality and sexual orientation in relation to a myriad of values and beliefs about romantic relationships, such as their permanence and what is expected in terms of gender roles in a romantic relationship. Young adults, thus, learn to navigate between their desire for autonomy and their longing for closeness and intimacy. Young adulthood can be critical to the development of expectations, attitudes and beliefs about stable romantic relationships, holding the potential to shape young adults’ romantic relationship stability and health in later committed romantic relationships.

Attachment theory is critical in our understanding of romantic relationships. Puberty marks the beginning of profound changes to the attachment system: New attachment figures are selected, and a new hierarchy emerges among attachment figures.

In addition, the sexual behavioural system becomes more influential. Parents, who were the most important attachment figures during childhood, progressively become secondary attachment figures and friends or romantic partners are increasingly relied upon in times of distress. The romantic partner or close friends come to replace the parents as primary attachment figures, in terms of their centrality and regularity of use as “safe havens” (Kobak, Rosenthal, Zajac, & Madsen, 2007). Yet romantic relationships are different from other close relationships on a number of dimensions. First, based on attachment theory, romantic relationships can be described by taking into consideration two other behavioural systems, the caregiving behavioural system and the sexual behavioural system (Mikulincer, 2006). This unique combination of behavioural systems differentiates romantic relationships from parent-child relationships. Social psychologists Clark and Mills define romantic relationships as “communal” rather than “exchange” relationships, which means they are characterized by patterns of giving based on perceived romantic partners’ needs and not on expectancy of repayment or of indebtedness (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004). From an attachment theory perspective, built on the foundations of a well-functioning caregiving system, a communal relationship entails that each partner responds to the other’s needs, gives according to the other’s needs and not based on an evaluation of what the other has given in the past, and expects the other to do the same regardless of a potential imbalance between each other’s needs at a particular point in time. The perceived level of responsibility for the partner’s happiness and success and the wish to identify and meet the partner’s need without expecting the same benefits in return in the future were coined *communal strength* (Mills et al., 2004). Both commitment (it is easier to give without

expecting repayment if both partners are engaged in the relationship permanently or at least for the long term) and sacrifice (meeting the partner's need might come at the expense of one's own goals) are linked to communal strength. Commitment generally refers to the partners' intention that the relationship continues into the future (Cui, Fincham, & Durtschi, 2011; Etcheverry & Le, 2005; Jacquet & Surra, 2001).

Commitment has been most often defined using two frameworks: (1) Johnson's tripartite model of commitment (Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999), which identifies *personal reasons* or the persons' intention to stay in the particular relationship, *moral reasons* or sense of obligation and responsibility, and structural reasons for commitment, such as constraints, pressures and the availability of attractive alternatives; and, (2) Rusbult's model (1983) in which commitment stems from the perceived quality of alternatives, satisfaction with the relationship, and perceived investments, both tangible and intangible. Both models have gained empirical support (Le & Agnew, 2003; Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2010). Commitment and sacrifice, in so far as they might run counter to young adults' desires for exploration and independence, are likely to be points of confusion or tension for navigating stable romantic relationships. In addition, communality in young adulthood might appear and be experienced differently than in later adulthood.

### **Commitment, Communality and Romantic Relationship Functioning**

Both communality and commitment have been linked to appraisals of the partner and a range of positive and negative emotions and outcomes in romantic relationships (e.g. Algoe, Gable, & Maisel, 2010). However, researchers are only beginning to understand the interplay among communality, sacrifice, and commitment. Romantic

relationships fare less well when they work like exchange relationships. Indeed, romantic partners' expectancies of repayment are linked to more negative appraisals on the part of the receivers, more negative emotions, including guilt, and less focus on the partners' intentions (Algoe, et al, 2010; Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012). A willingness to make sacrifices has been correlated positively with relationship satisfaction, partner's happiness, and higher levels of commitment (Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2002). However, perceptions of high costs or harm, reciprocity from the partner, and locus of control are all key factors in determining whether sacrifice will be detrimental or constructive for the relationship (Whitton et al., 2002). In two recent studies, the more participants conceptualized their relationship as communal and the higher their level of commitment, the more likely they were to feel positive emotions in the context of sacrifice regardless of their level of happiness or the type of sacrifice made (Kogan et al., 2010; Whitton, Stanley, & Markman, 2007). Yet, Kogan et al (2010) also found that three aspects of sacrifice – the extent of effort invested, the degree of hesitation to sacrifice, and the perception of the partner's level of need – were not correlated with communal strength. Appraising sacrifices rather than the behavioural tendency to sacrifice seemed to be related to communal strength and level of commitment, whereas the willingness to sacrifice was correlated with the level of commitment only.

Willingness to sacrifice and communal strength can also be linked to implicit theories of relationships, that is the idea of growth or “working-it-out” in a relationship versus the notion of finding one's destiny or soul mate. These theories help to conceptualise the extent to which individuals incorporate effort as a necessary part of

romantic relationship functioning (e.g. whether individuals think romantic relationships evolve and grow), and the extent to which differences are seen as irreconcilable and stable over time (e.g. if individuals believe the partner is "made for them" or not; Franiuk, Pomerantz, & Cohen, 2004; Knee, 1998). In theory, implicit theories of relationships influence all aspects of relationships, such as the selection of a partner, and actions and cognitions in the face of difficulties. Individuals holding strong destiny beliefs will believe that their partners are either a good match and compatible, or that they are not. Individuals holding growth theories of romantic relationships will instead view problems or differences as transient and manageable. As a result, if two individuals have very different interests or are experiencing significant problems in their relationship, they will arrive at different conclusions regarding the viability of their romantic relationships based on the implicit theories they hold. If they have strong destiny beliefs, they might believe that the situation signals their partner is simply not the right person for them. If they hold strong growth beliefs, they might be more likely to believe that problems can be resolved and the relationship maintained. The majority of the empirical research's findings are limited by small sample sizes (about or less than 100 participants) and cross-sectional designs, despite results replicated across several studies using diaries and self-report questionnaires (e.g. Franiuk et al, 2004; Knee, Nanayakkara, Vietor, Neighbors, & Patrick, 2001). Two studies provided evidence for the protective nature of growth beliefs after unresolved conflicts or when partners held a more negative perception of their partners, for 75 heterosexual couples and 128 individuals involved in heterosexual relationships (Knee, Patrick, Vietor & Neighbors, 2004). To explain their findings, authors hypothesized that growth belief altered the meaning ascribed to conflicts, making

them opportunities to know one's partners better or instances of increased perceived investment rather than proofs or signals that the partner is not the "right one" (Knee et al., 2004). In addition, undergraduate and college students believing more strongly in growth theories were less likely than destiny theorists to feel a decrease in relationship satisfaction when they held a more negative appraisal of their partners (Franiuk et al., 2004; Knee, et al, 2001). Consistent with the previous findings, soul-mate theorists were more likely to emphasize the aspects of their partners most consistent with their pre-existing expectations (Franiuk et al., 2004). On the contrary, individuals maintaining a work-it-out or growth theory reacted in a less polarizing manner towards their partners. In addition, while the implicit relationship theories held by participants were stable over a eight-months period (Franiuk, Cohen & Pomerantz, 2002), they were very reactive to the experimental set-up of the researchers in another study, suggesting that one or the other can be primed in individuals by specific situations and will take over the individual's "usual" beliefs (Franiuk et al., 2004).

To summarize, negative or positive perceptions of sacrifice are thus embedded within wider expectations regarding the relationship, such as commitment or communality. The perceived cost to the self of specific actions seems relatively immune to levels of happiness and types of sacrifice, but vulnerable to how much partners feel they should be responsive to their partner's needs and their commitment level. Higher levels of commitment not only increased the likelihood of sacrificing for the partner, but also whether the benefits to sacrifice for the relationship and positive emotions and appraisals experienced by each partner. Greater communal strength, on the other hand, only seemed to increase positive appraisals of sacrifices. Implicit theories of

relationships, by inducing different interpretations of challenges such as conflicts, can also moderate perceptions of effort and sacrifice in romantic relationships, as well as the level of commitment or communal strength each partner will endorse. Thus, beliefs about the permanence and communality of romantic relationships have the potential to alter what meaning similar actions take and the associated perceptions of cost or harm to self of performing those actions.

Expectations and beliefs in romantic relationships are shaped by various factors. Family-of-origin characteristics are among the factors that have been most vigorously studied. As a result, the longterm influences of parental divorce, and the associated risk factors and outcomes, have come under scrutiny.

### **Transmission of Attitudes Toward Commitment and Effort in Parental Divorce**

A wealth of research has focused on young adults' capacity to sustain long-lasting relationships, particularly marriage and divorce patterns. The most consistent trend in this research supports the "intergenerational transmission" of divorce, with adults and young adults who experienced their parents' divorce during childhood showing higher divorce rates than their peers raised in intact families (e.g. Segrin, Taylor, & Altman, 2005; Wolfinger, 2000, 2003). The experience of parental divorce also increases the likelihood of marrying an individual who has also experienced divorce, and unions of two adult children of divorce are three times more likely to end in divorce than unions with both partners raised in intact families (Wolfinger, 2003). Yet, no significant differences have been shown between young persons who experienced their parents' divorce and those who did not, both in their intent to marry and in their perceptions of the probability for success of their future marriage (Fowers, Lyons, Montel, & Shaked, 2001).

One potential mediating mechanism put forth to explain the intergenerational transmission of divorce is that family of origin's characteristics shape offspring's attitudes and beliefs in committed romantic relationships, which in turn informs their behaviours, expectations and appraisals of their partner and close relationships.

### **Attachment Theory**

Based on John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth's original work (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 1991), attachment theory holds that the attachment system serves to maintain or create proximity between the infant and his or her primary caregiver in order to ensure survival. In early childhood, caregivers serve as secure bases to explore the world. Infant-caregivers' interactions influence later attachment representations by structuring expectations of offspring toward others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). The attachment system that develops during infancy is composed of several internalized representations of the self, the environment, and the caregivers in relation to the self. Early representations are mostly event-chain memories and are later complemented by language-based and complex memories (Marvin & Britner, 2008). The collection of memories and cognitions forms relationship-specific, context-specific and general representations. Attachment patterns can be divided into four main types – secure, avoidant, anxious and disorganized – or can be conceptualized as a continuum on two dimensions – anxiety and avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

An individual's overall attachment representation is thought to influence his or her sensitivity to their partner's signs of distress, how he or she will handle verbal communication, and even beliefs about conflict and conflict resolution. Anxious or avoidant attachment predicts lower sensitivity and responsiveness toward the romantic

partners, lower beliefs of efficacy in resolving conflicts or perceived threats to the relationship in times of conflict (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2012). Secure attachment is related to better caregiving, more positive sexual schemas and more pleasure in the exploration of sexuality, compared with insecure attachment. Securely attached individuals also demonstrate unique “uses” of love and caregiving, particularly to show love to others, compared to avoidant individuals, who are more likely to consider self-enhancement and public reputation, and anxious individuals whose fear of abandonment is central and will use caregiving both to show love to others and for public reputation (Mikulincer, 2006). In addition, interactions with caregivers shape a host of other personal characteristics important for the maintenance of healthy romantic relationships. For example, not only does the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship predict the quality of romantic relationships 15 years later in a longitudinal study, but it does so partially through its association with higher levels of self-esteem in early adulthood (Johnson & Galambos, 2014). Self-esteem itself is robustly associated with better relationship functioning and dyadic analysis have shown an additive effect where both partners’ level of self-esteem combine to predict commitment and satisfaction in romantic relationships (Robinson & Cameron, 2012). However, while parental divorce is consistently associated with variations in parent-child attachment due to its interplay with other risk factors, mixed findings characterize the research on parental divorce and romantic attachment (Sirvanli-Ozen, 2005). In addition, two cross-sectional studies of 7335 adult participants supported a selective rather than diffuse influence of parental divorce on attachment (Fraley & Hefferman, 2013). Parental divorce was associated with relatively low parent-child attachment security, especially for father-child dyads and

when parental divorce occurred during early childhood, but its influence on romantic attachment was insignificant.

The absence of a direct effect of parental divorce on romantic attachment could be explained through a potential mediator operating in the relation between family-of-origin's characteristics and romantic attachment. In a longitudinal study, Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman and Laren-Rife (2011) investigated how parent-child interactions at age 15 predicted self-reported romantic attachment representations at age 25 and 27 in 559 young adults who were involved with romantic partners. Secure attachment at age 25 mediated the influence of positive parent-child interactions at age 15, and secure romantic attachment at age 27. Another study assessed attachment representations of 374 adolescents (81 % of whom were raised in intact families) to their mothers, fathers, friends and romantic partners over two years (Doyle, Lawford, & Markiewicz, 2009). Even when controlling for family structure, mother-adolescent attachment tended to be more secure than father-adolescent attachment, and insecurity in attachment patterns were more stable with parents than with friends or romantic partners. Insecure father-adolescent attachment was correlated with later insecurity in the adolescent-friend relationship, while insecure mother-adolescent and friend-adolescent attachments were associated with later insecurity in the adolescent-romantic partner attachment. The Relationship Questionnaire (RQ) was used in this study to assess attachment style, and participants could have interpreted the RQ questions about each type of relationship based on varying expectations and social norms in relation to parents versus friends versus romantic partners during adolescence. In addition, parental divorce is associated with a variety of risk factors that could lower parent-child attachment security such as, for

example, temporary decreases in the quality of parenting, maternal or paternal mental health or socio-economic status (Sandler et al, 2012). Thus, parental divorce arising in the context of other potential risk factors could influence young adults' romantic attachment through a disruption of secure parent-child attachment representations. Several studies support significant gender differences in parent-child attachment after parental divorce (Nielsen, 2011). Daughters seem to be at a higher risk for decreases in the quality of father-child relationship after parental divorce. Daughters more frequently reported feeling unloved and rejected by their fathers compared with sons, and a lack of paternal involvement was associated with greater difficulties in romantic relationships (Nielsen, 2011).

Finally, especially relevant to the present study, adult attachment representations mediated the relation between family-of-origin and marital beliefs in a sample of 1210 participants between 18 and 30 years (Jensen, Willoughby, Holman, Busby, & Shafer, 2015). Higher levels of attachment anxiety were correlated with higher endorsements of the idea that marriage was more advantageous than being single and lower levels of the perceived permanence of marriage. Attachment avoidance was correlated with lower beliefs in the permanence of marriage, in the advantages of marriage over singlehood, and in the reported priority of marriage in the young adult's life. Previous experiences in romantic relationships were more predictive of beliefs than distal factors (Jensen et al, 2015).

As a result, parental divorce can potentially influence losses in parent-child relationship quality and attachment security, especially for father-daughter dyads. While a direct effect of parental divorce on romantic attachment remains disputed, the mediating

role of parent-child attachment has been supported by several studies using romantic attachment or marital beliefs as outcome measures. Parental divorce and family of origin's characteristics, however, still have important implications for beliefs and attitudes toward romantic relationships.

### **Family of Origin's Structure and Interparental Conflict**

The diversity in family transitions and trajectories after parental divorce, as well as in the family of origin's characteristics (for example the intensity of parental conflict), are among the challenges of research on parental divorce and offspring's long-term outcomes. Unlike the legal record that attaches the ending of a marriage to a specific date, in the social sciences literature "divorce" is a proxy term for the myriad of transitions unfolding over months and years, including dynamic shifting within the family and extended family systems, changes in custody and living arrangements for children, relocation to new neighbourhoods and cities, economic changes, remarriages of one or both parents, and heightened risk for the dissolution of these second marriages.

Studies of adult children of divorce's attitudes toward marriage and divorce offer insight into their readiness to declare their commitment in traditional and legal terms. While children raised in intact families hold more positive attitudes toward marriage than children with divorced parents (e.g. Segrin et al., 2005; Yu & Adler-Baeder, 2007) and report less apprehension regarding marital relationships (Tasker & Richard, 1994), Yu and Adler-Baeder (2007) point out that due to small effect sizes, statistical significance may not indicate meaningful differences. Furthermore, characteristics of the biological parents' marital relationship no longer predicted attitudes toward marriage when the characteristics of the parents' remarriages were taken into consideration. In contrast,

aspects of their parents' remarriage explained approximately 6.6% of the variance in levels of offspring's current relationship quality and 11.4% of the variance in their attitudes toward marriage (Yu & Adler, 2007). The decreased influence of biological parents' marital relationship could be explained not only by characteristics of the parent's remarriage but also by the additional supports and resources associated. If the remarriage is successful, children could grow up in a more stable and wealthier environment, benefit from better parenting as their primary caregivers receive support from their new partners; or on the contrary, if the remarriage fails, they will have to cope with a new series of transitions (Hetherington, 2006). In addition, downward shifts in socio-economic status and living with a single mother have been associated with a greater likelihood of leaving the parental home at an earlier age, and earlier dating involvement and marriage entry (Tasker & Richards, 1994).

As a second area of relevant research concerning attitudes toward divorce, many studies support a higher likelihood of considering divorce as a viable option for married partners with divorced parents (e.g. Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010; Cunningham & Thornton, 2005; Tasker & Richard, 1994), with differences between participants from intact and divorced families more discernible when the overall level of happiness in the offspring's relationship is rated more poorly (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). In their longitudinal study, Cunningham and Thornton (2005) followed participants from their fourteenth to their thirty-first birthday and measured their attitudes toward divorce at 18, 23 and 31 years. Parents' remarriage, but not parental divorce, were associated with increases in children's positive attitudes toward divorce at 18 and 23 years. Maternal attitudes were correlated with young adults' attitudes toward divorce at 18 years of age

only. No distal factors significantly predicted young adults' attitudes toward divorce at 31. Again, later family structures appear to be important in predicting young adults' attitudes toward marital relationships. Using the same data set, Cunningham and Thornton (2006) tried to determine whether parents' marital quality increased young adults' endorsement of parents' attitudes. Young adults' attitudes regarding pre-marital sex, cohabitation and singlehood were closer to their parents' attitudes when the latter reported higher levels of relationship quality. Thus, parental divorce could diminish the young adults' trust in parental attitudes (Cunningham & Thornton, 2006). In addition, when it comes to attitudes toward divorce, the impact of parental divorce and parental conflict are sometimes difficult to disentangle. Parental divorce and parental conflict in intact and divorced families were predictive of thoughts of divorce in offspring's relationships, while offspring's divorce was predicted only by parental divorce, when controlling for age, sex, race, and parental education (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). Offspring were especially likely to divorce when their parents had divorced and exhibited low levels of conflict. Nevertheless, when happiness in the offspring's relationship was high, few thoughts of divorce occurred to participants from both intact and divorced families, but at moderate or low levels of happiness in the romantic relationships, the difference between participants from intact and divorced families became significant. Participants from divorced families were much more likely to think about divorce when experiencing low or average levels of happiness in their romantic relationship than offspring from intact families (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

Third, studies on parental divorce and general commitment messages in stable romantic relationships have yielded inconsistent findings. One study found no effect of

parental divorce on commitment, but women from divorced families reported less trust and satisfaction with their relationships (Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Another study found that level of commitment, when considered together with attitudes toward divorce, mediated the relationship between parental divorce and young adults' relationship dissolution in non-marital but stable romantic relationships (Cui, et al., 2011).

Individuals from divorced families were more likely to endorse that their families of origin illustrated to them that romantic relationships are not permanent, should be approached with caution and are beset by lack of trust and infidelity, while individuals raised in intact families were more likely to report that their families of origin showed them that marriage is enduring and that external pressures play an important role in relationships (Cui et al, 2011). Similar patterns were found when comparing commitment messages learned from parents' happy and unhappy marital relationships (Weigel, 2007). In addition, parental divorce was not correlated with messages endorsed in individual's own romantic relationships, but parental divorce and parental happiness and commitment-messages were correlated with individuals' romantic beliefs.

Fourth, certain aspects of parents' marital relationships before the separation have been repeatedly scrutinized. Particularly, chronic exposure to overt and covert conflict between parents has been consistently associated with decreases in the quality of parenting and children's adjustment difficulties during young adulthood (Hetherington, 2006), including less trust in romantic relationships generally and in individual partners (Roth, Harkins & Lauren, 2014), and heightened intensity of conflict in romantic relationships (Fincham & Cui, 2010; Simon & Furman, 2010). Parental conflict, but not parental divorce, has furthermore been associated with efficacy beliefs in romantic

relationships. Higher marital conflict was correlated with lower efficacy beliefs regarding romantic relationships, which in turn were correlated with higher levels of conflict and less happiness and satisfaction with the romantic relationship for young adults followed for seven weeks (Cui, Fincham, & Pasley, 2009).

To summarize, offspring's attitudes toward marriage and divorce are correlated with transitions following the parents' divorce, such as parents' remarriage. Parental remarriage seems to stimulate favourable attitudes toward divorce and to explain variations in the quality of offspring's romantic relationships. On the other hand, parental divorce influences the perceptions of commitment messages passed on by the family of origin. Factors such as parents' level of conflict pre-divorce and current levels of offspring's happiness in their own romantic relationships moderate what thoughts and beliefs young adults endorse in their romantic relationships and how frequently these thoughts and beliefs occur to them. Overall, these findings suggest that young adults from divorced families not only get different messages than young adults raised in intact families from their families of origins, but also that these messages will vary and be modified by later experiences. For instance, observing the parents in successful remarriages could inform assessments of the parents' marital relationship with one another, and provide evidence for positive evaluations of the parents' divorce. Furthermore, challenges such as conflict might not be appraised in the same way. Witnessing parental divorce after a period of intense conflict is not conducive to the same narratives than witnessing parental divorce after a period of low conflict. Similarly, witnessing parents being very independent and uncompromising or witnessing

disequilibrium in the relation (whereby one partner would sacrifice everything) is likely to lead young adults to different conclusions.

### **Additional Factors: Genetics and Changing Societal Beliefs**

While beyond the scope of the present research, it is worth noting that the genetic transmission of personality traits, and the stability or change in societal beliefs about romantic relationships could partially explain the intergenerational transmission of parental divorce as well as the inconsistent findings across cohorts. Cui, Wickrama, Lorenz, and Conger (2011) have underlined both methodological issues and rapid sociological changes that could explain the discrepancies in the literature on parental divorce and offspring's marriage entry and dissolution. In recent decades, an increasingly accepting view of divorce and alternative family structures (remarriages, single parent households, cohabitation) has lowered the perceived social pressure to marry and to remain in life-long romantic relationships. Moreover, with at least 40% of legally recorded marriages expected to end in divorce in the next 25 years (Milan, 2013), parental divorce has become a relatively common experience.

In addition to varying social expectations, personality traits have been hypothesized to explain some of the commonalities between parents and offspring's experiences. Neuroticism has been robustly associated with poorer relationship quality and satisfaction (Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2005; Masarik et al., 2013). Neuroticism is an increased tendency to experience negative emotions, and it will influence how individuals respond to their partners in stressful or ambiguous situations. In a study by Masarik et al. (2013), higher levels of neuroticism in adolescents predicted more negative relationship interactions, poorer relationship quality in young adulthood, and less endorsement of the

view that marriage will lead to a fulfilling life. Furthermore, considering neuroticism as a dyadic construct showed that neuroticism was a better predictor of negative perceptions of global marital quality – for the wife when both partners scored highly, and for the husband when he scored highly – than daily perceptions of closeness (Ben-Ari & Lavee, 2005). Furthermore, the personality cluster called the “dark triad” (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy) is associated in the literature with a preference for short-term relationships (Jonason, Luevano, & Adams, 2012) and poorer quality of romantic relationships, based on studies conducted in several countries (Jonason, Li, & Czarna, 2013). Evidence supports the importance of genetic factors underlying the dark triad and the big five personality traits, with the exception of Machiavellianism considered to be more susceptible to shared environmental factors (Vernon, Villani, Vickers, & Harris, 2008).

### **Implications of Literature Review**

Attachment theory and previous research on young persons’ attitudes and beliefs about romantic relationships have yielded insights into the intergenerational transmission of divorce. Disruptions in parent-child attachment, especially fathers and daughters, are associated with lower romantic relationship stability for girls. Additionally, parental divorce, parental remarriage and parental conflict all influence aspects of young adults’ attitudes and beliefs about commitment in romantic relationships.

Amato and DeBoer (2001)’s study suggests that young adults from divorced families are more likely to consider ending their romantic relationships at relatively lower levels of personal frustration or unhappiness, than those raised in intact families. For relationships characterized by high levels of happiness, both Rusbult’s and Johnson’s

tripartite models of commitment suggest that the gains from the relationship are evidently higher than the costs and the romantic relationship will continue in the future. However, the “costs” perceived as acceptable, and the assessment of these “costs,” are what is likely to differentiate couples who stay together from those who do not, when medium or fluctuating levels of happiness are reported. Ups and downs are part of every romantic relationship, and a greater tolerance for dissatisfaction or a greater tendency to make efforts in the relationship is protective. While both romantic partners will be influenced by the relationship characteristics, it is also conceivable that young adults could have formed schemata about commitment and degrees of effort to be invested in romantic relationships based on observations of their parents’ romantic relationships.

The research has not yet addressed how children come to understand the overall rules and expectations governing their parents’ romantic relationship, and how they evaluate their parents’ effort or sacrifice in the relationship. While studies have been effective at teasing apart components of the children’s experience, it is unclear whether offspring create schemas of their parents’ marital relationship and if so, whether these could impact expectations for their own romantic relationships in young adulthood. Behaviours, such as parental conflict, occur in a context, and this context can influence the way in which meaning is created. For example, acts of caregiving by the father, such as buying flowers for the mother might be interpreted differently whether they are part of the father’s general awareness of his wife’s needs or whether they are regular manifestations of love of an otherwise absent husband. Thus, similar behaviours will not take on the same meaning depending on the general relationship model displayed by the parents, a variable that is difficult to measure in quantitative assessments. One of the

mental representations of the parents' romantic relationship might include a sense of personal sacrifice by relationship partners and its desirability and utility in romantic relationships. Was the relationship unequal on dimensions of sacrifice and commitment? Were the parents very independent from each another and not ready to let go of their personal objectives?

### **Young Persons' Perceptions of Parents' Romantic Relationship**

Observational learning theory posits that children learn vicariously from the environment by seeing others' actions and the resulting consequences (Bandura, 1977). As primary caregivers of their children, parents are key role models in shaping their children's understanding and behaviours at home and by selecting their children's environments outside of the home, including daycare and school settings. Albert Bandura (1977) pioneered social learning theory to build a strong empirical foundation for understanding how children learn from their environment by observing others perform actions and witnessing the positive or negative outcomes, also referred to as vicarious reinforcement. When children go on to enact the learned behaviour, they will draw conclusions based on their experiences, which will lead to the behaviour being reinforced or dropped from their repertoire.

Nevertheless, children learn in contexts that may influence the conclusions or appraisals they draw from witnessed "facts" and events. Proponents of symbolic interactionism argue that meaning, rather than facts, should be the focus of study (Weigert & Gecas, 2003). In symbolic interactionism, meanings emerge out of interpersonal interactions and are deeply influenced by contextual factors. Meaning is not considered to be intrinsic to facts or what is observed, but it is embedded in and

shaped by social interactions. Meaning-making cannot be separated from social interactions and, therefore, it is a malleable and dynamic process. Individuals are active actors in the formation of meanings and selection of behaviours, as they select, compare and co-construct meaning. Identities are seen as positional (at one moment and in a certain context) and part of wider social systems (Weigert & Gecas, 2003).

A symbolic interactionism conceptualization can be helpful in family research, particularly when complemented with social exchange and conflict theories (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). Social exchange theories are similar to Rusbult's model of commitment (1983) in which commitment stems from the perceived quality of alternatives, satisfaction with the relationship and perceived investments, and the notion that many relationships are shaped by cost and gain analyses. Symbolic interactionism allows us to consider how analyses of costs and gains are embedded in wider structures of meanings created through social interactions. Context, expectations, meanings previously given to the behaviour, and perceived roles all play out in the assessments of observable "family facts" (Rank & LeCroy, 1983). For example, if a partner increasingly spends time with his or her friends, the other partner can view it as a threat to the relationship, or as a period of self-expansion and growth for the partner; if a partner's perception of what is an appropriate effort in the relationship changes, the same behaviour by the partner (e.g. buying flowers) may no longer be regarded as sufficient (Rank & LeCroy, 1983).

Thus, young persons raised in divorced families could derive two sets of meanings from witnessing their parents' romantic relationships and experiencing divorce: (a) Key characteristics or main narratives for their parents' romantic relationships, and (b) expectations for what constituted appropriate effort in their parents' romantic

relationships. In turn, these narratives could potentially provide another additional explanation for the intergenerational transmission of divorce. In addition, while socialization explanations usually emphasize the influence of the environment, children and adolescents are not passive recipients. They can actively select information and participate in shaping how they internalize their parents' values and models (Peterson & Bush, 2013). Qualitative inquiries can provide insight into how young adults actively organize and interpret the information they received from observations of their parents.

One way to understand how those narratives can influence children is through the lens of relational schema theory. Relational schema theory stems from the literature focusing on parent-child interactions, as it postulates that early relational experiences lead to the creation of constructs such as attachment models, rejection sensitivity and other generalizations about how others tend to respond (Andersen, Saribay, & Przybylinski, 2012). In a romantic relationship, relational schemata would include (a) representation of the interactions with the partner, and (b) one of the "self-with-other" (in other words, a representation of one's identity in relation to the significant other). Relational schemata are furthermore associated with scripts ("if-then" sequences, e.g. if she yells, I must leave the room) to guide our actions and filter the events we remember most when they are activated (Baldwin, 1995). While schemata have typically been conceptualized as being formed through the parent-child and sibling interactions, children's observations of the parent-parent relationship over the course of development could potentially lead children to infer certain patterns of appropriate behaviours, which influence their representations about romantic relationships. These representations of parent-parent relationships are in addition to, or in integration with, the schemata they form based on their own social

interactions. Furthermore, witnessing the parental interactions will provide cues as to whether experiences in the parent-child relationships seem to be applicable to romantic relationships in particular. For example, while children might learn with their mothers that adults can be trusted to provide care and a secure base, they may witness their mother having an affair and deduct that romantic relationships are one instance in which what they have learned with their mother does not apply. Thus, witnessing parents' romantic relationships could potentially lead to the creation of specific representations of parents' romantic relationships and how romantic relationships should work. These schemata would exist in addition to attachment and other related representations already studied in the existing literature.

### **Understanding Representations and Schemas**

Given the assumption that additional representations could be formed through the observation of parents' romantic relationships, there is a need to understand how and when during the course of development these representations become important. As a first developmental requirement for the formation of representations of romantic relationships, children need to be able to understand the emotions and mental states of their parents to be able to conceptualize them as a couple and to assess their relationship with one another. The theory of mind literature suggests children acquire the ability to evaluate and understand parental beliefs, including parents' approaches to close relationships, relatively late in their development, likely during older childhood and early adolescence. This can be attributed to the higher-order theory of mind processes and interpretation required; a capacity that is considered the emergence of a quasi-constructivist or constructivist theory of mind on the part of the young individual

(Tarricone, 2014). Furthermore, theory of mind is partially related to the understanding of emotions, especially when children become aware of how external situations or past experiences could trigger different emotions in different individuals and even a range of emotions in a single person (Weimer, Sallquist, & Bolnick, 2012). As Weimer et al. (2012) aptly point out, after children recognize the emotions of another person, they still have to attribute them to the correct mental state or desire: for example, children seem to start understanding the notion of surprise as linked to specific beliefs around seven to nine years of age. With cognitive abilities sufficiently developed during late childhood, children of approximately ten years of age should be able to conceptualize their parents' interactions with one another vis-à-vis their parents' mental states with some accuracy. Their conclusions could then be refined as they live their own experiences and reflect on their parents' romantic relationships first as adolescents and then as young adults.

Multiple, possibly contradictory, representations may co-exist, and the current literature suggests that factors such as *embeddedness*, *coherence*, and *accessibility* of representations might be important characteristics. According to Andersen et al. (2012), studies have shown several representations of significant others and relationships are formed and are used depending on their degree of activation and the degree of activation of related representations. Moreover, transference patterns can activate the schemata associated with one's significant other, sometimes more strongly so than one's own recognized beliefs (Andersen et al, 2012). Thus, the more a given representation is embedded in other representations, the greater likelihood for it to be activated in loosely related contexts. A hypothetical scenario might provide a good example: A young woman lost contact with her father after her parents' divorce, and it informed both her

representations of father-daughter relationships and of bi-gender relationships (male-female). Her father always told her he would call later, but never did. As a young adult, she knows most people will keep their promise and call her as planned. However, after her first date with her new boyfriend, she feels extremely anxious when he told her he would call her later. A potential explanation could be that the father-daughter relationship schemata became so embedded in more general relationship schemata (male-female relationships) that it influenced her reaction. In addition, Etcheverry and Le (2005) tried measuring the *accessibility* of commitment constructs (measured by response time on commitment questions) and commitment at time one and seven months later. The more quickly participants responded to the commitment measures, the stronger the correlation between commitment measures and other relationships' outcomes. Given the importance of attachment representations, the degree of coherence between attachment representations and representations regarding the parents' romantic relationship could be an important moderator.

While the latter considerations are beyond the scope of the present study, they are mentioned to exemplify the complexity of the subject at hand. Representations of parents' romantic relationships provide another possible lens for understanding what meanings are attributed to specific actions in context and how young adults make sense of their parents' divorce and subsequent family transitions. In addition, families are embedded in varying social contexts, and the coherence or incongruence between the family and outside environments such as schools, laws, wider social norms and expectations can also shape young adults' assessments and representations (Peterson & Bush, 2013).

### **Qualitative Studies of Young Persons with Divorced Families**

A few qualitative studies have attempted to understand what meanings emerge out of the experience of parental divorce, and how this meaning-making occurs, using grounded theory or other qualitative approaches. Cunningham and Skillingstead (2015) identified common themes using in-depth interviews with 21 university students from divorced families, when the students narrated their experience of parental divorce and its perceived importance regarding their own romantic relationships. The main themes included: (a) A fear of unintentionally repeating the parents' errors, (b) the lack of information needed to succeed in romantic relationships, (c) a wish to avoid their parents' mistakes and feeling they have learned what not to do, and (d) a fear that changes in the self or partner over long periods of time could lead to incompatibilities too great to be negotiated in the relationship. Thus, while parental divorce seems to have left the participant young adults with a sense of being somewhat ill-equipped, they also report having learned from their parents' experiences. Likewise, Maes, De Mol and Buysse (2011) and Smart (2006) report that during in-depth interviews, some children between 11 and 15 years old who had experienced parental divorce were able to articulate for the researchers how divorce *ought to* be handled by partners to reduce harm to all involved. Children expressed that parents should communicate clearly the reason for the divorce, lessen conflictual interactions and shorten the divorce process as much as possible. Children furthermore felt the need for a coherent narrative explaining why their parents had divorced (Maes, De Mol & Buysse, 2011), even if each of the parents often produced contradictory narratives (Smart, 2006).

In another qualitative study, Mahl (2001) interviewed 28 college students between 19 and 26 years old. Participants reported their parents divorced for a range of reasons, including poor communication, incompatibility between partners, infidelity, and “growing apart.” The participants were divided into three groups based on the narratives they provided: Modellers, reconcilers and strugglers. *Modellers* did not mention their parents’ remarriage and some similarities were found between their parents’ romantic relationships and the offspring’s responses on measures of love experiences, although these young persons seemed unaware of these similarities. *Reconcilers* talked about their parents’ remarriages and identified what they wanted to reproduce or not in their parents’ romantic relationship. *Strugglers* tended to break up their romantic relationships for reasons similar to their parents’ perceived reasons for divorce and attribute difficulties in their own romantic relationships to parental divorce. Overall, participants felt cautious about marriage but not as much about dating.

Interestingly, most studies have focused more on the experience of parental divorce, rather than investigating what model of romantic relationship parental divorce may or may not be invalidating. Before separating, some parents live as a couple in front of their children, and as such provide the first model of what it means to be in a romantic relationship. Berger and Kellner (1964) see co-construction as one of the main challenges of new romantic relationships; coming from different backgrounds and family stories, partners have to negotiate a shared identity that will inevitably be drawing from the knowledge they have acquired in their families of origin. Along the same lines, young adults might have representations of what being in a stable romantic relationship

means and these representations might be derived at least in part from their parents' behaviours toward one another.

One of the only studies to investigate commitment-related messages transmitted in the family of origin using grounded theory was carried out by Weigel, Bennett and Ballard-Reisch (2003). One hundred and sixty one college students (mostly women, both from intact and divorced families) between 19 to 51 years were asked to write a story from their family of origin that illustrated the commitment messages they had received. Participants reported both direct injunctions from parents and observations of parents' behaviours with one another. Ten major commitment themes emerged during the qualitative analysis: (1) Relationships take work, (2) marriage is enduring, (3) love and happiness, (4) partnership and connection, (5) relationships are impermanent, (6) prioritizing and upholding obligations, (7) external influences on relationships, (8) approaching relationships with caution, (9) fidelity, and (10) divorce is hard on families. *Relationships take work* was the most frequently endorsed theme occurring in 32.8% of participants' stories, and *Divorce is hard on families* was the least endorsed theme (5.2%). Parental divorce was correlated with decreased occurrence of the *Relationships take work* and *Marriage is enduring* themes and increased occurrence of the *Relationships are impermanent* theme. A follow-up study revealed that the commitment messages derived from the family of origin and endorsed by participants accounted for 18% of the variance in their perceptions of commitment to their own romantic relationships. Thus, this study supports the idea of differing interpretations of commitment based on the families of origin, but does not relate these interpretations to

the larger context of the young adult children's general perceptions of their parents' romantic relationships.

Similar actions might or might not be interpreted similarly in different contexts and observations made in the family of origin could influence later assessments in the young adult children's own romantic relationships (Weigel, Bennett & Ballard-Reisch, 2003). When parents show compassion and care for each other, or when one partner shows care while the other partner reacts by minimizing the spouse's love or attitude, the children are likely to draw different conclusions regarding the usefulness and desirability of caring behaviours, both in general and in the context of romantic relationships. Based on the vicarious learning model, children could acquire a model of what it means to be a part of a couple, and how much effort one should invest in a romantic relationship based on observation of their parents. This information could be complemented or modified through the observation of other couples, such as their grandparents or other couples within the extended family and the family's friendship network, as well as the romantic relationships of their older siblings. Perceptions of these other couple relationships may also enter into the young adult children's representations of romantic relationships.

By late adolescence and emergent adulthood, children should be able to utilize this accumulation of "relationship information" to derive conclusions about what being part of a couple means or should mean. Although this understanding of the parents' relationship as a couple is likely to develop later than for parent-child relationships, and possibly in a more unconscious fashion, young adults are thought to refine their understanding of qualities of their parents' relationships with each other, including their willingness to sacrifice, to operate as a team, and to continue to be committed to the

relationship, as they grow older. This developmentally refined conceptualization of the parents' relationships as a couple could provide young adults with a framework for deciding what is appropriate, desirable, or to be avoided in their own romantic relationships. Some young adults might feel like they are lacking a model for being in romantic relationships, while others might pick and choose from other relationships around them. Given the malleable and co-constructive nature of meaning making, assessments and representations of the parents' romantic relationships and subsequent divorces are likely to change based on the young adults' experiences and their discussions with friends, parents, and other. Therefore, any one study will only capture the meaning young adults associate with their parents' romantic relationships and divorce at a specific time point and in a specific context.

### **The Current Study**

The current study explored how young adults describe their parents' romantic relationships with each other, and how perceptions of the parents' unit as a couple could influence their expectations in romantic relationships, especially concerning communal strength. Based on the review of the literature, three areas worthy of exploration were identified. In these areas, the term "representation" refers to the key descriptors used by participants in their narratives. The young adults' schemata or core representations of their parents' romantic relationship cannot be formerly assessed in the present study, but what participants say is most likely influenced by the former. Due to the methodology of the present study, the interactions between the researcher and participants are considered to construct and shape the meanings and representations described by the participant (Ponterotto, 2005). As a result, while participants' answers are most likely informed by

their core representations, they are also embedded within the particular context of the interview.

1. Young adults might have general representations, to be studied as self-reported narratives, of their parents' romantic relationships.
2. Young adults might have representations or perceptions of the communality of their parents' romantic relationship, the extent to which putting effort into these relationships was desirable, and how efforts were distributed between the relationship partners.
3. Having a narrative of the parents' romantic relationship might implicitly and/or explicitly influence schemata they have of romantic relationships in general, and the roles of communality and effort in relationship functioning, more specifically.

As a novel departure from the previous research focusing largely on parent-child relations, the current study of young persons' perceptions of their parents as romantic partners was purely exploratory. How young adults conceptualize their parents' romantic relationships when asked to describe them, and the themes that emerge from these descriptions, are unknown.

## Method

### Participants

Twenty-two female undergraduate students between the ages of 18 and 22 years ( $M = 20.00$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) participated in the study. Only women were eligible to participate, to ensure a greater homogeneity of our sample, and to ensure the themes would reach saturation. Eighty percent of participants ( $n = 22$ ) did not identify with any particular cultural or religious group. Two participants self-identified as members of a religious faith, Catholic or Christian-Protestant, and one participant articulated aboriginal ancestry. Sixteen participants described their families as upper-middle class, four as lower-middle class, and two as working class. Seventeen participants felt that their SES stayed the same over the course of their childhood, and only three said that it diminished. To participate in the study, participants had experienced parental divorce between their eleventh and 17<sup>th</sup> birthday. The majority of participants' parents were married pre-divorce (20) and two were living together as common-law partners. The mean age of participants at the time of separation was 13.95 years ( $SD = 2.31$ ,  $Min = 11$ ,  $Max = 17$ ). Four participants reported one or both of their parents had remarried. Of those, three of the four reported it was their fathers. Only six of the participants without remarried parent(s) reported one or both parents were involved in a long-term romantic relationship.

Twelve participants were not dating anyone at the time of this study. Only one participant had never been involved in a romantic relationship (casual or serious). The majority reported one or two serious romantic relationships (18 participants). One participant reported ten casual relationships.

## **Procedure**

Participants were recruited through the Psychology Department's Participant Pool. In addition, flyers inviting participation were posted in other academic departments on campus. In order to participate, respondents had to speak English fluently, have been born in Canada, and not have any children of their own. In addition, only female participants were included in the present analyses to have a more homogeneous sample. Given the study's focus on observations and narratives of the parents' romantic relationship, the parental divorce had to have occurred after the participant's eleventh birthday. Based on our literature review and the theory-of-mind literature, children are able to recognize complex emotions and their associated mental state around ages seven to nine (Weimer et al, 2012). Thus, the previous criterion ensures participants will have witnessed their parents' romantic relationship for a few years while being able to infer their parents' mental states and emotions. It was not necessary for participants to be involved in a romantic relationship currently. At this exploratory stage of study, criteria for participation were relatively stringent in order to define a homogeneous sample in terms of gender, and developmental phase currently and in relation to remembering their parents' romantic relationships prior to divorce.

Following informed consent procedures online, participants completed questionnaires reflecting the theoretical constructs under investigation. They did so one week before the in-person individual interview, in order to minimize the priming effects of the questionnaires. Participants were interviewed in the Families in Motion Research and Information Lab at the University of Victoria by the principal investigator, a graduate student in clinical psychology with supervised training in interviewing methods. The

interviews were semi-structured and lasted between 40 to 75 minutes. The main questions were asked of all participants, but follow-up questions depended on the participants' responses.

At the end, participants were debriefed and they were given an opportunity to meet again with the researcher or her supervisor. Information about counselling services on campus were offered in case they felt the interview had triggered difficult memories that they wished to process further. However, no participants contacted the researcher a second time or followed up with her supervisor. All participants received extra credit on the course of their choice for their participation.

A literature review was undertaken at the beginning of the project, to identify previous research findings and to conceptualize how parents' romantic relationships could be important to the expectations of young adults in their own romantic relationships. Charmaz (2006) argues that completing a review of the research at the beginning does not impede later qualitative analyses. A more in-depth review of the literature was conducted again after the major codes were derived from participants' narratives. This approach allowed for a balance between an awareness of previous research findings, and a relatively unbiased openness to the full range of participants' responses.

### **The Interview**

The interviews were carried out using Chase's (2003) approach. Chase (2003) advocates for a detailed interview guide that serves as a support or structure for the interviewer and is used in a semi-structured fashion. The focus is on the flow of the conversation and close and careful listening to the participants. The questions are

constructed to invite stories and particular personal experiences. Follow-up questions were included in the interview questions, but they were adapted to each participant's story. The follow-up questions were also designed to build on the overarching question and to gain more insight into its components. For example, when answering the question about how much effort their parents were willing to make in their relationships with each other, participants were probed for (a) a specific anecdote in order to bring to life for the researcher the conceptual comments of the participant, and (b) whether parents were aware of the needs of their partners (i.e. do they know where to direct their efforts). These accounts were based on the retrospective perspectives of the participants. The interview questions were crafted carefully to minimize the potential effects of social desirability. For example, the word "sacrifice" was never used in the open-ended question and the softer, less potentially threatening word "effort" was preferred. Participants were directly prompted for events, stories or anecdotes at several times during the interview in order to prevent them from restricting themselves to a purely conceptual and theoretical discussion, as participants may infer different meanings than the researcher concerning statements such as "a lot of effort." During the interviews, the interviewer remained especially attentive to eliciting stories and anecdotes of participants and of probing further when she felt the participant's response was too theoretical and ambiguous (See interview guide in the Appendix A).

The interview questions were designed to progress from open-ended questions about the parents' romantic relationships and then to more focused questions about communality or effort, before introducing any comparison with the participant's own expectations in romantic relationships. In this way, the researcher hoped to allow for the

disclosure of participants' spontaneous thoughts when reflecting on their parents' romantic relationships, and then on the communal strength of this relationship.

Participants were asked to describe their parents before the divorce, specifically when the participants were "nine or ten years old" to ensure they discussed a time during which their parents were still together and the children were old enough to remember and at least partially understand their parents' romantic relationship. It is acknowledged that the subsequent discussion of young adults' perceptions of effort and their description of another couple, in the second part of the interview, is likely to have been influenced by their recollection of their parents' romantic relationship. However, because the focus is on the commitment or effort-related messages of young adults in the context of their families-of-origin, this limitation does not invalidate young adults' accounts in the later portion of the interview.

While in the initial questions an attempt is made to "take the participants back in time" to a point in time when their parents' relationship was potentially more peaceful and the participants could comprehend how it worked (nine or ten years-old), some parents might already have been engaged in high levels of conflict or even started the divorce process at that time, for example, by actively talking about divorce. This is especially true because some participants might have experienced their parents' divorce around age 12. Some participants, on the contrary, might have experienced their parents' divorce at 17 years of age and remember a time when the parents' romantic relationship was still successful. Yet descriptions of both types of scenarios was considered to be informative regarding how young adults describe and assess their parents' romantic relationships and how, according to them, their parents' marital separation colours or

does not colour their accounts. Questions were added so that all participants come to discuss their parents' romantic relationship around the time of the separation, so as to be better able to compare the participants' accounts.

At the end, participants were asked to select and briefly discuss another important couple in their environment and to identify the nature of this romantic relationship, for example a maternal aunt and uncle or a best friend and her boyfriend. Information on the second romantic relationship was collected after the questions on the parents' romantic relationship had been completed. As a result, this would reduce the participants' tendency to compare their parents' romantic relationship to the other couple in the first half of the interview and it would provide a purer account of the participant's conceptualization of the parental unit as a primary focus of this study. The other romantic relationship chosen by the participants can be influenced by their perception of their parents' romantic relationship and potentially by social desirability effects. For example, participants holding negative views about their parents' romantic relationship might pick a couple with completely different characteristics to prove the errors of their parents.

The answers given by the participants are likely to be biased by social desirability effects, especially for questions around the notion of effort in romantic relationships. It is usually seen as socially appropriate to advocate for the necessity of efforts to be made by both partners in order to maintain romantic relationships, or some participants might feel the need to prove to the researcher that their parents tried "sufficiently" to make their relationship work before they resorted to divorce. In order to reduce these tendencies in participants as much as was possible, the researcher emphasized in her introductory

statement that there is no right or wrong answer to the questions, and that the researcher's interest is in hearing what it was like for the participants, how they feel towards the different issues touched upon, and that their subjective feelings and impressions are of central interest rather than social expectations. The semi-structured interview questionnaire is appended to the present document (see Appendix A).

## Measures

Participants were invited to complete the following quantitative measures, in addition to their demographics information: the *Communal Strength Measure* by Mills, et al (2004); the revised version of the *Dedication Subscale of the Revised Commitment Inventory* [original version by Stanley & Markman (1992) and the revised version cited in Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman (2011)] and, given the importance of the attachment literature to the research questions, the *Experience in Close Relationships-Revised Questionnaire* (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). Participants were also asked to rate on a Likert scale whether they feel they usually act in accordance with their schemata of how romantic relationships should work.

**Communal strength.** Mills et al. (2004)'s Communal Strength Scale (CSS) is a self-report questionnaire assessing the extent to which one feels responsible to meet the needs of partners, with 10 items rated on 11-point Likert scales (0 = *not at all* and 10 = *extremely*). It is usually used in the context of already formed romantic relationships. However, the current study was focused on young adults' general dispositions in romantic relationships rather than in a specific romantic relationship, and the questionnaire was introduced in the following way: "If you were involved in a satisfying romantic relationship for 3 months or longer, what do YOU feel would be appropriate?"

The questionnaire was also modified for young adults to indicate what they believed their fathers and mothers would have answered before the divorce.

In a sample of 239 college students, internal consistency CSS was established with alpha coefficients of .85 for a member of the immediate family and .83 for best friend for females, and .91 for both a member of the immediate family and best friend for males (Mills et al, 2004). Other studies supported the CSS's ability to discriminate between different relationships, in the expected directions (Day, Muise, Joel & Impett, 2015; Lambert, Clark, Durtschi, Fincham & Graham, 2010).

To establish construct validity, CSS scores were positively correlated with ratings of closeness to other, general communal orientation using the communal orientation scale, and elements of romantic love (e.g. valuing the need and happiness of one's partner) on the Rubin Love Scale (Mills et al., 2004). Furthermore, while CSS scores were correlated with a 3-item liking measure and the Relationship Closeness Inventory, t-tests showed they nevertheless measured independent constructs. Mills et al. (2004) also administered their measure individually to 123 married couples and found an alpha coefficient of .86, as well as a significant correlation between communal strength and marital satisfaction. Later studies have found moderate and positive correlations between scores on the CSS, the Investment Model Scale, and a measure of sexual communal strength (Day et al, 2015; Hafner & Ijzerman, 2011).

**Dedication.** The Dedication Subscale is a part of a larger self-report questionnaire, the Revised Commitment Inventory (Owen, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2011), developed on the basis of the original Commitment Inventory by Stanley and Markman (1992). This subscale contains 8 items, ranked on a 7-point Likert

scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) and measures the participants' willingness to sacrifice for the relationship and their commitment to the relationship. The same modification described above in relation to the Communal Strength Scale, concerning the inclusion of young adults currently involved or not involved in a romantic relationship, was made for the Owen et al scale (2011).

Based on a sample of non-married couples (engaged and/or cohabiting), the dedication sub-scale showed good internal consistency for both women and men and across several studies ( $\alpha = .76 - .89$ ; Owen et al., 2011; Kelmer, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2013; Owen, Quirk, & Manthos, 2012). The 7-factor model fit well for both women and men, and the dedication subscale total scores showed moderate positive correlations with the other subscales on the RCI (Owen et al, 2011). For engaged couples, the dedication subscale was positively correlated with the Marital Adjustment Test (Owen et al., 2011) and both versions of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and the Respect in Close Relationships Scale (DAS; Owen et al., 2011; Owen et al., 2012). The dedication subscale was moderately and positively correlated with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, and the perceived likelihood to marry their partners in the future, and negatively correlated with the perceived likelihood to break-up with their partners, for participants in both close-proximity and long-distance romantic relationships (Kelmer et al, 2013).

**Attachment.** The Experience in Close Relationship-Revised (ECR-R) is a self-report questionnaire developed by Fraley et al. (2000). It contains items, ranked on a 7-point Likert scale (1= *strongly agree*, 7= *strongly disagree*). The ECR-R has received

extensive support for its reliability and validity in the literature, and is now regularly used by researchers (e.g. Fairchild & Finney, 2006; Sibley, Fischer, & Liu, 2005).

It was initially tested on a sample of 1085 undergraduate students in the United States. It pooled the initial list of 323 items used in the Experience in Close Relationships questionnaire (ECR) and used an Item Response Theory model to select items based on their discrimination values to improve the original measure. Thirteen of the 18 anxiety items and seven of the 18 avoidance items were included in the original ECR (Fraley et al., 2000). Furthermore, the distribution of the items into two dimensions was supported by confirmatory factor analysis (Fairchild & Finney, 2006; Sibley et al., 2005). In subsequent studies, the Cronbach's alpha for the anxiety and avoidance subscales ranged between .89 to .94 and from .90 to .95 respectively (Brumbaugh, Baren, & Agishtein, 2014; Jiang & Tiliopoulos, 2014; Lee, Reese-Weber, & Kahn, 2014; Sibley, et al, 2005; Sibley & Liu, 2004) and strong test-re-test reliabilities with correlations of about .86 after six weeks and, utilizing best fit model analyses, latent ECR-R avoidance and anxiety loadings highly after three weeks onto their respective measures at Time 2 were found (Sibley, et al, 2005; Sibley & Liu, 2004).

Convergent validity was demonstrated by correlations in expected directions, with a positive relation between the ECR-R anxiety subscale scores and the UCLA Loneliness Scale and self-reported worrying (Fairchild & Finney, 2006). The ECR-R has also been found to be correlated with the Relationship Questionnaire, another attachment measure, and to diary reports and ratings of interactions with romantic partners. ECR-R scores tend to be stable over time with 84% shared variance over a three-week period.

However, the ECR-R was a less apt predictor of attachment with other family members and friends (Sibley et al., 2005).

### **Qualitative Analyses**

Grounded theory and symbolic interactionism theories both endorse the theoretical assumptions that similar events can give rise to different meanings and equally valid subjective realities (Ponterotto, 2005; Weigert & Gecas, 2003). In addition, because meaning arises through interpersonal processes, the interaction between the researcher and participants is considered to have more of a role than allowing access to the participants' experiences. The interviewing process leads to a co-construction of meaning, and understanding the participants' experience is developed in the context of the research process (Ponterotto, 2005). Rather than being considered a weakness, co-construction is conceptualized as inherent to any research endeavour with recognized strategies to remain aware of co-construction and to keep the researcher's influence to a minimum.

**The researcher.** The interviews are located within the researcher-participant relationship and will be influenced by both parties. As a result, the credibility and quality of qualitative research rests in the researcher's degree of awareness to their own pre-conceptions, identities and biases, and the researcher's ability to engage in a reflexive process (Morrow, 2005).

To better situate the interview, I will present my training, pre-conceptions and the context of the current research. I was the principal investigator for the study, which was a requirement of my M. Sc. in clinical psychology. I arrived in Canada one year before starting the interviews, and completed my Bachelor's degree at the American University

of Paris, France. I started my training in qualitative methodologies at my undergraduate institution and continued under the supervision of my current supervisor, Dr. Ehrenberg. Building rapport with participants was facilitated by my empathic responding and active listening skills, which I developed during my training as a future psychologist.

My interest in the current topic stemmed from discussions with friends who had experienced parental divorce and the clients' families in my first internship in Paris. More specifically, I witnessed high levels of conflict between long divorced parents and the difficulty of adolescents and children to make sense of those experiences. I have never experienced parental divorce nor witnessed my parents' romantic relationship. Although I have some representations of my grandparents' romantic relationships and an idealized or hypothesized representation of my parents' romantic relationship, my experience is very different from the participants.

I was born and raised in France, within a bi-cultural French-Spanish family. Due to my accent, my French origins were easily identified by participants. I am a white, and educated young woman, and each of those positions comes with a certain degree of privilege. In addition, my role as a researcher and position within the department automatically conferred me a higher position of power. As a result, I opened the interview by emphasizing my beliefs that participants' own experiences and point-of-views were all valid, and that I will need their help to understand them.

My strongest pre-conception is that both the European and North American cultures are pro-long term relationships. I also desire long-term relationships for myself, even though I recognize they might not be fulfilling for or desired by all. I have never

casually dated. I have been involved in two long term relationships, one 5-year relationship and one 2-year and a half relationship with my current partner.

Throughout the research project, I kept a reflexive journal and frequently consulted with my supervisor in order to keep the influence of my cultural background, education, beliefs and related life experiences to a minimum.

**The methodology.** Several researchers using qualitative analyses emphasize the need for the researcher to challenge their own beliefs and to immerse themselves in the participants' experiences (Andersen, Inoue, & Walsh, 2012; Charmaz, 2006). The themes should reflect the participants' experiences and narratives (Morrow, 2005). The qualitative data were analysed using a grounded theory methodology based on Charmaz's (2006) approach. Line-by-line coding allowed the researcher to uncover new ideas, and bring her closer to the participants' perspective, therefore reducing bias. Coding was completed through several readings, and initial line-by-line coding was used to identify potential major and minor themes. Major and minor themes were selected based on their occurrence across participants, and their importance in the participants' narratives. Some themes might not be present throughout an entire section of the interview, but might have an explanatory quality; for example, they might be identified by the participant as a way of making sense of the divorce. These themes were also maintained as potential minor and major themes during the line-by-line coding phase, because they seemed to be important in structuring the participant's meaning making endeavour. The first ten interviews were coded line-by-line and the subthemes were gradually grouped together in larger themes capturing the gist of the participants' experience. Subsequently, the 12 later interviews were axially coded (Charmaz, 2006). The potential major and minor

themes identified during the line-by-line coding were used to code the remaining interviews. If the themes were thought to insufficiently capture a participant's experience, line-by-line coding was used again. In qualitative analysis, interviews are compared for differences and similarities, a process which helps to illuminate what themes are present and important across interviews, and also allows for the emergence of core categories (Andersen, et al, 2012). Upon the discovery of a new theme or a new relation between two themes, an additional review of previously coded data followed. Additional subthemes were added until the themes became "saturated" and captured the perspectives of the participants. Major and minor themes were identified at the end of that process. New questions generated during the analysis phase were not included in subsequent interviews, unlike the procedure of grounded theory itself (Andersen, et al, 2012). Indeed, this project is conceptualized as a first step toward developing a grounded theory of what young adults remember about their parents' romantic relationships and whether and how these memories and perceptions later influence their assessment of what constitutes an appropriate level of effort to put forth in their own romantic relationships. Later research can investigate the new questions derived during the analysis phase.

"Memos" helped in the creation of a theory around the various themes to answer questions such as what are the relations among themes, and also increased the researcher's awareness of her own biases (Charmaz, 2006). Memoing is useful at each stage of the research to document how analytical decisions were made in general and regarding specific themes, to acknowledge biases, record comparisons, thoughts and doubts during coding, and to justify changes in the researcher's perspective (Birks, Chapman, & Francis, 2008). The researcher detailed her reactions and thoughts before,

during the interviews and during the analyses in a reflexivity journal in order to keep track of her biases and be transparent toward other researchers (Bush & Ehrenberg, in press; Williams & Morrow, 2009). Additionally, validity was ensured based on Hesse-Biber and Leavy's recommendations (2011). Once the theory and themes started emerging, the researcher looked for negative cases and tried to understand: (1) Why the relationship between the themes/concepts does not apply to this individual; and (2) whether the researcher's theory should be revised based on the basis of these negative cases. Finally, the mixed-method design allowed for triangulation, and the comparison of key constructs, for example, the degree of communality of the participant in both the survey and the interview (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The quantitative data complemented the qualitative analyses in a descriptive fashion. The researcher's supervisor reviewed the researcher's codes, interview transcripts, and reflexive journal and memos, to check the coding and validate analytical decisions and major and minor themes. Codes and themes were discussed in depth with the researcher's supervisor. The researcher went back to the interview transcripts and some themes and codes were changed to incorporate the supervisor's feedback.

The narration of participants happened in the context of the interview and they were probed for stories so that the researcher could better understand their experience. Narrative elements can be included in the coding process (Ruppel & Mey, 2015). While we did not look for structural elements of stories during coding, contextual conditions (first spontaneous story chosen by the participants to describe their parents' relationship; spontaneous description versus description prompted by the researcher) were considered when generating the codes.

The software Atlas.ti5 was used to help the researcher organize codes and create visual maps of important codes. The software did not generate any of the codes, but helped to keep track of the codes created, to organize them in groups and to generate tables listing the codes associated with each participant (Lewins & Silver, 2007). By allowing the researcher to have a faster and more comprehensive perspective of the codes generated at each stage, Atlas.ti5 sped up the creation of major themes or codes.

This partially inductive and interpretative grounded theory approach is especially fitted to the current study. Indeed, there is currently very little knowledge on how young adults perceive their parents' romantic relationships, how they describe them, and how they understand the balance of effort and sacrifice made within them. Furthermore, the inductive approach will ensure that the data analyses will remain close to the participants' spoken words and will not be guided by the theoretical biases of the researcher. It is also important to note that grounded theory often goes hand in hand with theoretical sampling, whereby several rounds of data collection are completed to address existing gaps in the theory (Charmaz, 2006). Based on previous questions and answers, new questions are devised and asked to theoretically selected samples (who can best answer the new questions?). The current project could not do so due to time constraints, but new questions that arose during the analyses phase were noted in the memos and retained for future research.

## Results and Discussion

### Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 1. Some participants did not answer all the items for particular subscales. The participants' responses were used to inform the qualitative analyses, and to check whether the themes encapsulated the participants' experience.

Table 1: Descriptive characteristics of self-report questionnaires

<b>Measure</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b><i>Range</i></b>
<b>ECR – anxiety</b>	22	4.99	1.36	1-7
<b>ECR – avoidance</b>	21	4.90	1.44	1-7
<b>Dedication Subscale</b>	21	4.16	.83	1-7
<b>Communal Strength – Self</b>	22	7.08	.75	0-10
<b>Communal Strength – Father</b>	22	6.00	2.04	0-10
<b>Communal Strength – Mother</b>	22	7.09	1.92	0-10

Norms available for the ECR-R are based on the responses from 17,000 people who have taken the questionnaire on the test developer's website (Fraley, 2012). Norms exist for different gender and age groups. Observed mean scores in the current study were higher than the norms for women and individuals in their twenties for both the anxiety and avoidance scales (women:  $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ;  $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ; individuals between 20 and 30 years-old:  $M = 2.88$ ;  $M = 3.59$ ). The Dedication Subscale was initially administered to 320 cohabiting or engaged couples (Owen et al, 2011). The observed mean score for female participants in Owen et al (2011)'s study was higher ( $M$

= 6.30,  $SD = 0.81$ ) than the observed mean score from the present study. However, observed mean scores for the communal strength scale were higher in the current study than in Mills et al (2004)'s study. When 533 college students were asked to rate their communal strength towards a relative, the mean for the communal strength measure was 6.51 (Mills et al, 2004).

### **Qualitative Analyses**

The interview was divided into five broad topics to detail the participants' experiences and opinions of their parents' romantic relationships, their own romantic relationships, and one other romantic relationship in their environment. Several themes and sub-themes were present throughout the interviews, but their importance varied across topics. Other themes and sub-themes were relevant to only one topic, or to a handful of participants. Sub-themes endorsed by a handful of participants could still be reported, if they were (a) crucial in understanding the participants' experiences, and (b) an indication that a subgroup of participants had a very different opinion than the majority. In addition to *content* themes, some process codes were created in order to capture how participants created meaning in the interviews. The *major process codes* include: (a) Endorsing meaning creation, (b) describing by what it is not, and (c) comparing and contrasting.

Table 2: Summary of key themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes	Definitions
Q: Description of the parents' romantic relationship (RR) together		
<i>Not knowing or understanding everything as a child</i>		Participants explained that they struggled to understanding the reasons of the parents' divorce, their RR or they learned new information after the divorce.
<i>Partners in a romantic relationship</i>	<i>Doing things together as a couple; Witnessing physical expressions of affection; Trips; Doing things together as a family</i>	Participants identified the absence or presence of characteristics or behaviours which helped them decide whether the parents were in a RR together.
<i>Describing the relationship's dynamics</i>	Distance between the parents ; <i>Fighting and disagreements ; Division of household chores and logistics</i> ; Providing help and support to the partner	Participants remembered most the closeness or distance between the parents, the absence or presence of parental conflict, who was in charge of the household chores and gestures parents made to help one another.
<i>Constraints</i>	Personality ; Work	Constraints explained in part the dynamics in the parents' RR.

Q: Understanding the parents' effort in their RR.		
<i>Reliable indicators of effort</i>	<u>Doing things together as a couple</u> ; <u>Taking care of the home/family logistics</u> ; Emotional support ; <u>Accommodating the partner's wish or need by visibly doing something or giving something</u> ; Time ; Marital counselling	All participants who endorsed those sub-themes agreed that the behaviors indicated an effort was being put in the RR. Participants might have commented on the absence or presence of those behaviours. When the behaviors were absent, participants sometimes explained what the parents should have done (e.g. support their partner emotionally).
<i>Complex indicators of effort</i>	<u>Doing something as a family</u> ; Effort for the children ; <u>The importance of professional life</u>	Participants disagreed on whether these behaviors (i.e. advancing or putting on hold one's career goals, taking care of the children) signaled an effort in the RR.
The themes <i>Constraints</i> (with the addition of the sub-theme <i>major stressors</i> ) and a version of <i>not knowing everything as a child</i> (i.e. <i>a difficult assessment to make</i> ) were also present.		
Q: Evaluating the parents' RR		

<p><i>Explaining what went wrong</i></p>	<p><u>Need for romance in RR</u> ; <u>Individual differences</u> ; <u>Importance of expressing affection</u> ; <u>Should have provided more/different type of support</u> ; <u>Children make RR more complicated</u> ; Seeing or being told about relational aggression</p>	<p>Each participant identified one or more reasons for the parents' divorce, based on their observations of their parents' RR.</p>
<p><i>Learning from the parents</i></p>	<p><i>Skepticism about long term RR ; Feeling scared about RR</i> ; Finding the right person ; Need to protect yourself  Put all your effort in ; Parents provided a good model ; Divorce should be avoided  <i>Communicating well in a RR is important</i></p>	<p>Participants varied in the knowledge they derived from <i>observing their parents' RR</i> and "talking with their parents' about the divorce and the parents' RR.  Participants' narratives divided them into two groups.  Participants in both groups endorsed the last sub-theme.</p>
<p>Q: Participants' effort in their own RR</p>		
<p><i>Romantic relationships require effort</i></p>	<p><i>A lot of effort ; Need two sided (and equal) effort</i> ; RR are the top priority</p>	<p>Participants believed that effort is necessary in RR, and it needs to come from both partners.</p>

<i>I come first</i>	<i>There should be limits ; <u>Need to protect the self</u> ; <u>Need to protect other aspects of your life</u> ; Be independent</i>	Participants explained that they were responsible for their own well-being, and that they may need to put their well-being, goals or other aspects of their life before their RR.
<i>Messages derived from the parents' experiences</i>	<i>Some relationships should end ; It is ok to put effort in RR</i>	Participants felt that what they witnessed in their parents' RR was informative about the role of effort in RR and could be summarized into one or two messages.

Note: The list of themes presented in this table is not exhaustive. Themes and sub-themes indicating general evaluations of the parents' RR and themes about the other RR in the participants' environment were not included. The themes and sub-themes in italics were endorsed by half or more of the participants. Underlined themes are extensions of themes and sub-themes encountered in previous questions or sections of the interviews.

**Initial description of the parents' romantic relationship.** The first interview topic consists of young adults' descriptions of their parents' romantic relationships. Overall, the literature review revealed that quantitative methodologies have not allowed researchers to identify what stands out to young adults when they look back and remember their parents' romantic relationships. What does stand out to young adults of divorced families when they think about their parents' romantic relationships? What do they feel is the most meaningful way to describe them? Do they focus on parents' disagreements or fights and the divorce, or on other aspects?

***Partners in a romantic relationship.*** *Partners in a romantic relationship* was a common theme across participants. The parents' romantic relationships were most often characterized by the presence or absence of "coupley" behaviours, which were grouped into four sub-themes : (a) *doing things together as couple*, (b) *showing physical signs of affection*, (c) *trips*, and (d) *doing together as a family*. Fifteen participants described their parents doing an activity together, which did not involve the children or another family member. Participants usually did not provide many details regarding the content, type or frequency of the activity, or the parents' moods or comments when they returned home. Participants emphasized the notion that parents were doing something together just the two of them, rather than focusing specifically on what they were doing.

P112: They did stuff together like they went to movies together and went out for dinner and like that kinda things. So I felt they spent a ok... like they spent a reasonable amount of time together

P101: That was one of the big things I noticed, that they wouldn't do the bike rides or they wouldn't go do things together

P105: They would always have time to, like spend time with each other and do stuff with each other, which I found really admirable: When you have a family, to still make time for each other

Depending on the participants' accounts, either the absence or presence of such behaviours was noted, and the sub-theme was sometimes present in conjunction with the *describing by what it isn't* process code (e.g. P101). Interestingly, fifteen participants described *doing activities together as a family* when remembering their parents' romantic relationship, yet the extent to which the family was seen as an extension of the parental unit varied. Several participants, like P105, seemed to contrast family life and parents' romantic relationship with one another rather than understanding it as two sides of the same coin. For some participants, family life was viewed as subtracting time away from the parents' relationship with one another. On the other hand, family life seemed to re-affirm the parents' relationship with one another for a fewer number of participants.

P119: Every year we would do like breakfast and bed for my mom, like my dad would come and wake us up and do breakfast in bed for my mom (on the mother's birthday)

(Later on, describing the parents' romantic relationship) I would say unconditional, in that moment it felt like it was unconditional love, it just, it felt like a family

Participant 119 was a part of this subgroup. Not only did she describe all members of the family doing an activity together, but she also attributed strong characteristics to the parents' romantic relationship – e.g. unconditional love – based on the family unit. Her beliefs about the non-conditionality of love in families were transferred to the parents' relationship, even if for only a moment. Descriptions of family activities were often more detailed and encompassed the narration of brief stories, for

example about a father waking up the children to make breakfast, or memories of outdoor activities or the setting out on a family vacation, even if, just as was true of descriptions of couples' activities, the frequency with which they occurred remained unclear. Most often, participants placed more emphasis on the presence or absence of such activities rather than the type of activity or the enjoyment derived from the activities.

In addition, the young adults' perceptions of their parents' romantic relationships were shaped by what they have *seen or observed in parenting*. *Seen or observed in parenting* is part of the theme *ways of learning about the parents' romantic relationship*, which has been coded across interview questions. Ten participants mentioned their parents' parenting styles and used that observation to provide evidence for more far-reaching statements regarding the parents' personalities or reactions toward one another.

P118: My dad has a slightly more assertive personality, my mom's a little bit more reserved, my mom was definitely more a friend kind of parent, and my dad was more of a 'I am your parent' kind of parent

Thus, family life unsurprisingly provided participants with additional information. For participant 118, and many others, parenting style is an indication of more general dispositions or personality traits, which participants might or might not expect their parents to display in their romantic relationships.

Another "coupley" behaviour was more indicative of the parents' romantic relationship specifically and seemed mostly unrelated to family life. Fifteen participants also remembered and commented on whether they *witnessed physical signs of affection* between their parents or not, and it was the major theme for one participant's spontaneous story. It included descriptions of the parents kissing, hugging, giving each other back

rubs, and comments on the frequency and relevance of these activities, including the lack of such behaviours or when they behaved “more like friends.”

P104: Yeah, I can't even remember them hugging each other. Maybe as a goodbye or maybe like 'oh, hi! You're home' but that was just one hug. It was never really 'oh I'll give you a shoulder rub or something'.

P119: If you went to like, the kitchen, my dad would still be holding my mom, they would just like randomly kiss. It was just the little things that were like 'oh they are still in love.'

Witnessing physical signs of affection was mostly viewed in a positive light and interpreted as an indication of good relationship functioning. Yet, a few participants (e.g., P104) seemed to rank behaviours and to consider some behaviours to be less meaningful than others – “that was just one hug.” While one hug was judged to be insufficient by one participant, another described random kisses as one of the indications of parents' love for each other, suggesting that signs of affection between parents both functioned as proof of their love/disinterest in one another and yet might also be interpreted based on the participants' current perceptions. The relatively large number of accounts using the presence or absence and quality of physical signs suggested they are perceived to be integral parts of romantic relationships.

Participants' general descriptions of their parents' romantic relationships sometimes included direct references to a daily routine, but ten participants recalled components or snapshots of *trips*. Nine participants referred to a family trip in their spontaneous stories. Trips seemed to crystalize or exemplify some of the dynamics

present in every day life, or in the contrary provided pockets of improved family functioning.

P104: So we didn't have that much time together other than if we went on a family trip.

P129: Going on a family trip is probably the best one where their personalities came out. My dad is very organized, type A personality, stick to the box, and my mom is more go with the flow... So the planning of trips is more where that came out. (spontaneous story)

Trips were unique, distinguishable events, and might thus be more easily identified and remembered. More often than not, participants' accounts were fragmented and consisted of one to two "scenes," or as in the case of participant 129 more general statements. Trips were embedded in larger-scale evaluations of the parents or their relationships, and in rare occasions they could even represent turning points, such as identifying one trip as the parents' last attempt to make their relationship work.

*Doing activities as a couple and witnessing physical signs of affection* both might have become part of the children's retrospective accounts, because they were based on easily identifiable behaviors. Some of these behaviours were also part of stereotypical narratives of romantic love, such as buying flowers. Therefore, young adults might have been more likely to notice and assess those behaviours and their meanings in their parents' romantic relationships and other romantic relationships. Also, young adults may have remembered more vividly the behaviours that were currently important to them in their own romantic relationships.

***Describing the relationship's dynamics.*** Young adults used a variety of sub-themes to describe the dynamics of the parents' romantic relationship. These included,

(a) *distance between the parents*, (b) *fighting and disagreements*, (c) *division of household chores and logistics*, and (d) *providing help and support to partners*. In addition, the theme *constraints* was used to differentiate two sub-themes which provided partial explanations of the observed dynamics: (a) *Parents' personality*, and (b) *work*.

Only five participants described a noteworthy *distance between the parents*, whether it was emotional or physical distance. They could do so through single adjectives, such as “cold” or “distant,” or through more fleshed out descriptions of the distanced relationship dynamic. This sub-theme was mostly paired with more *negative assessments of the parents' romantic relationships* or descriptions of *multifaceted relationships*. The latter were characterized by shifts in the relationships dynamics, such as noting that the relationship significantly changed over time, that roles reversed or dramatically changed due to outside stressors, or that the parents' relationship was highly volatile. When mentioned in the context of parents' multifaceted romantic relationships, the distance between the parents often characterized only part rather than all of the relationship.

P128: They didn't really seem that involved in each other, I don't know. Like they didn't fight in front of us or anything... But they didn't seem really like loving or anything.

As in participant 128's account, the perceived distance between the parents could not always be easily explained or exemplified by a short story or a memory. Social narratives about divorce often include partners verbally fighting with one another, and to a certain degree they might reflect and even have preceded the downward trajectory that numerous quantitative research studies have described as parental conflict. Yet, memories of parents arguing may not always inform participants' descriptions of their

experiences in their families of origin. For example, participant 128 commented on the absence of visible fights and how “parental conflict” thus could not explain her parents’ relationship dynamic. While the sub-theme *fighting and disagreements* was present for 18 participants, it was paired with the process code *describing by what it is not*. Many participants mentioned parental conflicts only to re-affirm their absence or their rarity. Thus, many young adults seemed not only to resist seeing their parents’ conflicts as integral or important parts of their parents’ romantic relationships, but a few also spontaneously denied witnessing parental conflicts or remembering parental conflicts when asked to describe their parents’ romantic relationships.

P101: I mean, I really, like, I barely... I don’t remember my parents fighting a lot.

P128: I know they used to fight a lot when I would go to sleep, so I don’t know, that probably has to do with trust.

(Spontaneous story) Not really a particular one, the typical one kinda like the kid sits at the top of the stairs and listens to their parents fight, like THAT happened a lot.

Some young women, like participant 128, also described more “typical” dynamics, where the child witnessed very conflictual interactions. The participant’s mention of the sub-theme even in the absence of conflict and participant 128’s words (“the typical one”), suggested the extent to which a fighting couple has become the prototype for how we think and talk about parental divorce. When present, participants’ accounts of disagreements or fights were often embedded in more complex and ambivalent narratives. On the one hand participants might describe their parents’ fights and, on the other, the parents’ willingness to support each other; they sometimes had a

difficult time reconciling these contrasting elements into a coherent description of their parents' relationship. Thus, many young adults appeared to actively resist the narrative of parental divorce and conflict. It is possible young adults resisted acknowledging conflict to protect their parents or to portray their family more positively. It is also possible this narrative was reflective of how they understood their parents' romantic relationship.

The range of responses also drew attention to the significant variability in participants' experiences in their families of origin, and in the characteristics they chose to associate with their parents' romantic relationships when describing them to an unknown interviewer. Social desirability may have played a role in the participants' descriptions, with participants being potentially more likely to describe or remember positive aspects of their parents' romantic relationships when speaking with a stranger. Nevertheless, later during the interview presumably when the interviewer was somewhat more familiar, some participants disclosed difficulties, such as "you always want to say no but the truth..." One participant explained she was more willing to admit her parents' influences on her to an unknown interviewer than to her friends, which suggested not unexpectedly that social desirability was a variable factor across participants.

The *division of household chores and logistics* seemed to be more important than *fighting and disagreements* to many participants, when painting a picture of their parents' relationships with one another. The *division of household chores and logistics* sub-theme was present in 14 of the 22 interviews and was the main theme for one participant's spontaneous story. Participants described the division of responsibilities between parents in terms of household chores such as cooking and cleaning, driving children or the

partners to activities or to school, and decorating the house. The sub-theme often emerged in conjunction with two other sub-themes: *doing activities as a couple* and *provide help and support to the partner*. It was also tied to social norms and evaluations of the parents' romantic relationships. Egalitarian arrangements, where the father was actively involved with the chores or logistical issues, were usually paired with more positive perceptions of the parents' relationship and a greater recognition by participants of the support and help partners provided to each other. A study of social discourses about romantic relationships demonstrated that gender equality was one of the socially agreed upon characteristics of the "good couple" in therapeutic narratives presented in self-help books or TV shows (Eldén, 2012). Wider social discourses could have influenced what young women perceive to be appropriate, and draw the focus on certain characteristics of the parents' romantic relationships rather than others. In addition, young women may have been especially sensitive to their mothers' roles, and assessed them in the context of what they hope or expect their own romantic relationship will be like.

P142: An image that I have is the dinner time cooking. They would always cook together in the kitchen (...) So you know they are out working all day but there is always a thing every night where they would come home and cook together and cook for the family.

P104: He never...really did the dishes or anything.

Participant 142's account rendered the unity she perceives in her parents' relationship based on their involvement in the household chores, and how their joint cooking also allowed for a family reunion at the end of the day. This excerpt provided an

example of how multiple sub-themes became intertwined in participants' narratives, since the division of household chores and logistics became one of the activities parents do as a couple, even if it was not a socially romanticized activity. Non-egalitarian arrangements usually co-existed with more negative or ambivalent descriptions of the parents' romantic relationships. In addition, when the parents' relationship was deemed to be highly unbalanced, the mother was typically managing most of the household chores, with the exception of one participant who described her father as being the household manager. In North America, women still perform more household chores than men, despite the recent demise of the breadwinner-housewife narrative (e.g. Frisco & Williams, 2003). Yet, men and women who perceived the divisions of household chores to be fair, rather than equal per se, were happier in their marital relationships than those who did not. While imbalances in the division of labor might not be problematic for all marriages, when women, but not men, perceived the division of labor to be unfair, they were more likely to divorce their partner (Frisco & Williams, 2003). In the current study, young women's negative judgement on imbalanced division of household chores may reflect the parents', or most likely mother's, dissatisfaction in the marital relationship. Only one participant (participant 119) mentioned she could consider becoming a stay-at-home mother.

Sometimes, but not always paired with the *division of household chores and logistics*, the sub-theme *provide help and support to the partner* also appeared spontaneously in the descriptions of eight participants and in one of the spontaneous stories. Those participants explicitly described how one partner helped the other one in general or by using specific examples.

P131: She always made him lunch everyday. Like even if she was really busy and working a double shift during the day, she would still get up early and make lunch for everybody

P109: They both really encouraged each other's work (...) like everything they wanted to do, like any activities or anything, or whatever they had to go through. They were always really supportive of each other, there for each other, and tried to help each other in whatever way possible.

The *division of household chores and logistics* and *provide help and support to the partner* provided instances when young women conflated or opposed family life and the parents' romantic relationship. While her mother was described as "make[ing] lunch for everybody," participant 131 commented her mother "always made him lunch everyday," inferring her mother helped her father in particular, as well as the family more generally. This could be one of the instances in which participants decided whether doing something for the family was also doing something for the partner. Many participants described situations where both partners supported and helped each other, but some described highly uneven efforts. In the latter cases, the mother was usually the one described to be more helpful and supportive (e.g. participant 104). This sub-theme was further explored for all participants in the following topic.

*Providing help and support, doing things together as a couple* and *witnessing physical expression of affection* all suggested some young women were looking for examples of caregiving behaviours when they were asked to remember and describe their parents' romantic relationship. Through their observations of their parents' parenting styles, they made decisions about what behaviors demonstrated support and to whom this support was shown. In some cases, the presence of caregiving behaviours

counterbalanced the fights and disagreements, allowing participants to construct or at least endorse an overall positive evaluation of their parents' romantic relationship.

Embedded in the detailed descriptions of their parents' romantic relationships, the theme *constraint* emerged to explain some of the parents' relationship dynamics or difficulties. It included participants' comments on their parents' *work* or *personality* when those factors explained the relationships' dynamics. Referring to work or personality helped young women to make sense of the larger picture, and were therefore a part of the participants' conceptualizations. Furthermore, this theme emerged again in topics raised later on during the interviews. Ten participants referred to one or both parents' *personalities* or traits. They attributed parental behaviours to fixed characteristics or traits.

P142: My mom was always, I want to say the brains, she was, umm, very strong-willed (...) she was stubborn, like me. My dad, umm, passive, aggressive, quiet and definitely more subdued so that really bounced out through the relationship.

When parents' behaviours were explained using personality traits, they became qualitatively different from one-time behaviours conditioned by specific circumstances. They seemed more recurring, enduring and acquired an explanatory quality. Personality traits were usually mentioned when discussing individual differences or disagreements between the parents.

Similarly, participants discussed their parents' *work*. While some mentioned the type of job their parents held, many commented more extensively on their parents' work-schedule or work arrangements, such as working from home or being a stay-at-home parent.

P118: My mom was a stay at home mom at that age, and then my dad worked from home, so it wasn't like, it wasn't like he was going to work and then she would kiss him bye, as he was, they were both home all the time... there wasn't much opportunity for them, to do that.

P131: I don't think they really spent a lot of time together when I was nine, just because they both had their separate jobs and they were so busy.

Work arrangements, just like personality differences, were used to explain the parents' relationship dynamics and the presence or absence of "coupley" behaviours. Through the eyes of the young adults interviewed, work structured the parents' romantic relationship and limited the extent to which parents had the opportunities and time to interact with one another.

***General perception of the parents' romantic relationship.*** A number, but not all, participants provided an overall, general evaluation of their parents' romantic relationships. The theme indicated participants endorsed one of the mutually exclusive sub-themes about general perceptions of the parents' romantic relationship: *Multifaceted relationship, relationship with good characteristics, and negative assessment of the parents' relationship.*

The parents' relationship was described as a *multifaceted relationship* by seven participants. This sub-theme captured accounts in which the participants were uncertain, oscillating between positive and negative descriptions of their parents' romantic relationships, or invalidating some of their initial descriptions or adjectives when responding to follow-up questions. Young women often referred to *fighting and disagreements* or *not knowing or understanding everything as a child*. Five participants

described an *uneven or non-reciprocal relationship*, and this sub-theme was also present in the later topics. To be coded as such, participants needed to explicitly describe their parents' relationships as uneven or non-reciprocal, or needed to provide an example in which one partner was clearly not reciprocating the efforts of their spouses.

P129: There was no fighting in the house, they never argued with each other, they were very civil, they did things together, we did things as a family umm so they had a good relationship in that sense. They didn't have a good relationship in terms of communicating needs or wants with one another, umm and making sure everyone was happy, so my mom was a lot unhappier than my dad was (first spontaneous description)

Non-reciprocal relationships could be balanced by other factors (for example doing activities together or as a family or the absence of fights) and did not always lead to an overall negative perception of the parents' romantic relationship. Participants' accounts illustrated the complexity of meaning making about the parents' romantic relationships. Participants not only decided what was most salient in their parents' romantic relationships, but also tried to balance competing evaluations.

Fifteen participants, however, seemed to have reached a unified evaluation of their parents' relationships. Eleven of them endorsed that their parents' romantic relationship was *a relationship with good characteristics* and held an overall positive view of the relationship. Four participants, on the other hand, endorsed a *negative assessment of their parents' romantic relationship*. To be classified in one or the other, the participants had to associate mainly positive characteristic, such as "loving" or "light" or negative adjectives, including "tense" or "cold" to their parents' relationship. When sub-themes such as *doing activities together as a couple/family* were coded without the

process code *describing by what it isn't*, young women were more likely to evaluate their parents' relationship positively.

P119: It was actually REALLY GOOD, which is weird. They were very, like my mom's very, umm like self-sacrificing so she would go to the end of the world to do anything for anyone else. So when I was younger they were very, very close, very very like together. (first spontaneous description)

P104: It wasn't what I would want my relationship to be like (spontaneous first description)

Some participants were surprised by their evaluations of their parents' romantic relationships. However, as in the above excerpts, their evaluations of their parents' relationship was straightforwardly communicated to the interviewer, if it was clear to the participants themselves. Imbalanced relationships, such as was the case for participant 119, were not always associated with ambivalent or negative spontaneous descriptions, probably depending on its perceived outcome or associations with other themes or sub-themes. Participant 104 was the only participant who disclosed not wanting to have a romantic relationship similar to that of her parents at this early point during the interview.

Finally, eleven participants identified they lacked some information, or had only a partial understanding of the situation when they were younger and endorsed the sub-theme *not knowing or understanding everything as a child*. This sub-theme started the theme *It's not easy to understand*, which continued to develop throughout and across the interviews. Young women disclosed gaps in their knowledge before or during the parents' divorce, or disclosed they learned something about their parents' romantic relationship after the divorce. Most often, participants seemed to learn negative

information about one or both parents. The following excerpts exemplified the variability evident in what participants learned or understood after the fact:

P133: But, I was obviously in elementary school and stuff, it's, it's hard to tell (...) It always seemed to be about stuff that we didn't really understand, so it wasn't, it didn't compute.

P113: In front of like my brother and I, they were always happy but I think there was a lot of stress, sort of like with work and money and stuff.

Acquiring additional information after the fact did not decrease participants' commitment to making sense out of the situation. Indeed, the process code *endorsing meaning creation* was present for all participants throughout their entire interview. Participants acknowledged they were making sense of their parents' relationships, for example, by using sentence stems such as, "I think ..." or "I guess ..." whether it was despite of or because of the frequently identified gaps in their knowledge.

**Summary.** Young women were active agents in the construction of meaning about their parents' romantic relationships. They were aware of the limitations of their knowledge and sometimes had difficulties reconciling the multiple observations and interpretations they had made over years. Their accounts suggested that in addition to the general evaluations they made of their parents' romantic relationships, they remembered the presence or absence of "coupley" behaviors, the distribution of household chores, or the support partners provided to one another. The participants' narratives were influenced by more far-reaching social narratives, whether they agreed with these narratives, such as gender equality, or they tried to resist them, such as fights and disagreements during a divorce. The sub-themes *doing together as a couple* and *doing*

*together as a family* seemed to co-exist, but the extent to which doing for the family demonstrated a commitment to the romantic relationships varied. Work and personality differences started to emerge as two potential explanations for the romantic relationship's dynamics.

**Understanding the parents' effort in their romantic relationship.** After their spontaneous descriptions of the parents' romantic relationships, participants were encouraged to reflect on their parents' efforts toward each other and toward the parental romantic relationship before the divorce, and their parents' awareness of each others' needs. The findings revealed that participants "carried forward" a few sub-themes from the previous section of the interview.

***Reliable indicators of parental effort.*** Some sub-themes were consistently endorsed by participants as expressions of the parents' efforts toward one another or their relationships, and were grouped together under the major theme *reliable indicators of parental effort*. The presence of the behaviour indicated an effort on the part of one or both partners, while its absence signalled a lack of effort. Five sub-themes emerged: (a) *Doing things together as a couple*, (b) *taking care of the home/family logistics*, (c) *emotional support*, (d) *accommodating the partner's wishes or needs by visibly doing something or giving something*, (e) *time*, and (f) *marital counselling*.

The first sub-theme of *doing things together as a couple* emerged during the initial section of the interview, and was endorsed by 11 participants when discussing their parents' efforts. It often occurred in conjunction with the codes *effort present*, or *considering what parents should have done*. Participants, when reflecting on their parents' efforts in the relationship, spontaneously mentioned it. Participants provided

examples of joint activities or mentioned one partner planning a joint activity for both partners. The second sub-theme, *taking care of the home/family logistics* was an extension of the *division of household chores and logistics* present in the first part of the interview and was endorsed by 14 participants. While it included reflections about the division of household chores and logistics, it also contained wider comments regarding improvements of the home by one or the other parents, or the creation of a special space where the family could meet. When discussing the division of household chores, these young women reported more often that their mother, rather than their father, completed most of the chores. Most participants considered doing the chores or taking care of the house a representation or a reflection of each partner's efforts into the relationship. Kroska (2003) asked 305 married or cohabiting adults to evaluate "feminine" and "masculine" household chores, men and women only differed in their ratings of one third of the chores. Women evaluated more positively child-care activities, laundry and meal and perceived those chores to give them more powerful roles than men did. On the contrary, men evaluated more positively auto and yard work and washing dishes. Individuals' participation in the task increased their likelihood of providing a positive evaluation of the task, except for women who spent a lot of time in those activities and at their paid work (Kroska, 2003). Young women in the current study may have been more appreciative of tasks they participated in, or felt they were most likely to participate in, in their own romantic relationships. This excerpt from participant 139 provided an example of how the house became more than the physical space in which the family lived.

P139: I think for me a BIG thing was painting the house, and like re-doing the house, 'cause the house was – it was just like – like once they got divorced, we moved out of the house, we sold the house. The house was just like the last thing that kept our family together. And so when he – it

was a big house – and he just went outside and he just painted the entire thing by himself, and he painted it like – it was blue – and he painted it magenta, which is a horrible color. But that’s the colour she wanted. It was a burgundy magenta. And like he spent hours out there and like took a week off to do the entire thing. And like what’s interesting for me, is when we sold the house, it wasn’t finished... painting? So like for me that’s like almost symbolic of their relationship? Like he never almost like maybe he never got the chance to finish everything he wanted to do to make the marriage better?

While participant 139 might be more articulate and opinionated on the subject than many other participants, similar meanings seemed to hold across narratives. Young women’s evaluations seemed to be very grounded in the everyday lives of their families. As mentioned in the previous section, the young women’s focus on chores and logistics might be the outcome of the enmeshment of gender equality and definitions of the “good couple” in our society, and/or their expectations for their own romantic relationships. These expectations may be both informed and informing their accounts of their mother’s or father’s roles.

Eight participants used the sub-theme *emotional support* on its own or by tying it to the various sub-themes. Participants directly mentioned the presence or absence of emotional support by one or both partners, or they provided examples of emotional support, such as showing appreciation, learning about the day and/or interests of their partners, and regulating the partner’s emotions. The sub-theme was broadened to include actions promoting positive emotions on the part of the partner to capture the variety of participants’ accounts. Emotional support was only sometimes directly named, and it was unclear to what extent some participants consciously identified its presence. Furthermore, the same participant could describe examples and ways in which emotional support was both present and absent in the parents’ relationship. Nevertheless,

participants consistently expressed that the presence of emotional support indicated effort on the part of the parent(s) in their romantic relationships. Previous research suggested the importance of emotional work in romantic relationships. Stevens, Kiger and Mannon (2005) interviewed 96 couples to assess how their involvement in household tasks, emotional work and childcare tasks influenced their level of marital satisfaction. Men and women's involvement in household tasks were not predictive in their satisfaction with household tasks arrangements or satisfaction in the marital relationship, when the emotional work performed by each partner was taken into account. Men's own emotional work and their partners' emotional work predicted their satisfaction in the division of emotional work in the relationship. For women, their partners' emotional work only was predictive of their satisfaction with the division of emotional work. Both men and women were more satisfied with their marital relationship when their partner shouldered more emotional work (Stevens et al, 2005). Thus, young women in the current study may have identified a key shortcoming or success of their parents' romantic relationship, depending on the presence or absence of emotional support from both partners.

P101: I mean I know my mom, it felt like my mom could not do much for my dad, but I think it's like my dad was trying to help my mom with that as well too.

P105: He would help a lot physically, I would always be like I said cleaning and cooking but emotionally, like when there were problems he never seemed to be super attentive or if my mom was upset he wasn't super attentive.

Accounts by participants 101 and 105 provided examples of visible emotional support, and hinted at the complex understanding participants have of their parents' relationships. Participant 101 was describing the change in the relationship brought forth by her mother's life-threatening illness, and while she also described visible and physical ways in which her dad would help her mother, her examples were also filled with subtler examples of help. Similar to participant 105, for several participants the sub-theme was working in conjunction with the process code *describing by what it isn't* or with descriptions of *limitations in effort* or *considering what partners should have done*.

Fourteen participants reported one or both partners *accommodating the partner's wish or need by visibly doing something or giving something*. The behaviours could stem from situational circumstances, such as a sick parent who had to be driven to medical visits, or be present throughout the relationship. Thus, it was possible for participants to describe moments when the parents were visibly accommodating each others' needs and moments when they were not. If participants articulated the absence of such accommodations, the sub-theme was coded as well along with the code *describing by what it isn't*. The examples given by participants varied widely and could include, for example, helping the partner to book a room for work, going on a trip, or building something. Due to the variety of behaviours, it was often coded in conjunction with other sub-themes such as *doing things together as a couple*, or *taking care of the home/family logistics*. Accommodating the partner's wish sometimes came at a cost, whether it was a financial cost or not.

Ten participants believed *time* was an indication of effort in the relationship. Usually, participants did not directly identify they used *time* to evaluate their parents'

relationships, but strongly implied it was crucial to their understanding. *Time* referred both to the total length of the relationship, and the partners' willingness to take time out of their days to take care of each other. A few participants also mentioned parents should have "spent more time" together.

P101: I thought they did put a lot of effort in but I guess they didn't obviously, because they didn't last long enough.

Finally, six participants mentioned marital counselling as an example of parents putting effort into their relationships. Participants mentioned marital counselling only briefly, usually by stating its occurrence, and often it seemed to be unclear how long it lasted. The refusal by a parent to go to marital counselling was viewed as a lack of effort on the parents' part. For participants, marital counselling seemed to be a straightforward proof of their parents' effort to save the relationship, even though they could obviously not witness their parents' interactions during the sessions.

***Complex indicators of effort.*** Other sub-themes describing the absence or presence of efforts in the parents' romantic relationship did not lead to similar conclusions for different participants or individual participants disclosed experiencing difficulties in interpreting them. They were grouped under the theme *complex indicators of effort*. The decision made by individual participants about those sub-themes might be especially telling; it could lead to differences between participants' conclusions and meaning making. Three sub-themes were included: (a) *Doing something as a family*, (b) *effort for the children*, and (c) *the importance of professional life*. All three sub-themes are extensions or branches of sub-themes that were presented in the previous section.

Eight participants mentioned parents' *doing something for the family*. While the importance of this sub-theme diminished in this section of the interview, some participants again commented on family outings or activities. Some young women considered that *doing something as a family* was also an indication of parents' efforts in the relationship. An extension of this sub-theme emerged later during the interview and provided more insight into how participants evaluated their parents' efforts in the family context. Ten participants endorsed the sub-theme *effort for the children*. Those young women described their parents' efforts to take care of the children, for example driving the children to an activity or hiding the marital difficulties from the children, or mentioned that their parents remained together for the children. More often than not, participants did not consider doing something for the children as an expression of the parents' efforts in their relationship with one another.

P142: And then my dad would do things for us, like for my brother and I to show that he cared. Not necessarily to show my brother and I but to show "look how much I love my kids" to my mom.

P140: I guess what was important to my mom was that he tried to establish a relationship with my brother and I, and she would try and get him involved with us more. So, I guess in terms of what he would try, then go to one of my soccer games or he would try to do something with my brother. But it was never really about their relationship I guess.

Accounts from participants 142 and 140 showed how similar parental behaviours were interpreted very differently. While for one participant being involved with the children did not translate to the parents' relationship together, the other viewed her father's interest in his children as messages for his wife. This echoed the participants'

difficulties in assessing how family life was or was not also part of their parents' relationship together, and whether they should include those in their narratives of their parents' romantic relationships. Potentially, those difficulties could stem from gender differences in the parents' satisfaction to perform child-care tasks. Indeed, women who were involved in more child-care tasks were more dissatisfied with the work arrangement while men who performed more child-care tasks expressed being more satisfied (Steven et al, 2005). Participants' indecision or diverse interpretations in the current could be linked to a marked contrast between mothers' and fathers' perceptions. Different mothers could have interpreted the fathers' behaviors differently and communicated their understanding to their children.

Seventeen participants commented on the *importance of professional life* in the context of their parents' efforts towards one another. Participants' accounts included descriptions of strong professional goals on the part of one or both partners, the fulfillment or lack thereof of those goals and work arrangements, for example expressing narratives of stay-at-home mothers and working fathers or of highly demanding jobs for both parents. Many young women explained how work arrangements partially shaped their parents' relationships with one another by restricting parents' free time, or by leading one of the partners to feel dissatisfied. This sub-theme often appeared in conjunction with descriptions of *limitations in effort* and *uneven effort*, especially when one partner's professional goals took precedence over the other's aspirations. Work or professional success was rarely associated with effort for the relationship or for the family and was seen more as benefiting the individual parent.

P129: They didn't do a whole lot to be honest, umm cause when you both work five days a week and sometimes one of them would work on the weekend too, it didn't really seem like there was a whole lotta time.

P128: He was probably putting his career before everything else.

P119: My dad was like we need, our family needs to be successful, we need to have money, I need to support my family, I need to do whatever it takes to support my family.

Views expressed by participant 119 were representative of only two participants, who seemed to construct meaning differently than the rest of the participants despite similar sub-themes. Career, just like in participant 128 and 129's accounts, usually seemed to work against the relationship or provided an indication that the parent's first effort was not directed to the romantic relationship with their spouse. Young women with stay-at-home mothers often considered the work arrangement to be an example of how much effort their mothers put into the relationship, and of the lack of effort or awareness of their fathers. Instances when one partner supported a move to another city or a job conversion, were identified as efforts made toward the relationship. Thus, evaluations of effort based on the parents' work or work arrangements were often embedded within analyses of the benefits and costs to the individual partners. The current social narratives about work and stay-at-home parents may have shaped participants' evaluations. If work is highly valued and considered one of the main paths to self-fulfilment, the perceived cost incurred by the mothers for staying at home will be higher. On the other hand, if only unsatisfying jobs are available and work is not valued, staying-at-home might be a luxury and the higher perceived costs might be incurred by

the person leaving the home to work. Regardless, this sub-theme came as a surprise, given the relatively high socioeconomic status of the participants in the sample.

**Constraints.** When discussing how much effort parents put into their relationships with one another, participants again alluded to potential explanations for the relationship' dynamics or difficulties in the parents' relationships. The theme *constraints* included the sub-themes *importance of professional life* (very similar to the previous section's *work* sub-theme), *personality* and *major stressors*. The *importance of professional life* provided participants with clues regarding the efforts their parents directed toward their relationships with each other, but it also explained some of the difficulties. Just like participant 129, other participants mentioned that heavy work schedules "put a damper" on their parents' relationship.

During this second section of the interview 12 participants mentioned their parents' *personality*. They made references to fixed traits or set ways of behaving by one or both of the parents. Their accounts could stem from witnessing the same behaviours consistently over long periods of time and/or from seeing the parent(s) behaving similarly in the context of other relationships, which led them to attribute some personality or fixed traits to their parents. On the other hand, a few participants such as participant 135 and 122 explained inferring or guessing how one partner behaved in the romantic relationship based on what they knew about that parent's personality.

P135: She's like really selfless so she's always looking out for other people and she was definitely aware.

P122: She really – I don't even know the name for this personality trait – but she like, she really needs to discuss things.

Six young women disclosed their parents faced *major stressors*. These included parental illness, job transitions or unemployment, car accidents followed by physical impairments, or siblings with challenging behaviours or mental health concerns. This sub-theme appeared in conjunction with descriptions of *uneven effort* or *limitations in effort*.

***It's not easy to understand.*** The interviewer prompted participants to evaluate their parents' efforts in their relationships and the extent of their parents' awareness of the partner's needs. Again, it was challenging for participants to make sense of their parents' experiences. Fifteen participants felt it was a *difficult assessment to make*. Young women disclosed explicitly they were having a hard time with the questions (especially when asked about their parents' awareness of each others' needs) or they identified shortcomings in their knowledge at the time of the divorce or even currently. The participants' responses included several indications of their doubts and hesitations (long pauses and phrases such as, "I guess" or "maybe"). Fifteen participants also disclosed a *change over time* in their parents' relationship with one another or in the participant's perception of it. It often occurred in conjunction with the previous sub-theme. Out of the fifteen, two young women explained their perceptions changed even though their parents' relationships did not. Some participants reported marked changes over long periods of times, specific turning points or feeling the relationship changed just before their parents' separated.

P133: It was probably as my mom started pulling away more, that he became more willing to do what it took to make things work, whereas at that point I think, it's (pause) I – at the point I was

much younger you know, I think umm... like I said my – it probably – my mom probably tried at first from what I can remember.

P130: I think honestly that that trip they took together was kind of like the make or break, you know, it a couple of years before the divorce and I think that was their last chance to either figure it out or not. But before that trip they were very aware of each other's needs and willing to help out with anything.

Similar to participant 130 and 133's accounts, changes over time could lead to a complete reversal of roles in the relationship, or to a drastic shift in the parents' behaviours, and integrating those conflicting images into a single and coherent narrative proved quite challenging.

***Overall evaluations of parental effort.*** Across and within young women's narratives, parental effort toward the parents' romantic relationship was evaluated. The following distinctions emerged from their narratives: *Mutual effort, clearly uneven effort, limitations in effort, lack of effort, useless effort, good awareness of the partner's needs, and insufficient awareness of the partner's needs.* These sub-themes were not mutually exclusive when coded within interviews because some of the parents' relationships changed drastically over time, leaving participants to grapple with how their parents' efforts waxed and waned throughout their romantic relationships. Ten participants endorsed both of their parents put relatively equal amounts of effort into their relationship at one point in time or throughout the relationship. Usually this evaluation co-occurred with descriptions of one or both partners having a good awareness of the partner's need and/or a more egalitarian distribution of household chores. Fourteen participants described or named the parents who put in an uneven amount of effort into their

relationships, with one parent (usually the mother) being described as sacrificing more or putting in more effort. Twelve participants described some limitations in the efforts their parents contributed, or that the romantic relationship was not one or both partners' first priority. Eleven participants indicated one partner put none or almost no effort into the relationship at one point in time or throughout the relationship. Seven participants directly described instances when their parents' efforts were useless or harmful to themselves.

P105: So like when they made an effort at that point I felt it didn't ever progress because they were both like too stressed and too... on different levels.

P110: Before this point he was more overweight, he lost his job, and I felt because he started to care more about his own needs and no longer about meeting or trying to meet my mom's needs in any way that he could, he lost weight, he started to get his life back together.

Participant 105 and 110's accounts rendered how some young women understood not only that there could be limitations in the efforts their parents directed into their relationships, but also that more effort might not have been the answer. Theoretically, this finding about the limited usefulness of effort could have interesting implications for how these young women then conceptualized how much effort they should put into their own relationships.

Sixteen participants indicated that one or both of the parents had a *good awareness of their partner's needs* at some point in time. Often, they reported their mothers had a good awareness of their fathers' needs, and attributed levels of awareness to the parents' personality.

P142: I would say quite aware, my mom is incredibly smart and very intuitive. She is good at, you know, observing and she can, she has a spidey sense, like a gut instinct.

P135: I don't think my dad was very aware of my mom's needs or goals. I think he was very selfish at the time and that's probably part of the reason my mom was probably so frustrated.

Personality was invoked to explain both good and insufficient levels of awareness of the partner's needs or goals (for example, see participant 142 and 135's quotes above). Twelve participants described an *insufficient awareness* by one or both of the partners at one point or during all the relationship. Fathers were most often described in lacking awareness of the mothers' goals, and about the mothers' professional goals for stay-at-home mothers. Hence, participants' narratives echoed descriptions of traditional gender roles, but they understood those within the lenses of more recent social norms advocating for equality within the household. The traditional gender roles were inspired by the breadwinner-caregiver model in which men earned money outside of the house and women took care of the house and were perceived to be more sensitive and natural caregivers (Fulcher, Dinella & Weisgram, 2015). Some young women in the current study were especially aware of costs their mothers incurred because of gender based roles. Yet, they attributed their father's lack of awareness to personality traits rather than to gender based socialization patterns.

**Summary.** Several sub-themes helped participants in assessing their parents' effort in their romantic relationship: *Doing together as a couple, emotional support, taking care of the house, accommodating the partner's wish, time and marital counseling.* Efforts were mostly described in positive terms or they were associated with the process

code *describing by what it is not*. Young women often felt negatively toward their parents' effort when they witnessed highly unequal relationships or when they felt the efforts made by a parent resulted in prolonged or high levels of distress for that parent. Professional life and partner(s)' personalities were again described to be stressors on the parents' romantic relationship. Gender inequalities in the parents' romantic relationship often occurred in the directions predicted by traditional gender roles, in the form of women staying in the house or making sacrifices in their professional goals and men being relatively less attuned to their partners' needs. Yet, participants attributed their father's lesser awareness to their father's personality rather than to gender-based socialization patterns.

Young women experienced difficulty deciding what behaviors done for the family were also done for the partner. For example, household chores were often categorized as efforts done for the partner as well as the family, but family activities or doing things for the children were not. Men's professional life was most often not interpreted as an effort put toward the relationship, whereas the women's adherence to traditional women's role were interpreted as such.

The interviews suggested that while young women found it difficult to analyze the efforts their parents put into the parental romantic relationship, they were able to do so and they looked at several behaviours to make their assessment.

**Evaluating the Parents' Romantic Relationship.** Participants were asked to reflect on their overall perception of their parents' romantic relationship, and whether the divorce influenced this perception. They were encouraged to describe how, and why, their perception might have changed over time. Participants were also asked to evaluate

what influence, if any, their parents' romantic relationships had on their own approach to romantic relationships.

*It's not easy to understand.* Some responses suggested the evaluation was embedded in a larger context, which was invisible to some participants. This wider context continued the theme *it's not easy to understand*, which was present in the previous section of the interview.

Seven participants' comments suggested their evaluation of their parents' romantic relationship was *influenced by the parent-child relationships*, or vice-versa. Some young women thought about the dissolution of the family rather than the romantic relationship itself.

P123: I have a strong fear of rejection I think of the... as well like how their relationship was... and then my dad completely rejected my mom, and in turn he rejected me and my sister.

P112: The only things that are making me angry at my parents or kind of disrespect them, like respect them less is when I think of those times that like they didn't really respect each other.

Participant 112 was the only female participant to discuss spontaneously how her parents' interactions with one another also influenced the level of respect she had for them. However, it might be a question worth exploring in later research, because it points to bi-directional relations that have received little attention in the literature. Similar to participant 123, young women based their judgement of their father, both as a father and a romantic partner, on the dissolution of the family and/or tensions in the daughter-father relationship. Difficulties in the father-daughter relationship could further explain reports of wariness toward male partners. Thus, the assessment of the father's efforts in the romantic relationship might be tainted by the daughter's disappointment in the father-

daughter relationship, especially for young women. Young women, compared to young men, are at a higher risk to experience a decrease in the quality of the father-child relationship after the parental divorce (Nielsen, 2011). Echoing the current study, some young adults expressed that being rejected by one parent led them to feel more fearful in romantic relationships or be less connected with their romantic partners in Mahl (2001)'s study.

Related to this sub-theme, three participants endorsed *feeling hurt by the parents' divorce*. Most participants displayed positive or neutral affects throughout the interview, but three participants became more emotional and explained how their strong emotional reactions to the divorce were still a part of their lives.

P139: My parents were just so miserable, and they were just so sad – and like I was upset. And umm, and I was just, I am just so scared to get hurt again. So when I open myself up, like and like get hurt – like I just – it's just not something I want to experience again.

P104: Because when they broke up I didn't feel sorry for myself, I would be like 'oh I feel sorry for my brother! I feel sorry for my mom!' all these things, that never really took the time to – I don't know – I never took the time to feel sorry for myself (sigh) (pause) I thought I was going to be really good (emotional tone).

Whether they disclosed feeling hurt or having a difficult relationship with one of their parents, usually the father, these participants had a harder time analyzing the influence of their parents' romantic relationship and separating it from other experiences in their families of origin. This theme suggested how hard it was for children, even years after the divorce, to make sense of what they had observed and experienced.

***An overall evaluation.*** Only twelve of the 22 participants provided an overall evaluation of their parents' romantic relationship. Other participants focused on

particular aspects of their parents' romantic relationships when asked to evaluate their parents' approach to their romantic relationships together. Eight participants provided an *overall negative assessment* of the parents' relationship.

P128: I just don't think that they were very romantic at all, they didn't do anything that really resembled a relationship to me.

P135: Because it's so negative, so not really any thoughts beside don't do what they did! (laughs).

For their statements to be coded, the participant had to negatively evaluate the romantic relationship in its entirety. Young women could, like participant 128, deny their parents' relationship the term "romantic," when they felt it did not compare with the participant's stereotypical image of a romantic relationship. Other participants, such as participant 135, invalidated the parents' model without putting into question the terms used. On the other hand, four participants presented a *mostly positive image of the parents' relationship*. Those participants disclosed valuing their parents' model and did not feel the divorce had invalidated it. Again, to be coded with the sub-theme, they made a general statement before answering the question in detail.

P137: Well I thought like they're my parents and they love each other and they were like in love and they were going to stay together and I thought they both like cared a lot and treated each other well.

P112: Their relationship in general, apart from the separation, I think it was a relatively good model, like I would generally say that like, I feel most of the things they did were very healthy.

Both participants described their parents' relationship in positive terms.

The lack of spontaneous overall evaluations and the somewhat paradoxical sub-themes found in some participants' interviews, as well as the theme *It's not easy to*

*understand*, are consistent with the sometimes contradictory narratives endorsed by participants in previous research (e.g. Smart, 2006).

***Explaining what went wrong.*** Many participants explained how their parents could have improved their relationships or identified their parents' mistakes. Other young women identified positive aspects of their parents' romantic relationship. Twenty-one participants provided one or more reasons for the dissolution of their parents' romantic relationship.

P132: I was thinking more, so like, wanting to understand his point of view at the beginning, just being like 'oh, he wasn't happy,' like I don't think of my mom badly, thinking like 'oh yeah she spent too much time at work or anything' but... I just think that maybe over time because of their like routine, they stopped spending time on each other.

Similar to participant 132, most participants did not blame one or both parents when they provided reasons for the relationship's ending. The number and type of descriptions provided varied, but the majority of them were classified into seven sub-themes: *Need for romance in the relationship, individual differences, importance of expressing affection, divorce is beneficial or valid, should have provided more or a different kind of support, children make the relationship more complicated, and seeing or being told about relational aggression.* Nine participants reached their current conclusions about their parents' relationships by contrasting/comparing the parents' actions or relationship to other romantic relationships, social norms, or their own beliefs regarding what constituted a "healthy" romantic relationship. None of the sub-themes used to explain the parents' relationships were endorsed by the majority of participants, suggesting the variety of

lived experiences and constructed meanings among participants. Some sub-themes were reminiscent of sub-themes present in other sections of the interview.

Seven participants identified the need for romance in the parents' relationship. They identified the lack of it to be a reason for their parents' relationship dissolution or they praised the presence of romance. Young women directly used the words “romance” or “romantic,” thereby making a direct reference to our Western model of romantic relationships.

P137: I think it was better when I was younger, and I think they had more time to be romantic with each other and to do that kind of thing.

P142: My dad likes to do the little things, like you know the flowers, the surprises, just to make her know that she was loved. For sure. So I would say they were both very in tune for that part of the relationship from what I remember.

Both participants 137 and 142 provided accounts that were similar to those present in the sub-theme *doing things together as a couple*. Again present in earlier sections, seven participants explained the *importance of expressing affection*. The participants commented on the presence or absence of affection in their parents' romantic relationship, and some even explained it was part of what they had learned from their parents to apply to their own relationships.

P133: I guess to me, I never, that much – and maybe it was because they weren't affectionate, saw it that much as a relationship between them, rather than 'it's our mom and dad.'

The lack of affection in the relationship, just like the lack of romance, could put into question the very nature of the parents' relationship (e.g., participant 133). To better judge how affectionate their parents were, many young women compared them to other couples, or their stereotype of a romantic relationship. Thus, this sub-theme often occurred with the process code *compare and contrast*.

The sub-theme *individual differences* was also a continuation of a previous sub-theme : *personality*. Six participants endorsed it. It included descriptions of the parents' different tastes or personalities.

P137: And I also think they grew apart a bit in the way that they just changed like you know, they changed a little bit and they both didn't necessarily believe in the same things any more, and about the same things anymore and I think that took a toll on that part of it too.

P105: I feel like they would have both needed to change to be a better match for each other. And I don't know if that's always possible, like if people should have to change or so.

Participants described a state-of-affair, like participant 105, or a process of change that led to the parents growing apart from one another (just like participant 137's account). In two other qualitative studies, some of the main reasons for or lessons learned from parental divorce were reminiscent of our *individual differences* sub-theme: the incompatibility between partners and growing apart (Mahl, 2001), and the fear that change in the self or partner over time might lead to incompatibilities which cannot be negotiated (Cunningham & Skillinghead, 2015). One excerpt particularly portrayed the similarities between Mahl (2001)'s themes and our own:

Chachi: Mom and father got divorced because they grew apart. When two people change and don't change together, then you're going to have some irreconcilable differences and if you can't work with those, that's going to lead to divorce.

Again, "irreconcilable differences" or engrained differences were identified to explain the dissolution of the parental romantic relationship. The final comments offered by participant 105 and by "Chachi" in Mahl's (2001) qualitative study illuminated the potential stakes for participants' meaning making process. If partners could not or should not change to adapt to one another, finding the "right match" - based on a destiny theory of romantic relationship - may have become crucial. The explanation retained might have wider implications or sustain wider beliefs about romantic relationships: For example, how high is the perceived risk of growing apart in romantic relationships? Eight participants simply described the divorce as being beneficial for their parents, and one found it beneficial also for herself.

P110: I personally found my parents' divorce good for them, because my dad started to care more for himself, like I said, so if they hadn't gotten divorce I might have a more negative view on their relationship and my future relationships or certain things like that because I might have such low expectations.

The divorce could paradoxically lead to a more positive view on romantic relationships, as described in participant 110's account, by allowing the suffering of one partner to stop. For some, divorce signalled a negative or unhealthy relationship, and thus allowed the participants to distance themselves from their parents' model. Seeing the positive impacts of divorce on one or both parents could also exert potentially lasting impact on young

adults of divorced families. Several quantitative studies provided evidence that young adults from divorced families were more likely to consider divorce a viable alternative compared to young adults from intact families (e.g. Miles & Servaty-Seib, 2010).

Already present in the previous section but to a lesser degree, the sub-theme that parents *should have provided more support or a different kind of support* to their partners emerged from the responses of ten participants. Participants had clear and precise ideas regarding the ways in which partners could have better supported each other. Participants mentioned, for example, one partner should have dedicated more time to their partner, helped with the household chores, or shown more affection.

P140: That I think they could have worked harder to make the roles more even, so umm, my dad could have made dinner once in a while or cleaned or taken my brother and I somewhere, and my mom could have gone out on her own or something, yeah just divided the house tasks more evenly.

Again, the sub-theme was embedded into wider social narratives and norms, or other sub-themes such as the *importance of expressing affection*. Reflecting upon the necessity to support the partner in several ways, and the importance of romance and affection could have a protective influence on participants' romantic relationships.

Egalitarian distributions of chores were advocated for by many participants (in both the previous section and the current one), including participant 140. A study of 586 college students (401 of which were female) also documented young women's desire to break away from the breadwinner-caregiver model by becoming co-breadwinners for the family (Fulcher et al, 2015). Yet, these young women had felt they will be more involved

caregivers for their children than their husband (Fulcher et al, 2015), in contrast to our participants' emphasis on the equal distribution of household chores. It is possible young women held different expectations regarding household chores and raising children, or that they discussed an ideal scenario in our study.

While all the previous sub-themes were related to the parents' actions or relationships, seven participants disclosed feeling *children make romantic relationships more complicated*. It was unclear to what extent participants felt responsible for their parents' relationship dissolution, or to what extent their analysis will influence their family planning. Participants explained maintaining a romantic relationship or making the decision to end the relationship becomes more complicated once children are present.

P132: And a bit maybe from like having psyc classes talk about like the strain of children on a relationship that I am just like 'oh, well', like, I dunno, it's not our fault, but like because of that they might not have put as much effort into themselves.

P123: So I think that really affected their romantic relationship, with especially the addition of kids, and like added stress, it really impacted it. I kind of think that kind of made it start to deteriorate.

Similarly to participants 123 and 132, several participants described a direct link between the parents' difficulties and the stress of parenting, whether they learned this in their psychology classes or thought about it spontaneously. The description of the family was again separated from the parents' romantic relationship, and seemed to subtract rather than add to the parents' experience together. Those participants might find it challenging

to adapt their definition of romantic relationships to upcoming life phases, such as parenthood.

Six participants disclosed *observing and/or being told about relational aggression*. These young women described one partner being shut down by the other partner despite extreme unhappiness or instances of direct verbal or emotional aggression. They often later endorsed the *communicating well in the relationship is important* sub-theme.

P101: And now like my mom and my dad tell me the story about how... you know... like my mom would try to say that she was unhappy at one point and my dad would not consider it and would tell her to suck it up pretty much.

P123: I did see that my dad would like, he could be quite mean to her, so I think part of that was that I... like I don't want anybody to do that to me, I don't want, yeah...

Similar to participants 101 and 123's accounts, relational aggression perpetration was perceived to be most often enacted by the father in the parents' relationship, even if some young women also disclosed examples of relational aggression perpetration by their mothers unto their fathers. Palazzolo, Roberto and Babin (2010) investigated the association between spouses' verbal abuse or psychological violence and young adult children's use of inter-personal violence, by recruiting 128 young adults and both of their parents. Currently witnessing verbal abuse and psychological violence between parents increased the likelihood of participants' involvement (both perpetration and victimization) in inter-partner violence in their own romantic relationships, when the perpetrator and child were of the same sex. Children tended to report higher between-parents' aggression than their parents' self-report indicated (Palazzolo et al, 2010). Their

findings have important implications when more than one fourth of our participants described witnessing instances of verbal abuse or psychological aggression. Adolescents experiencing their parents' divorce when they start dating could be at a higher risk of witnessing verbal abuse or psychological aggression and in turn of being perpetrators or victims of inter-personal aggressions in their own romantic relationships.

Although present in other sections of the interviews, the process code *compare and contrast* was especially important in the present section. Nine participants clearly stated that social norms, observations of other couples, and ideals of relationships to be benchmarks against which they evaluated their parents' romantic relationships.

P139: I'd go over a friends' house, and you'd see you like the mom and dad like kiss on the lips and stuff like that, that's, that's just something I never saw.

P129: Ummm, but yeah, for that point in time they had a, somewhat decent relationship, normal for people that have been married that long.

Participant 139 used the comparison to express the unusual nature of her parents' romantic relationship, while participant 129 normalized their experience. Either way, their conclusions and perceptions are shaped by their views of other romantic relationships and by the norms enacted by couples in their environment. Comparisons helped young women to distance themselves from their parents' romantic relationship in order to make an assessment.

While all participants had an active role in making meaning out of their parents' relationship dissolution, and 21 young persons identified explanations for the relationship dissolution, divorce changed the perceptions of their parents' romantic relationship for

only 12 participants. This included one participant who already held a very negative perception of her parents' romantic relationship.

P113: I think so, a lot! I didn't really know before that they weren't happy, until afterwards, and now seeing them happy you kinda realize that there are better things.

The divorce revealed the state-of-affairs of the parents' marriage to participant 113, and was legitimized by the positive outcome for the parents. Whether changes in the participant's perception were minimal or more substantial, they most likely partially reflected participants' knowledge gaps and progressive understanding of romantic relationships. On the other hand, ten participants explained having similar perceptions of their parents' romantic relationships even after the divorce. The divorce reinforced the participants' already negative perception of the parents' romantic relationship or failed to put into question their positive evaluation.

P105: But I don't think it changed the way I saw them when I was younger, because I still remember those things. So no I don't think it changed that.

Participant 105's narrative demonstrated how the assessment of the parents' relationship may involve the definition of different time periods, for example, "when I was younger." By doing so, she could keep her positive appraisal of her parents' romantic relationship and prevented her parents' model of romantic relationship to be invalidated by the divorce. For young women with overall negative evaluations, the divorce offered additional proof of the parents' difficulties.

It was surprising to the interviewer, given the importance of work and work schedules in the previous sections, that work arrangements did not appear in the young

women's narratives of their parents' divorce. Work seemed to be identified as a significant stressor on the relationship in previous sections, especially when participants discussed reasons for limited parental effort.

***Learning from the parents.*** Only one participant reported she did not feel influenced by her parents in any way and felt her “own personality has done more towards my relationship than my parents' influence.” Twenty-one young women out of 22 explained *learning from their parents'* romantic relationships or their parents' romantic relationship dissolution. Most reported they would have learned the same lessons regardless of their parents' divorce. Several participants felt their parents' influence will become or become stronger when they started searching for a long-term/serious relationship partner or when they will start thinking about marriage. Eight sub-themes best captured the participants' answers: *Skepticism about long-term relationships, feeling scared, finding the right person, need to protect yourself, communicating well in the relationship is important, divorce should be avoided, put all your efforts in, and parents provided a good model.* Participants learned from their parents through two means, which were added to the theme *ways to learn about parents' romantic relationships*: *Observing the relationship, and talking with parent(s) about the relationship.*

Ten participants endorsed the sub-theme *communicating well in the relationship is important.* Some young women explained that their parents should have communicated more or differently, and others discuss the importance of communication solely in the context of their own relationships. This sub-theme mirrored both what they learned in psychology courses and mainstream relationship advice in North American

society. It could also be a result of witnessing relational aggression between the parents for some participants (e.g., participant 127).

P127: I don't always (pause) discuss it in the most appropriate way, because I watched my parents... like just battle like all the time. (...) So I will often catch myself doing it and say like 'I don't want to be that way' or 'that's not a healthy way to behave or a good way to behave'.

P118: I definitely try to make sure that my partner is heard like... I think that was a big thing, like not... communicating enough? And like everybody says that's like the epitome of relationships, you need to communicate. So I try to ensure I have that?

Participant 118 directly mentioned the social narrative about “healthy” romantic relationships: “Everybody says that's like the epitome of relationships, you need to communicate.” With only six participants describing instances of relational aggression and the absence of communication in the previous sections, it was surprising to find the importance of this sub-theme for almost half of the participants. Some participants might have reported what they believed they were expected to learn. Moreover, a similar sub-theme emerged in Mahl (2001)'s study, but not in Cunningham and Skillingtead's (2015) study, when participants described reasons for their parents' divorce or what they had learned from it. Communication difficulties in Mahl (2001)'s study could encompass relational aggression, lack of communication and parental conflicts. It allowed researchers to capture the diversity of adverse parental interactions.

Eleven participants felt skeptical about long term romantic relationships. They doubted the viability of long-term relationships, described romantic relationships as intrinsically finite, or explained being more cautious in romantic relationships.

P127: I think about relationships umm (pause) as ff- as really finite... I think that they end... I don't see them as lasting. I see them more as a means to an end now. So like you would marry someone because you want to have children with them, or because you would like a house together or because you share benefits at work... or because they're a good partner, you know? In the sense that they are also educated.

P105: I don't want what happened to my parents to happen to me. It's like, yeah it's very daunting I guess. The way I look at this is like, I'm kinda skeptical, like is this the right person?

Participant 127 seemed to redefine relationships based on her experience. Other young women interpreted the events as signs of the impossibility or difficulty of realizing their original definition of romantic relationships (e.g., participant 105). Frequently, the sub-theme was presented in tandem with the sub-theme *feeling scared*. Nine participants endorsed the sub-theme *feeling scared* and discussed how their parents' relationships have made them wary and nervous about romantic relationships.

P110: And I think it made me run away from commitment... but... a lot (...) I mean that I was like scared of intimacy I guess, or like really loving someone. It makes me just worried because I don't want what my parents had.

P132: It might influence the fear of like 'oh yeah, I am like super happy, super in love now, but like what about down the road?' cause I think my parents were together for like... almost 25 years? Like 24 years? And then they split up? And I'm just like 'oh' – that's like a huge fear of mine that down the road, it might fizzle out?

The young women explained being scared of a particular aspect of romantic relationship, their future partner's reaction, romantic relationships in general (e.g., participant 110) or

the outcome of romantic relationships (e.g., participant 132). Underlying the participants' narratives, there may be a decreased confidence in the young women's capacity to handle the struggles of partnership, and a decreased belief in the benefits of doing so. Trusting any partner might be harder when romantic relationships are linked to feelings of worry. Fear was also present in two of the themes identified in Cunningham and Skillingstead's (2015) study: (1) Fear of unintentionally repeating parental errors; and, (2) fear that change in self or partner over time might lead to incompatibilities too great to be negotiated. In addition, young adults who experienced their parents' divorce also endorsed the theme *approaching relationships with caution* more frequently than young persons raised by married parents in Weiger et al's (2003) study when they were asked about the commitment messages present in their families of origin. Thus, it was clear from the findings of several qualitative studies as well as the current study that young adults might feel more fearful of romantic relationships after experiencing parental divorce.

Similar to participant 105, six other participants explained the importance of *finding the right person* before getting married or entering a longterm relationship.

P133: I don't think that there's a one person for you out there. There's lot of people that you can be compatible with. Umm...so I kind of think like you just gotta find someone that's really right for you, and then I also think that like you could be at a different point in your life where it doesn't work out anymore.

However, even finding the right person was not enough to assuage the skepticism of certain participants, and contradictions emerged in participants' narratives. For example,

participant 133 argued for both the need to “find someone that's really right for you,” and at the same time that “you could be at a different point in your life where it doesn't work out anymore.” In the literature, individuals holding destiny theories were more likely to hold polarized views of their partners (Franiuk et al, 2004). Unresolved conflicts were perceived as more damaging to relationships among destiny theorists (Knee et al, 2004), than for individuals who held growth theories of romantic relationships. Thus, the narrative of *finding the right person* could potentially weaken the sense of security young adults may feel in romantic relationships.

Eight participants described a *need to protect the self* when involved in romantic relationships. It included taking the time to engage in individual hobbies or activities, protecting friendships or one's independence, or safeguarding one's identity.

P105: I want to figure out my direction and goals in life before I am with someone. Just because I don't wanna lose sight of that just because I am in a relationship, like I saw that happened to my mom.

For young women like participant 105, witnessing the losses or missed opportunities of one parent (usually described as the mother) explained their need to protect themselves in romantic relationships. Romantic relationships became desirable but potentially threatening experiences, and these participants felt more negatively toward changes in goals or personality due to their involvement in a romantic relationship.

In another study where 315 young adults rated the importance of several relationship ideals, Conway, Christensen, and Herlihy, (2003) found that adults who experienced their parents' divorce indicated they cherished more the ideals of expressing affection, and support, that they valued more commitment, stability and acceptance and

that they were more eager to preserve their independence, and passion and to confront conflict in romantic relationships, compared to young persons whose parents stayed married. Similarly, participants in the present study not only realized the shortcomings of their parents' romantic relationships in terms of lacking romance, affection and support, but also felt scared and skeptical, and believed they had to find the right person and to safeguard their sense of independence and their personal goals in order to protect themselves. The participants' narratives suggested that while they were able to identify their parents' mistakes, they might struggle putting their fears aside. As a result, young women who experienced parental divorce might need help to realize the numerous insights they have gained about the maintenance of romantic relationships.

Due to the variety of participants' responses, some sub-themes reflecting only a small number of participants were included, if they (a) signalled a different way of thinking, and (b) were very salient in a few participants' account. Despite some participants' skepticism about romantic relationships, four young women explicitly stated *divorce should be avoided*, even if it might be useful in some situations.

P128: I don't think like if I ever get married I don't like... I would definitely try really hard to not get separated because that would affect... That's about if I had kids obviously, but I don't want to put them through that.

P130: And I don't never want to have to get a divorce. It's kinda like my goal.

Many participants felt they did not want to reproduce all or part of their parents' relationship, and a few felt avoiding a divorce was a crucial component of preventing

their parents' experiences. The presence of children was one of the reasons presented for avoiding divorce (e.g., participant 128).

Two young women explicitly stated one should *put ALL their effort in* to making a romantic relationship work.

P119: My mom is very loyal and very considerate and that kinda stuff and for me I am very loyal and very considerate and it is the same with my mom, like sometimes it is to a fault. Sometimes it is not smothering, it is not like clingy, but it is wanting to do whatever you can to make it work even if it is self-harming, right? And I find that's, and that's what I am like in my relationships and I realize that. I don't think I am as bad as my mom but I definitely have that kind of aspect or view of a relationship I guess.

P128: I usually give my all in my relationships now. Definitely value them, like they're really important to me. I don't think like if I ever get married I don't like... I would definitely try really hard not to get separated because that would affect... that's about if I had kids obviously, I don't want to put them through that.

It was unclear why participants 128 and 119 disclosed placing all of their effort into the romantic relationships, contrary to other participants, before tempering their statements. Their statements "give my all in my relationships" and "wanting to do whatever to make it work even if it is self-harming" suggested a greater willingness to incur costs in their romantic relationships. Participant 119 was also the only young adult who expressed strong doubts about the desirability of her parents' divorce and discussed her religious upbringing.

Two participants argued that their *parents provided a good model* for them. Participant 112 felt she held similar values than her parents regarding romantic

relationships, while participant 142 remained very admiring of her parents' romantic relationship. Both participants offered positive initial descriptions of their parents' romantic relationships.

P112: For one I feel that I had a good model for like... like I already said, the equality, also for like respect in general, which I feel definitely is something I value in potential romantic partners.

P142: I think if your parents have a really awesome and healthy relationship and you saw that from day one, how could you not?

Participants reported learning these positive relationship messages in two different ways. Those two sub-themes were part of the theme *ways to learn about the parents' romantic relationship*, which started in the first section of the interview. Sixteen participants described they learned from *observing their parents' romantic relationships* and being exposed to it for a long period of time. Some young women mentioned the primacy of the parents' romantic relationship over other romantic relationships they witnessed. Nine participants also described that *talking with the parents* about their relationship, while the parents were still together or after the divorce, helped them understand what they had witnessed.

P135: I view it differently because when they were together I didn't realize how bad it was, and then they separated, and then I realized how big of a dick my dad was being and stuff like that (brief laugh) because he realized it too. Yeah, he is pretty honest about it.

Participant 135's account suggested a dramatic shift in her perception of her parents' romantic relationships, but other young women felt their initial interpretation was

strengthened rather than weakened by their discussions with their parents. When they talked with one or both parents about their parents' romantic relationships, participants seemed to feel more informed and more certain of their interpretation. However, the content and valence of the parent-child discussions after a divorce might dramatically alter their impact (Afifi & McManus, 2010). Negative disclosures about the other parent increased the perceived closeness of the custodial parent-child relationship but increased symptoms of depression and anxiety for adolescents of divorced families (Afifi & McManus, 2010). The effect of parent's negative disclosure about themselves remains unclear.

***Summary.*** When asked to evaluate their parents' romantic relationships, only 12 of 22 participants provided an overall evaluation. Four out of these twelve participants continued to hold a positive perception of their parents' romantic relationships. Similar to other qualitative studies, the current findings suggested participants found it difficult to provide an overall and coherent assessment of their parents' romantic relationships.

However, all participants identified some of the mistakes their parents had made. They explained the importance of romance, affection and support in sustaining romantic relationships, and they seemed to be aware of how a lack of one or the other negatively impacted their parents' romantic relationships. Surprisingly, when directly asked what they had learned from their parents' relationship, they expressed mainly their scepticism or fear of romantic relationships, and their wish to find the right person and to protect themselves. Thus, they might need help to recognize their level of insight regarding what worked and did not worked in their parents' romantic relationships. Six participants disclosed witnessing or being told about instances of relational aggression between their

parents, and previous research suggested these young adults might be at heightened risk from becoming involved in inter-partner violence. Many participants disclosed having learned *communicating well is important*, although it was not clear how much that sub-theme was endorsed because of strong social norms. That is, participants may have reported what they felt it was that they should have learned.

Participants appeared to make meaning of their experiences through: (a) Witnessing their parents' romantic relationships, (b) talking with their parents about their relationship, and (c) comparing their parents' relationships to wider social narratives, psychology courses, or other couples known in their environment.

### **What is an appropriate amount of effort in romantic relationships?**

Participants were asked to reflect on what constitutes an appropriate level of effort in their own romantic relationships. To avoid purely theoretical explanations, young women were asked to provide examples of too much effort. Also, a hypothetical scenario was created for discussion. The participants had to estimate how long they would stay in a strained romantic relationship. Participants defined what they considered the difficulties would be and described how they would react. Finally, participants explained how their expectations might have been influenced by their parents' romantic relationships. Questions and responses in earlier sections of the interview may have coloured their reflections.

***Romantic relationships require effort.*** Participants all agreed that some level of effort was necessary in sustaining romantic relationships. Their initial narratives seemed very influenced by social desirability, but the specific examples provided insight into the actual level of effort participants deemed appropriate. Five sub-themes signaled

participants were willing to work at their romantic relationships: *A lot of effort, need two-sided (and often equal) effort, romantic relationships are part of top priorities, no time limit/hard to think of too much effort, and marriage needs more effort.* They were grouped into the theme *romantic relationships require effort.* Discussions of effortful behaviours desirable or necessary in romantic relationships included examples of: the importance of doing little things regularly, being willing to compromise, going out of one's way, time being equal to effort or the need to communicate. Participants' examples varied widely and brought to life their idiosyncratic understandings. Planning a trip for their partner or giving them a call unexpectedly if they had not seen the partner for a while were examples of going out of one's way. Participant 130, 110 and 137's accounts all illuminated the specific ways in which participants approached their romantic relationships.

P130: I just think you know, in day-to-day life making an effort to make them laugh you know, or just try to put a smile on each other's face is important.

P110: One of my best friends her grandparents have been married for like over fifty years and I went to one of their anniversary parties and she like, the grandma gave a speech and she was just in tears at the end because she was explaining how much work it took to be married for over fifty years and that's like, that's exactly what I think. Like if a relationship is going to work, then you need to put in the time and like serious effort to actually make it work, because everyone is going to have problems and everyone is going to have differences, but to find compromises to get past those is important

P137: Definitely put a lot of effort like... a month or whatever.

Sixteen participants initially expressed that romantic relationships require “*a lot of effort*” or a “significant amount of effort.” However, when these young women were asked to describe specific examples of what they meant by “*a lot of effort*,” responses ranged from seeing the partners two times a week to organizing trips.

P112: I do feel that like if you're in a relationship, like if you want to maintain it, it takes a lot of work to do that, so I think you have to make effort to like see them regularly and to me that would be at least two times a week.

As was the case for participant 112, the young women's specific examples helped the interviewer to gain insight into what “a lot of effort” really meant for participants. Participants' answers were probably influenced by the social norms of their family and peer group, their life phase, and their career or other goals. Some participants may not yet be considering long-term relationships.

Fifteen participants spontaneously mentioned that both partners needed to work at the romantic relationship. Some participants strongly felt that the partners' efforts needed to be exactly or roughly equivalent. This sub-theme was sometimes tied in with extreme examples of one-sided effort or arguments about the problematic nature of one-sided effort.

P132: As long as there is some effort on both parts to like, umm, solve the problem? That as long as you keep doing it and like you're putting effort in, that like no time really... there is no time limit.

P105: Well, what I learned like I already mentioned is that you, like, both people have to be willing to make effort and that's like the biggest thing I've learned, and what I'd take away

from that is that when I am going to get married and stuff, I want to marry someone that I know will always try to make an effort.

Participant 105's account was influenced by previous interview questions and echoed the *finding the right person* sub-theme. When endorsed the *need two-sided (and often equal) effort* sub-theme was central to the young women's narrative, such as in participant 132 and 105's accounts. Some participants felt their efforts in the relationship and the latter's duration was contingent upon their partner's effort when difficulties emerged. Those young women may approach their relationship with a benefit/cost analysis.

Unfortunately, previous research on exchange and communal relationships suggested that higher expectancies of repayment were associated with increased feelings of guilt and negative emotions and to a lesser propensity to consider the intentions of the partner rather than the outcomes of their behaviors (Algoe, et al, 2010; Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012). A strong emphasis on egalitarian romantic relationships may thus be paradoxically increasing young women's likelihood to over-analyse the costs and benefits incurred in their romantic relationships and turn communal into exchange relationships.

Only three participants directly and spontaneously mentioned that romantic relationships were among their top priorities. The two young women who had expressed that one needed to *put ALL their effort* into romantic relationships in the previous section were not among them.

P118: Maintaining a relationship is not something that you can do on the side. It kind of encompasses... your life I guess.

P142: And there is that whole argument of the balancing your time and everything but I think that when I choose to be involved in one it takes up a lot of my priorities and it becomes the top of the list or one of those.

For participant 142, her dedication to a future relationship partially explained she currently preferred to remain single. She rejected other narratives of romantic relationships, for example “that whole argument of balancing your time and everything,” and for participant 118, any romantic relationship automatically became embedded into the person’s life.

When asked to provide examples of too much effort or a time limit in the hypothetical scenario, seven participants actively resisted the idea.

P132: As long as there is some effort on both parts to like, umm, solve the problem? That as long as you keep doing it and like you’re putting effort in, that like no time really... there is no time limit.

P130: I mean at this point of my life there’s not too much that I can give that’s really that extreme. I mean extreme for me I guess, I automatically think of money. I know that’s not the most extreme thing but we’re both very privileged people. So there’s not a lot of things. I can’t really think of something that extreme that either of us wouldn’t do.

Participants refused to determine “cut-off points” for effort in advance, although it was contingent upon their partner’s efforts (e.g., participant 132). Others, like participant 130, limited themselves to their current relationship and pointed to the lower demands placed on romantic relationships during young adulthood.

Consistent with participant 130's claim, seven participants also emphasized that *marriage needs more effort*. Those participants had mentioned earlier during the interview that they perceived marriage to be an important and symbolic act. The interviewer encouraged them to consider how marriage might influence the efforts they would want to put into the relationship. Those young women felt that marriage increased the duration or intensity of effort directed at the romantic relationship. The hypothetical presence of children also increased the effort they would be willing to exert.

*I come first*. Perhaps not surprisingly given the participants' skepticism and fears about romantic relationships, several participants expressed that they prioritized themselves over their romantic relationships. The sub-themes indicating participants prioritized themselves were grouped in the *I come first* theme. Fifteen participants emphasized that the *effort in romantic relationships should have limits*. It was unclear however whether it meant the relationship should end or whether partners should re-negotiate how they approached the relationship. Four sub-themes provided insight into the participants' thoughts about prioritizing themselves: *Need to protect the self*, *need to protect other aspects of your life*, *be independent*, and *there is a time limit*. The first three sub-themes tended to co-occur.

Twelve participants felt the *need to protect the self* in romantic relationships. Participants explained that their parents or themselves should safeguard their identity, goals or values, and resist change. Some participants characterized changes in personality as "unhealthy" when they occurred for a partner.

P113: I think there comes a point when you have to not put in as much effort if you are not happy, and you need to balance your happiness for yourself and for your partner. And if you're putting in too much effort or changing things about yourself I don't think you should go to that point.

P129: you don't need to be together all the time. Umm, I think clingy is also, if you know what I mean when I say a 'we' couple? Someone that is always like, doesn't, no longer has their self-identity. It's always like 'we like this' and 'we like that' instead of being able to think for yourself. I think that's a little clingy too.

Participants 113 and 129 felt threatened if they had to change themselves for their partner, and those changes signalled a flaw in character and the inability to "be able to think for yourself." Keeping one's independence and personality unchanged seemed to take precedence over the stability of the romantic relationship.

Similarly, ten participants endorsed the sub-theme *need to protect other aspects of your life*. Participants explained that one or more aspects of one's life needed to be sheltered from the romantic relationship, including friendships and career goals.

P131: I think the only time that's too much effort is if one person in the relationship becomes so involved with the other person that they cannot do their own thing, they put so much effort into the relationship that they start to separate themselves from other things.

In the above statement, participants described only losing aspects of one's life instead of the more dramatic loss of one's identity. While this prospect was less threatening, the perceived stakes of entering a romantic relationship may still feel quite high for those

participants, which could in turn influence how they will assess their own effort in the romantic relationship.

Often co-existing with the two previous sub-themes, the sub-theme *be independent* was present in the narratives of seven participants. Participants praised the ability of a potential partner to have their own friends, life or to let them enjoy some time alone.

P129: I think that everybody needs their downtime, so expecting you to be on 24/7 for them, I think is expecting a little bit too much.

P131: If I was in a relationship and the person wants to spend all the time with me, and they're constantly trying to get my attention, and they're putting a lot of effort into spending all their time with me I would kind of push away. Because I don't like to be clung onto... I don't want to be too close to someone. I want to have my own space, my own time.

In these accounts, the narrative was not tied to feelings of loss but was instead centered on the positive outcomes of being independent.

Fifteen participants defined how long they were willing to spend to figure out a solution in strained romantic relationships. Their answers ranged from a few weeks up to one year. Some participants created diverse scenarios with different time frames.

P137: Like at least a couple of months before you just call it quit, you know what I mean? So I think that would be fair.

P101: I think it depends how much effort he is putting back, like if he is putting zero effort than I would last for maybe a week and then I would be totally done with it, because I would want something back from him.

Similar to participant 101, some participants tied their narratives to other sub-themes. Two-sided effort often legitimized any additional effort the participant would be willing to offer.

Some participants conceptualized romantic relationships as exchange than communal relationships, and might thus be more attuned to the benefits and costs they incurred in their romantic relationships. Thus, experiencing parental divorce could potentially heighten young adults' likelihood to consider divorce a viable alternative, by increasing the distress they experience when transient or permanent imbalances in the partners' effort occur or when the perceived costs necessary to maintain the relationship rise.

***It's not that simple.*** Many participants expressed that it was more complex than what the very-open scenario and the interviewer's questions could lead one to believe. Eighteen participants nuanced their answers to the hypothetical scenario and considered diverse alternatives.

P129: In terms of how much effort is being put in, I think depends on the... seriousness, or length of the relationship, or whatever.

The "seriousness" of the romantic relationship, in the words of participant 129, but also its length, its institutionalization (marriage) or the type of problems experienced all

informed the duration of the participants' commitment to the relationship. Some participants identified what they termed "deal-breakers" or instances where they would automatically end the relationship. Deal-breakers included infidelity, long distance, drugs and unhealthy or abusive relationships.

Six participants also explained they learned from other sources (friends, family) or their own experiences.

P119: And now I kinda realize: no! I like going to the gym, going to classes, studying, having a girl's night, like you know what I mean? And it's like finding that balance and I think I learned that from my past relationship, not my parents. Because it was from experience, I think I needed to learn that from experience.

Participant 119 described witnessing a very imbalanced romantic relationship between her parents and she had felt one needs to *put ALL of one's effort* into romantic relationships in a previous section. Similar to participant 119, other participants felt experience and friends and family shaped their expectations, but none reflected on wider social influences (norms, patriarchy, narratives promoting individualism and romantic love).

Three participants spontaneously commented that *problems always arise in any romantic relationship*.

P105: Because at the end of the day problems are inevitably going to happen and arise, and you just have to make sure that the other person is on the same page as you and, like, try their best to make it work.

Participant 110's recollection of the anniversary speech given by her friend's grandmother and participant 105's comment above both expressed not only the inevitability of hardships in romantic relationships, but also the belief that these obstacles can be overcome. Even though it was endorsed by a small number of participants the sub-theme *problems always arise in any romantic relationship* was retained in the analyses to help describe the narratives of participants who did not endorse the *I come first* theme.

***Relevance of the parents' romantic relationships.*** Overall, many participants broadly related what they witnessed between their parents as a child to their own approach to effort in romantic relationships. Twelve participants felt they had learned that *some relationships should end*. When asked what they had learned from their parents, the participants expressed support for their parents' divorce, endorsed the belief that divorce was a valid option or explained the benefits of a break-up.

P129: It's not only effort for the other person, but effort for yourself and your own happiness. So I think I learned from my mom to stand up for what I want and make my needs known instead of being... a pushover. Umm, I think I also learned that you have to put in some effort, like they did counselling, so you gotta put in some – just cause there's an issue, doesn't mean it's done. However, there is a point at which someone's not happy, they've been unhappy for awhile and that's not going to change.

Some participants felt they had learned to protect themselves and allow themselves to end relationships because they had witnessed a parent being unhappy in the romantic relationship (e.g. participant 129) or the parents' efforts not paying off. However, many

also felt they were left with a paradoxical message. Participant 129's account exemplified the complexity of what she has learned. Some relationships should end, but only after a certain amount of effort had been given. Every family probably had a different definition of what constituted a "decent" effort before giving up and the perceived costs of continued efforts.

Sixteen participants felt they learned that *it is ok to put effort in romantic relationships*. They explained seeing how their parents tried to fix or maintain their romantic relationships, or they explained the benefits of putting effort into romantic relationships when the interviewer asked them what they had learned.

P131: I'm always trying to put effort in or even imitate things that they did, like make breakfast for one another or just little things that they put in and took time to do, I think I admired a lot of that when I was younger and I think I use it toward my relationship.

P119: I don't think that divorce, divorce isn't really an option (...) I would rather tough it through and work on it and figure it out, because every relationship is gonna have their hard points, you know? No relationship is perfect, so it is just like, trying to figure it out, trying to figure out what works for you and even if it means getting separated and living apart for a couple of years and trying to rekindle you know?

P128: If we were both trying really hard I would stick with it for as long as it took.

Whether they emulated their parents' ways in expressing affection (e.g. participant 131) or they were left feeling two-sided effort justified putting in effort indefinitely (e.g. participant 128), participants were marked by the ways in which their parents showed

dedication to each other. Participant 119's account was unusual in so far as she was the only one who completely rejected the idea of a divorce and who believed her parents' relationship could have worked if they had tried for a longer period of time. Witnessing the divorce and its consequences, and probably her religious upbringing, led her to create another narrative than the majority of participants.

*Summary.* The participants' initial responses seemed shaped by social desirability effects, but young women quickly shared examples with the interviewer. Many participants emphasized the *need to protect the self, aspects of your life and to be independent* but also that *romantic relationships require effort*. Participants had idiosyncratic definitions and diverse examples of what behaviors indicated effort was being put in the romantic relationship. While seven participants thought examples of too much effort into their romantic relationships were hard to find, fifteen participants emphasized the need to limit one's effort.

Young women who were over-focused on self-protection or the effort being two-sided and equal could be at a disadvantage when trying to maintain stable romantic relationships, especially if they start viewing romantic relationships as exchange rather than communal relationships. Their narratives may have been influenced by their previous recollections of the parents' romantic relationships, and for some by the highly unequal romantic relationships and their mothers' sacrifices.

Participants' discourses showed the complex messages they had learned from their parents' romantic relationships and divorce. While 12 participants reported learning that *some relationships should end*, 16 reported they learned *it is okay to put some effort* in romantic relationships.

**Witnessing another romantic relationship.** During the last ten minutes of the interviews, participants were asked to name and describe another romantic relationship that provided them with a model or a counter example of how romantic relationships should work. Three participants initially felt no other romantic relationship was important to them. Four participants described “failed” relationships (a participant’s words) or mentioned the high number of divorces in their families.

P132: But like with one of them breaking up, if the other one were to break up I would be like ‘oh my God, if they break up and they were like the perfect couple, like how is this... If they don’t stay together then how are we going to work?’

Witnessing several “failed” relationships could have further decreased these four young women’s confidence in their own capacity to maintain romantic relationships, even though only participant 132 articulated clearly what those “failed” relationships meant to her. The remaining fifteen participants all described what they considered to be successful romantic relationships. Participants may have opted for the most socially desirable answer, to show the interviewer they witnessed positive romantic relationships. In addition, some of the four participants who described a failed relationship also described one successful relationship in their environment. Most participants described the romantic relationship of a family member, a friend, a family friend or a friend’s family member.

***Partners in a romantic relationship.*** Due to the similarities with the descriptions of their parents’ romantic relationships, the same overall theme was used and sub-themes were created to extend it. The participants usually described the partners as *loving*

(sixteen participants), *showing support and affection* (twelve participants), *doing things together as a couple* (twelve participants) and *being together for a long time* (eight participants). Those sub-themes usually co-occurred in pairs or more.

P110: They still love each other, it blows my mind (laughs), it actually blows my mind. They, like they still flirt with each other, like I don't know they have the ideal relationship.

P105: So I think it makes me very hopeful that like they are like... you can have a really healthy, good relationship. I mean they've been together since they were 16 years-old, and now they're like 50 something. So they have been together for a very long time and it just makes me go 'oh, I want to be with someone and be able to know them and be like able to deal with things with them and always know that they'll be there for you'.

P131: They cycle everywhere together, and they always do a lot together... I think they just recently bought, I think they bought donkeys so they could ride them together.

Participants' narratives revealed the intricacy of the sub-themes and the similarities between *showing support and affection* and *doing things together as a couple*.

Furthermore, these two sub-themes were already present when some participants described their parents' romantic relationships. Many participants were very specific and provided one or more concrete examples, such as "cycling" together or buying donkeys (e.g., participant 131).

***Learning from the second model.*** Participants not only chose to describe a second couple in positive terms, but also often reported learning from this second model. Eight participants expressed, often along expressions of admiration for the relationship or the partners, a *desire for a similar romantic relationship*.

P104: I always think, when I grow up, and when I marry someone, I want them to love me that much.

P119: Their relationship is what I want, that's the kind of love I wanna experience and I don't know if it's just because they have been married for that long that they know how to tolerate each other, or if it's something special or what it is but that's what I want I guess, just go through all the hardship and all the tough parts of life. You stick it through and you end up with this amazing story.

Participants 104 and 119 were both inspired by the second romantic relationship, even if they may not know how to replicate it. Participants also often expressed that those relationships occurred later on in life, or after a marriage, suggesting they may not believe those romantic relationships can occur at their current life phase.

Twelve participants endorsed the sub-theme *it brings hope*. This sub-theme often co-occurred with the previous sub-theme, *a desire for a similar relationship*.

P127: I think that they have salvaged a lot (laughs) of umm like positivity or hope I would feel towards getting married or having a long term partner, for sure, because they've had a really nice relationship and even after like 10 years they're still (...) what I experience with them, it's the same as it's always been, which I think is really refreshing and unique.

While most participants explained that the second relationship was less influential than their parents', witnessing a working and successful romantic relationship created hope for the young women. The observation of another couple relationship helped participants to re-frame their parents' divorce as *one* of the possible outcomes rather than the only outcome.

Two sub-themes were endorsed by a lesser number of participants but seemed to signal a different way to conceptualize effort and romantic relationships: *difficulties can strengthen a relationship, picking and choosing ideas from other romantic relationships*. Two participants explained that experiencing *difficulties can strengthen a relationship*.

P119: They are tough. They have gone through a lot and I think all their hardship really built their relationship stronger.

Future difficulties and conflict may feel less threatening to these participants than to participants who believed they are at a high risk of losing themselves through compromise or who were scared of being hurt in romantic relationships.

Three participants explained the practice of *picking and choosing ideas from other romantic relationships*.

P101: I think I can pick and choose things from other people's relationships that I look into, and things that I would exclude.

Similar to participant 101, they picked out specific ideas from romantic relationships in their environment rather than desiring any particular romantic relationship. One young woman mentioned she was happy with her parents' model and felt she only needed to complement it.

**Summary.** Four participants disclosed witnessing a high number of "failed" relationships or divorces in their close social circle. The fifteen participants who chose to tell the interviewer about a positive role model described a couple from their proximal social circle (family, friends, family's friends). They mentioned how these partners did

things together, expressed their affection and had been together for a long time. Thus, several earlier sub-themes were endorsed again by participants. Thinking about this other romantic relationship seemed to bring hope for many young women.

### **Strengths and Limitations of Study**

The current study extends previous research by considering parental divorce in rich context and by investigating young women's *narratives* about their parents' romantic relationship and the notion of making effort in romantic relationships. Participants' reflections were elicited in order to understand what stood out for children of divorced families about their parents' romantic relationships and what they learned not only from the parental divorce but also from witnessing their parents' romantic relationship prior to the marital dissolution. Their collective understanding was woven into social narratives that are often not taken into consideration in quantitative studies. Emergent themes and sub-themes based on the young persons' narratives suggest that what stood out for participants might be somewhat different from what researchers have focused on thus far.

The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the researchers to clarify ready-made answers, such as « romantic relationships require a lot of effort ,» to uncover the idiosyncratic meanings of these answers for individuals. This qualitative methodology captures the richness of participants' narratives and can inspire new avenues for future research.

Nevertheless, qualitative methodologies encompass their own set of limitations. The current findings cannot be generalized to the wider population, even if they echo the findings of previous quantitative and qualitative studies. To be able to reach saturation quickly and incorporate a homogeneous sample, the participants were all women, experienced their parents' divorce between 11 and 18 years of age, were born in Canada and were mostly Euro-Canadian, and studied at the University of Victoria. The present study would need to be replicated with other groups, including men and young adults of

diverse cultural and religious heritage, in order to truly understand which themes emerge and how those play out for each group. Also, some participants reported that they were currently dating while others were not. Therefore, concurrent romantic experiences could have influenced the accounts of some participants, especially when they responded to questions about the level of effort necessary in romantic relationships. Only quantitative designs will allow us to develop a better sense of how strongly certain theories about romantic relationships and effort are correlated with or informed by the characteristics of parents' romantic relationships or by participants' current experiences, and allow us to generalize these findings. The absence of a comparison group (young women from intact families) also limits our understanding of how the parental divorce may shape the young women's perceptions of their parents' romantic relationships.

## Conclusions and Implications

Young women are actively involved in creating meaning about their parents' romantic relationships and their parents' divorce. All of the participants made choices in determining the meaning they ascribed to particular events or behaviours. They compared their parents' behaviors to other couples in their environment, to an ideal or stereotypical romantic relationships or to social norms. Social narratives about gender equality, fights and disagreements during parental divorce or romance, partially shaped how the young women reflected on their experiences. At the same time, participants disclosed finding some of the questions difficult to answer and identified some gaps in their knowledge.

While previous research has favoured quantitative measures, the current qualitative analyses suggest mixed method designs might be more appropriate. Several of the participants' accounts contained paradoxes or contradictory conclusions that cannot easily be captured by quantitative measures. Quantitative measures are necessary to generalize findings to the wider population and to provide evidence for mediational pathways. Yet, complementing quantitative measures with qualitative interviews could help understand how each participant interpreted the quantitative measures and what was the participant's reference point, specifically whom are they comparing themselves to when they are saying they are putting in a lot of effort.

Young women's perspectives on their parents' romantic relationships were quite complex and ten participants felt the divorce had not changed their overall perception of their parents' romantic relationship. Many young women felt they had learned not only from their parents' divorce, but also from witnessing their parents' romantic

relationships. As a result, young women seem to have a general story or representation about their parents' romantic relationship, and the latter are important when one wants to understand how parental divorce influences young women's beliefs about romantic relationships.

When asked to describe their parents' romantic relationships, young women remembered the absence or presence of "coupley" behaviors, such as doing things as a couple or witnessing physical expressions of affection; the distribution of household chores with more positive appraisals of egalitarian arrangements; and instances when partners provided support to one another. Thus, participants seemed to describe and remember some of their parents' caregiving behaviours. Investigating how parents' caregiving behaviours toward one another might influence young adult children's caregiving behaviours in their own romantic relationship might be an area worthy of future research (preferably using a longitudinal mixed-methods design). In addition, the tension between the sub-themes *doing together as a couple* and *doing together as a family* and how young women make decisions about whether behaviors are done for the romantic relationship or for the family should be expanded upon in later qualitative studies. Participants resisted defining their parents' romantic relationships by their fights and disagreements, but embraced other social narratives, such as the egalitarian distribution of chores. Clinicians might want to encourage young adults to explore some of the social narratives about romantic relationships, to allow them to consider what works for them and to what extent their evaluations of their parents should be based on those narratives.

Young women were able to identify behaviors or instances that indicated the extent to which parents had placed effort into their romantic relationships. *Doing together as a couple, emotional support, taking care of the house, accommodating the partner's wish, time and marital counseling* were taken as evidence of the parents' efforts. Participants were very aware of imbalances in the parents' efforts or awareness of each others' needs, and had more negative appraisals when one parent seemed to sacrifice more than the other. Fathers were most often described as putting in less effort and being less aware of their partners' needs than mothers. Participants did not agree on whether actions done for the family or the children were also things partners did for their romantic relationships/each other or for themselves. Indeed, except for the household chores or cooking the meals, "doing something for the children" or "doing activities as a family" were not viewed as an effort directed at the partner by the majority of the young women interviewed. Participants identified work arrangements and personality differences as the two main stressors on their parents' romantic relationships. Further research on young adults' perceptions of their parents' efforts in their romantic relationships could expand on the current findings by exploring whether witnessing some types of effort rather than others has long term influences on young adults' own romantic relationships. Clinicians could explore with participants their beliefs around irreconcilable differences and gender roles, especially when the parents had uneven or unequal roles in the romantic relationship. They should pay particular attention to any indication that participants' ideals promote seeing romantic relationships as exchange rather than communal relationships.

When asked for an evaluation of their parents' romantic relationships, young women who experienced their parents' divorce also emphasized the importance of romance, affection and support in romantic relationships, and seemed to be aware of how a lack of one or the other negatively impacted their parents' romantic relationships. Yet, many focused on their feelings of skepticism and fear, the wish to find the right person and to protect oneself when asked what they had learned from their parents' romantic relationships. Clinicians might help young women to recognize the positive lessons they have learned from witnessing their parents' romantic relationships, and to help increase their sense of competence. Knowing what was missing or what could have been improved in their parents' romantic relationships can help young women build lasting romantic relationships. Furthermore, recognizing their level of insight might help some young women feel less scared or skeptical about romantic relationships. In addition, as previously discussed in the results and discussion section, Conway, Christensen and Herlihy (2003)'s study suggests young adults who experienced parental divorce scored significantly higher than young adults from intact families on the subscales similar to our themes. Exploring the relationship ideals of young adults in counseling or therapy sessions, including learning how those ideals may have developed and reframing the importance of specific ideals, might give young adults the opportunity to consciously chose their beliefs.

When working with adolescents or young adults currently living through parental divorce, greater attention should be paid to indications of verbal abuse or relational aggression between the spouses. These adolescents might be at higher risk of becoming involved in inter-partner violence, especially if their mother was the perpetrator

(Palazzolo et al, 2010). Clinicians should prompt adolescents and young adults in divorcing families to discuss instances of verbal abuse or relational aggression between the parents, and monitor the influence on adolescents and young adults' romantic relationships if they are dating.

Further research is also needed to generalize the present findings to the wider population and to understand more fully how different beliefs might be influenced by, and also exert influences on, the participants' perceptions of how much effort each parent directed into the romantic relationship. In addition, some participants explained discussing the parents' romantic relationship during and after the divorce with their parents. More research is necessary to understand the long term impact of positive and negative disclosures by the parents about the romantic relationship, oneself in the romantic relationship and one's partner.

Of the various lines of interviewing included in this study, discussions of what constitutes an appropriate amount of effort to direct into romantic relationships appeared most prone to social desirability effects. The young women all agreed that "a lot of effort" was required in maintaining a romantic relationship, but their examples were markedly diverse, including examples such as buying soup, planning a trip, or giving an abusive partner another chance. Existing scales might need to be modified to include more specific examples, and developmentally appropriate choices. Many participants recognized the importance of compromise or gestures for the partner and communication. However, consistent with the fears and skepticism they reported, many also emphasized they felt they needed to protect themselves and be independent. Participants reported learning that some relationships should end and/or that romantic relationships need to be

worked at. Many considered effort needed to be two-sided and equal in romantic relationships. Gender equality and protecting oneself in romantic relationships are not necessarily ill-advised, on the contrary, but if pushed too far those ideas could turn romantic relationships into exchange, instead of communal, relationships. Finding the balance between the multiple pulls, such as ending relationships versus putting in effort, protecting oneself versus compromising and responding to the partner's needs, might be especially difficult for young adults from divorced families. Both researchers and clinicians could benefit from exploring these "multiple pulls" and their interactions with young adult children who experienced their parents' divorce.

Finally, participants felt hopeful when they discussed what they considered a lasting and loving romantic relationship in their close social circle. The number of divorces or happy lasting romantic relationships young adults witnessed in their environment might also influence their propensity to consider divorce, and the lessons they derived from their parents' romantic relationships. Additional qualitative studies and a greater awareness of the narratives and discourses about romantic relationships could be helpful for exploring more deeply how young adults might use other romantic relationships they witnessed to understand their parents' or to think about their own romantic relationships.

## References

- Afifi, T. D., & McManus, T. (2010). Divorce disclosures and adolescents' physical and mental health and parental relationship quality. *Journal Of Divorce & Remarriage*, *51*(2), 83-107. doi:10.1080/10502550903455141
- Algoe, S. B., Gable, S. L., & Maisel, N. C. (2010). It's the little things: Everyday gratitude as a booster shot for romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, *17*(2), 217–233. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2010.01273.x
- Amato, P. R., & DeBoer, D. D. (2001). The transmission of marital instability across generations: Relationship skills or commitment to marriage? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *63*(4), 1038–1051. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.01038.x
- Andersen P., Inoue K., & Walsh K. (2012). An animated model for facilitating understanding of Grounded Theory and the processes used to generate substantive theory. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, *18*(8), 734-743, doi:10.1177/17449871111434188
- Andersen, S. M., Saribay, S. A., & Przybylinski, E. (2012). Social cognition in close relationships (Chapter 18). In S. Fiske & C. Macrae (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Social Cognition* (pp. 350–372). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Arnett, J. J. (2000). Emerging adulthood: A theory of development from the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, *55*(5), 469–480.

- Baldwin, M. W. (1995). Relational schemas and cognition in close relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 12*(4), 547–552.  
doi:10.1177/0265407595124008
- Bandera, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Bartholomew, K., & Horowitz, L. M. (1991). Attachment styles among young adults: A test of a four-category model. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61*(2), 226–244.
- Ben-Ari, A., & Lavee, Y. (2005). Dyadic characteristics of individual attributes: Attachment, neuroticism, and their relation to marital quality and closeness. *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 75*(4), 621–631. doi:10.1037/0002-9432.75.4.621
- Berger, P., & Kellner, H. (1964). Marriage and the construction of reality an exercise in the microsociology of knowledge. *Diogenes, 12*(46), 1–24.  
doi:10.1177/039219216401204601
- Birks M., Chapman Y., & Francis K. (2008). Memoing in qualitative research: Probing data and processes. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 13*(1), 68-75, doi: 10.1177/1744987107081254
- Bowlby, J., & Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1991). An ethological approach to personality development. *American Psychologist, 46*(4), 333–341.

- Brumbaugh, C. C., Baren, A., & Agishtein, P. (2014). Attraction to attachment insecurity: Flattery, appearance, and status's role in mate preferences. *Personal Relationships*, 21(2), 288-308. doi:10.1111/pere.12032
- Bush, J. & Ehrenberg, M. (in press, 2015). Children's experiences of sibling relationships after parental separation: A case study approach (Chapter 7) In S. Grant (Eds.), *Divorce: Risk Factors, Patterns and Impact on Children's Well-Being*. NY, USA: Nova Science Publishers.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Chase, S. E. (2003). Learning to listen: Narrative principles in a qualitative research methods course. In R. Josselson, A. Lieblich, & D. P. McAdams (Eds.), (pp. 79–99). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- Conway, M. B., Christensen, T. M., & Herlihy, B. (2003). Adult children of divorce and intimate relationships: Implications for counseling. *The Family Journal*, 11(4), 364-373. doi:10.1177/1066480703255609
- Cui, M., Fincham, F. D., & Durtschi, J. A. (2011). The effect of parental divorce on young adults' romantic relationship dissolution: What makes a difference? *Personal Relationships*, 18(3), 410–426. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2010.01306.x
- Cui M., Fincham F.D., & Pasley B.K. (2009). Young adult romantic relationships: The role of parents' marital problems and relationship efficacy. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(9), 1226-1235, doi: 10.1177/0146167208319693

- Cui, M., Wickrama, K. A. S., Lorenz, F. O., & Conger, R. D. (2011). Linking parental divorce and marital discord to the timing of emerging adults' marriage and cohabitation. In F. D. Fincham & M. Cui (Eds.), *Romantic Relationships in Emerging Adulthood* (pp. 123–141). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Cunningham, M., & Thornton, A. (2005). The influences of parents' and offsprings' experience with cohabitation, marriage, and divorce on attitudes toward divorce in young adulthood. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, *44*(1-2), 119–144.  
doi:10.1300/J087v44n01\_07
- Cunningham M., & Thornton A. (2006). The influence of parents' marital quality on adult children's attitudes toward marriage and its alternatives: Main and moderating effects. *Demography*, *43*(4), 659-672, doi: 10.1353/dem.2006.0031
- Cunningham M., & Skillingstead K. (2015). Narratives of socialization: Perceptions of parental influence after childhood divorce. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, *56*(2), doi:10.1080/10502556.2014.996043
- Day, L. C., Muise, A., Joel, S., & Impett, E. A. (2015). To do it or not to do it? How communally motivated people navigate sexual interdependence dilemmas. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *41*(6), 791-804.  
doi:10.1177/0146167215580129
- Dinero R.E., Conger R.D., Shaver P.R., Widaman K.F., & Larsen-Rife D. (2011). Influence of family of origin and adult romantic partners on romantic attachment

security. *Couple and Family Psychology*, 1(S), 16-30, doi: 10.1037/2160-4096.1.S.16

Doyle A.B., Lawford H., & Markiewicz D. (2009). Attachment style with mother, father, best friend and romantic partner during adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 19(4), 690-714, doi: 10.1111/j.1532-7795.2009.00617.x

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. NY, USA: W. W. Norton.

Etcheverry, P. E., & Le, B. (2005). Thinking about commitment: Accessibility of commitment and prediction of relationship persistence, accommodation, and willingness to sacrifice. *Personal Relationships*, 12(1), 103–123.  
doi:10.1111/j.1350-4126.2005.00104.x

Fairchild, A. J., & Finney, S. J. (2006). Investigating validity evidence for the experiences in close relationships-revised questionnaire. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 66(1), 116–135.

Fincham, F. D., & Cui, M. (2010). The differential effects of parental divorce and marital conflict on young adult romantic relationships. *Personal Relationships*, 17(3), 331–343.

Fowers, B. J., Lyons, E., Montel, K. H., & Shaked, N. (2001). Positive illusions about marriage among married and single individuals. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15(1), 95–109. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.15.1.95

- Fraley R.C., & Heffernan M.E. (2013). Attachment and parental divorce: A test of the diffusion and sensitive period hypotheses. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(9), 1199-1213, doi:10.1177/0146167213491503
- Fraley R.C. (2012, November). Re: Information on the experiences in close relationships-revised (ECR-R) adult attachment questionnaire [Web log message]. Retrieved from <http://internal.psychology.illinois.edu/~rcfraley/measures/ecrr.htm>
- Fraley, R. C., Waller, N. G., & Brennan, K. A. (2000). An item response theory analysis of self-report measures of adult attachment. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 78(2), 350–365.
- Franiuk, R., Cohen, D., & Pomerantz, E. M. (2002). Implicit theories of relationships: Implications for relationship satisfaction and longevity. *Personal Relationships*, 9(4), 345-367. doi:10.1111/1475-6811.09401
- Franiuk, R., Pomerantz, E. M., & Cohen, D. (2004). The causal role of theories of relationships: Consequences for satisfaction and cognitive strategies. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 30(11), 1494–1507. doi:10.1177/0146167204264894
- Frisco, M. L., & Williams, K. (2003). Perceived housework equity, marital happiness, and divorce in dual-earner households. *Journal Of Family Issues*, 24(1), 51-73. doi:10.1177/0192513X02238520
- Fulcher, M., Dinella, L. M., & Weisgram, E. S. (2015). Constructing a feminist reorganization of the heterosexual breadwinner/caregiver family model: College

students' plans for their own future families. *Sex Roles*, 73(3-4), 174-186.

doi:10.1007/s11199-015-0487-8

Gordon, A. M., Impett, E. A., Kogan, A., Oveis, C., & Keltner, D. (2012). To have and to hold: Gratitude promotes relationship maintenance in intimate bonds. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103(2), 257–274. doi:10.1037/a0028723

Hafner, M., & Ijzerman, H. (2011). The face of love: Spontaneous accommodation as social emotion regulation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(12), 1551-1563. doi:10.1177/0146167211415629

Hesse-biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. (2011). *The practice of qualitative research* (Second edition). USA: SAGE Publications.

Hetherington, E. M. (2006). The influence of conflict, marital problem solving and parenting on children's adjustment in nondivorced, divorced and remarried families. In A. Clarke-Stewart & J. Dunn (Eds.), *Families count: Effects on child and adolescent development* (pp. 203–237). UK: Cambridge: Cambridge.

Jacquet, S. E., & Surra, C. A. (2001). Parental divorce and premarital couples: Commitment and other relationship characteristics. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63(3), 627–638. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00627.x

Jensen T.M., Willoughby B..J., Holman T.B., Busby D.M., & Shafer K. (2015). Association between family and interpersonal processes and emerging adult marital

paradigm: Does adult attachment mediate. *Journal of Adult Development*, 22(1), 50-62, doi:10.1007/s10804-014-9200-3

Jiang, Y. X., & Tiliopoulos, N. (2014). Individual differences in adult attachment and reinforcement sensitivity. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 68, 205-210. doi:10.1016/j.paid.2014.04.022

Johnson, M. D., & Galambos, N. L. (2014). Paths to intimate relationship quality from parent–adolescent relations and mental health. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 76(1), 145–160.

Johnson, M. P., Caughlin, J. P., & Huston, T. L. (1999). The tripartite nature of marital commitment: Personal, moral, and structural reasons to stay married. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 61(1), 160–177.

Jonason, P. K., Li, N. P., & Czarna, A. Z. (2013). Quick and dirty: Some psychosocial costs associated with the dark triad in three countries. *Evolutionary Psychology : An International Journal of Evolutionary Approaches to Psychology and Behavior*, 11(1), 172–185.

Jonason, P. K., Luevano, V. X., & Adams, H. M. (2012). How the dark triad traits predict relationship choices. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 53(3), 180–184.

Kelmer, G., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S., & Markman, H. J. (2013). Relationship quality, commitment, and stability in long-distance relationships. *Family Process*, 52(2), 257-270. doi:10.1111/j.1545-5300.2012.01418.x

- Knee, C. R., Patrick, H., Vietor, N. A., & Neighbors, C. (2004). Implicit theories of relationships: Moderators of the link between conflict and commitment. *Personality And Social Psychology Bulletin*, *30*(5), 617-628. doi:10.1177/0146167203262853
- Knee, C. R., Nanayakkara, A., Vietor, N. A., Neighbors, C., & Patrick, H. (2001). Implicit theories of relationships: Who cares if romantic partners are less than ideal? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *27*(7), 808–819.  
doi:10.1177/0146167201277004
- Knee, R. C. (1998). Implicit theories of relationships: Assessment and prediction of romantic relationship initiation, coping and longevity. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, *74*(2), 360–370. 11p. 2 Charts.
- Knee, R. C., Patrick, H., Vietor, N. A., & Neighbors, C. (2004). Implicit theories of relationships: Moderators of the link between conflict and commitment. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, *30*(5), 617–628. doi:10.1177/0146167203262853
- Kobak R., Rosenthal N.L., Zajac K., & Madsen S. (2007). Adolescent attachment hierarchies and the search for an adult pair-bond. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, *117*, 57-72, doi:10.1002/cd.194
- Kogan, A., Impett, E. A., Oveis, C., Hui, B., Gordon, A. M., & Keltner, D. (2010). When giving feels good. The intrinsic benefits of sacrifice in romantic relationships for the communally motivated. *Psychological Science*, *21*(12), 1918–1924.  
doi:10.1177/0956797610388815

- Kroska, A. (2003). Investigating gender differences in the meaning of household chores and child care. *Journal Of Marriage And Family*, 65(2), 456-473.  
doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2003.00456.x
- Lambert, N. M., Clark, M. S., Durtschi, J., Fincham, F. D., & Graham, S. M. (2010). Benefits of expressing gratitude: Expressing gratitude to a partner changes one's view of the relationship. *Psychological Science*, 21(4), 574-580.  
doi:10.1177/0956797610364003
- Le, B., & Agnew, C. R. (2003). Commitment and its theorized determinants: A meta-analysis of the investment model. *Personal Relationships*, 10(1), 37-57.
- Lee, M., Reese-Weber, M., & Kahn, J. H. (2014). Exposure to family violence and attachment styles as predictors of dating violence perpetration among men and women: A mediational model. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29(1), 20-43.  
doi:10.1177/0886260513504644
- Lewins A. & Silver C. (2007). *Using software in qualitative research: A step-by-step guide*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Maes S.D.J., De Mol J., & Buysse A. (2011). Children's experiences and meaning construction on parental divorce: A focus group study. *Childhood*, 19(2), 266-272,  
doi: 10.1177/0907568211421220

- Mahl D. (2001). The influence on parental divorce on the romantic relationship beliefs of young adults. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 34(3-4), 89-118, doi: 10.1300/J087v34n03\_06
- Marvin R.S., & Britner P.A. (2008). Normative development: The ontogeny of attachment. In J. Cassidy, & P.R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research and Clinical Implications* (pp 3-22). NY, USA: Guilford Press.
- Masarik, A. S., Conger, R. D., Martin, M. J., Donnellan, M. B., Masyn, K. E., & Lorenz, F. O. (2013). Romantic relationships in early adulthood: Influences of family, personality, and relationship cognitions. *Personal Relationships*, 20(2), 356–373.
- Mikulincer, M. (2006). Attachment, caregiving and sex in romantic relationships. A behavioral systems perspective. In M. Mikulincer & G. S. Goodman (Eds.), *Dynamics of Romantic Love: Attachment, Caregiving and Sex* (pp. 23–46). New York, NY, USA: The Guilford Press.
- Mikulincer, M. & Shaver P.R. (2012). Adult attachment orientations and relationship processes. *Journal of Family Theory and Review*, 4(4), 259-274, doi: 10.1111/j.1756-2589.2012.00142.x
- Milan, A. (2013). *Marital Status: Overview 2011* (Component.). Canada: Ministry of Industry, Statistics Canada.

- Miles, N. J., & Servaty-Seib, H. L. (2010). Parental marital status and young adult offspring's attitudes about marriage and divorce. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 51(4), 209–220. doi:10.1080/10502551003597865
- Mills, J., Clark, M. S., Ford, T. E., & Johnson, M. (2004). Measurement of communal strength. *Personal Relationships*, 11(2), 213–230. doi:10.1111/j.1475-6811.2004.00079.x
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal Of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 250-260. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250
- Nielsen L. (2011). Divorced fathers and their daughters: A review of recent research. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, 52(2), 77-93, doi:10.1080/10502556.2011.46222
- Owen, J., Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2011). The revised commitment inventory: Psychometrics and use with unmarried couples. *Journal of Family Issues*, 32(6), 820–841. doi:10.1177/0192513X10385788
- Owen, J., Quirk, K., & Manthos, M. (2012). I get no respect: The relationship between betrayal trauma and romantic relationship functioning. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation*, 13(2), 175-189. doi:10.1080/15299732.2012.642760
- Palazzolo, K. E., Roberto, A. J., & Babin, E. A. (2010). The relationship between parents' verbal aggression and young adult children's intimate partner violence victimization

and perpetration. *Health Communication*, 25(4), 357-364.

doi:10.1080/10410231003775180

Peterson, G. W., & Bush, K. R. (2013). Conceptualizing cultural influences on socialization: Comparing parent- adolescent relationships in the U.S. and Mexico. In G. W. Peterson & K. R. Bush (Eds.), *Handbook of marriage and the family* (3rd ed., pp. 177–208). New York: Springer.

Ponterotto G.J. (2005). Qualitative research in counseling psychology: A primer on research paradigms and philosophy of science. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 126-136, doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.126

Rank M.R. & LeCroy C.W. (1983). Toward a multiple perspective in family theory and practice: The case of social exchange theory, symbolic interactionism, and conflict theory. *Family Relations*, 32(3), 441-448, doi:10.2307/584622

Rhoades, G. K., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2010). Should I stay or should I go? Predicting dating relationship stability from four aspects of commitment. *Journal of Family Psychology : JFP : Journal of the Division of Family Psychology of the American Psychological Association (Division 43)*, 24(5), 543–550.  
doi:10.1037/a0021008

Robinson, K. J., & Cameron, J. J. (2012). Self-esteem is a shared relationship resource: Additive effects of dating partners' self-esteem levels predict relationship quality. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 46(2), 227–230.

- Roth, K. E., Harkins, D. A., & Lauren, A. (2014). Parental conflict during divorce as an indicator of adjustment and future relationships: A retrospective sibling study. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 55(2), 117–138.
- Ruppel P.S. & Mey G. (2015). Grounded theory methodology - Narrativity revisited. *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science*, 49(2), 174-186, doi: 10.1007/s12124-015-9301-y
- Rusbult, C. E. (1983). A longitudinal test of the investment model: The development (and deterioration) of satisfaction and commitment in heterosexual involvements. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(1), 101–117. doi :10.10370022-3514.45.1.101
- Sandler I., Wolchik S., Winslow E.B., Mahrer N.E., Moran J.A., & Weinstock D. (2012). Quality of maternal and paternal following separation and divorce. In K. Kuehnle, & L. Drozd (Eds.), *Parenting Plan Evaluations: Applied Research for the Family Court* (pp. 85-122). NY, USA: Oxford University Press.
- Segrin, C., Taylor, M. E., & Altman, J. (2005). Social cognitive mediators and relational outcomes associated with parental divorce. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22(3), 361–377. doi:10.1177/0265407505052441
- Smart C. (2006). Children's narratives of post-divorce family life: From individual experience to an ethical disposition. *The Sociological Review*, 54(1), 155-170, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2006.00606.x

- Sibley, C. G., & Liu, J. H. (2004). Short-term temporal stability and factor structure of the revised experiences in close relationships (ECR-R) measure of adult attachment. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 36, 969-975.
- Sibley, C. G., Fischer, R., & Liu, J. H. (2005). Reliability and validity of the revised experiences in close relationships (ECR-R) self-report measure of adult romantic attachment. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 31(11), 1524–1536.  
doi:10.1177/0146167205276865
- Simon, V. A., & Furman, W. (2010). Interparental conflict and adolescents' romantic relationship conflict. *Journal of Research on Adolescence : The Official Journal of the Society for Research on Adolescence*, 20(1), 188–209.
- Sirvanli-Ozen, D. (2005). Impacts of divorce on the behavior and adjustment problems, parenting styles, and attachment styles of children: Literature review including turkish studies. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 42(3-4), 127–251.
- Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (1992). Assessing commitment in personal relationships. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 54(3), 595–608.  
doi:10.2307/353245
- Stevens, D. P., Kiger, G., & Mannon, S. E. (2005). Domestic labor and marital satisfaction: How much or how satisfied?. *Marriage & Family Review*, 37(4), 49-67.  
doi:10.1300/J002v37n04\_04
- Sullivan H.S. (1953). *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry*. NY, USA: W. W. Norton.

- Tarricone, P. (2014). From a copy theory of mind to a quasi-constructivist theory of mind. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 35*(1), 58–60.
- Tasker, F. L., & Richards, M. P. M. (1994). Adolescents' attitudes toward marriage and marital prospects after parental divorce: A Review. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 9*(3), 340–362. doi:10.1177/074355489493004
- Vernon P.A., Villani V.C., Vickers L.C., & Harris J.A. (2008). A behavioural genetic investigation of the dark triad and the big 5. *Personality and Individual Differences, 44*(2), 445-452, doi:10.1016/j.paid.2007.09.007
- Weigel D.J., Bennett K.K., & Ballard-Reisch D.S. (2003). Family influences on commitment: Examining the family of origin correlates of relationship commitment attitudes. *Personal Relationships, 10*, 453-474, doi:1350-4126/02
- Weigel D.J. (2007). Parental divorce and the types of commitment-related messages people gain from their families of origin. *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 47*(1-2), 15-32, doi: 10.1300/J087v47n01\_02
- Weigert A. J. & Gecas V. (2003). Self. In L.T. Reynolds, & N.J. Herman-Kinney (Eds.), *Handbook of Symbolic Interactionism* (pp.167-188). Oxford, UK: Altamira Press.
- Weimer, A. A., Sallquist, J., & Bolnick, R. R. (2012). Young children's emotion comprehension and theory of mind understanding. *Early Education and Development, 23*(3), 280–301.

- Whitton, S., Stanley, S., & Markman, H. J. (2002). Sacrifice in romantic relationships: An exploration of relevant research and theory. In A. Vangelisti, H. Reis, & M. A. Fitzpatrick (Eds.), *Stability and Change in Relationships* (pp. 156–181). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Whitton, S. W., Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (2007). If I help my partner, will it hurt me? Perceptions of sacrifice in romantic relationships. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 26*(1), 64–91. doi:10.1521/jscp.2007.26.1.64
- Williams E.N. & Morrow S.L. (2009). Achieving trustworthiness in qualitative research: A pan-paradigmatic perspective. *Psychotherapy Research, 19*(4-5), 576-582, doi: 10.1080/10503300802702113
- Wolfinger, N. H. (2000). Beyond the intergenerational transmission of divorce: Do people replicate the patterns of marital instability they grew up with? *Journal of Family Issues, 21*(8), 1061–1086. doi:10.1177/019251300021008006
- Wolfinger, N. H. (2003). Parental divorce and offspring marriage: Early or late? *Social Forces, 82*(1), 337–353. doi:10.1353/sof.2003.0108
- Yu, T., & Adler-Baeder, F. (2007). The intergenerational transmission of relationship quality: The effects of parental remarriage quality on young adults' relationships. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage, 47*(3-4), 87–102. doi:10.1300/J087v47n03\_05

## Appendix A

### Semi-structured Interview Questions:

*Introductory script:* I am interested in learning about how young adults remember and describe romantic relationships in their environment. Please try not to include identifying information about your parents, siblings or the other couple, such as names or occupations, unless it is relevant to the discussion.

Don't hesitate to use short stories and anecdotes so that I can understand your perspective better. I want you to remember that there is no right or wrong answer; I am just interested in how you remember things and how you feel about them. Your perspective, your feelings and experience are what matters.

### *Questions concerning the parental couple and its influence:*

1. Please describe your parents' relationship with each other when you were growing up, for example, think about when you were approximately 9 or 10 years of age.
  - a. For us to picture your parents' relationship it in a nutshell, can you think of a few descriptors or adjectives?
2. Can you think of an image, or event, or story that comes to mind when thinking about your parents' relationship with each other? Please describe what comes to mind.
3. How much effort did your parents appear to direct into making their relationship work?

- a. Is there a particular event, which made a strong impression on you concerning the energy or effort they put into their relationship?
  - b. How much do you feel they were aware of each other's needs or goals? How far were they willing to go to meet the need of their partner?
  - c. What was it like at the time when your parents were separating?
4. How do you feel and think about your parents' approach to romantic relationships?
- a. How did you get to feeling and thinking about your parents' way of being in a relationship (in the way that you just described)?
  - b. Did you feel their separation influenced your conclusions?
5. Has your parents' relationship influenced your approach and/or behaviours in close, romantic relationships?

*Progressing to a more theoretically grounded questionnaire for the parents' couple:*

6. You said their couple relationship did [*or did not, depending on what they said*] influence you in your own romantic relationships. Why is that so, do you think?
7. If yes (even a little) has your parents' relationship influenced:
- a. All of your relationships or one in particular?
  - b. How do you feel your parents' relationship is influencing you right now?
8. How much effort do you feel is appropriate in close relationships?
- a. Can you give me an example of "too much" effort?
9. For how long do you think it is appropriate to continue putting effort into a relationship?

10. Do you feel you have learned from your parents' experience concerning this particular aspect of romantic relationships?

*Investigating the second couple:*

1. Having had this in-depth conversation about your parents' romantic relationship, is there another couple you feel is important to you as role model or as a counter-example when you think about how romantic relationships should work?
  - a. How important do you feel that your observations of this couple relationship are in how you see close relationships?

Online Questionnaires:

*Additional Information Questionnaire*

1. Indicate gender: M                      F                      Other:
2. What is your age?
3. Are you currently in a relationship?
  - a. Not dating
  - b. Dating one person
  - c. Dating more than one person
  - d. Engaged or married
  - e. Other:
4. How many previous serious romantic relationships did you have? Casual dating experiences?

5. Are you interested in (check all that is applicable)?
  - a. Heterosexual relationships
  - b. Homosexual relationships
  - c. Serious relationships
  - d. Casual dating
  - e. Open relationships
  - f. One night stands
  - g. Multiple partners
6. Were your parents married? cohabitating? DK?
  - i. How old were you when they separated?
  - ii. Did they remarry? When? How many times?
6. How many brothers and sisters do you have? Describe: (full, half, step)
7. Are you Canadian? Y/N, if no specify:
8. Do you identify with a particular cultural group and/or religion? If yes, which one(s): \_\_\_\_\_
9. What year are you in at the Uni. of Victoria?
10. While growing up, which following social class would you say you belonged to?  
Working class/lower middle class/upper middle class/upper class
  - a. Would you say it changed during your childhood? When? Please specify
11. Do you feel that your experience in romantic relationships is close to what you think is appropriate for romantic relationship in general as reported in the previous questionnaires?

*The Experiences in Close Relationship-Revised scale*

The statements below concern how you feel in emotionally intimate relationships. We are interested in how you *generally* experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by circling a number to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement. 1 indicates that you strongly agree and 7 that you strongly disagree.

1. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love.
2. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me.
3. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me.
4. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.
5. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her.
6. I worry a lot about my relationships.
7. When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else.
8. When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me.
9. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.
10. My romantic partner makes me doubt myself.
11. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
12. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
13. Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason.

14. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
15. I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am.
16. It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner.
17. I worry that I won't measure up to other people.
18. My partner only seems to notice me when I'm angry.
19. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down.
20. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.
21. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners.
22. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.
23. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners.
24. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners.
25. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close.
26. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.
27. It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.
28. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
29. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
30. I tell my partner just about everything.
31. I talk things over with my partner.
32. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
33. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.
34. I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.
35. It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.

36. My partner really understands me and my needs.

*Dedication Subscale and Communal Strength Scale (self-report)*

*Script - Introduction to the questionnaires for the participants:* If you were involved in a satisfying romantic relationship for 3 months or longer, what would **YOU** feel is appropriate? Please apply this instruction to the following two questionnaires.

*Dedication Subscale of the Revised Commitment Inventory*

Please rate the following items from 0 to 7, with 1 = **strongly disagree**, 4 = **neither agree nor disagree**, 7 = **strongly agree**

1. My relationship to my partner *would* be more important to me than almost anything in my life.
2. I *would* want this relationship to stay strong no matter what rough time we encounter.
3. I *would* like to think of my partner and me more in terms of “us” and “we” than “me” and “him/her”.
4. I *would* think a lot about what it would be like to be married to (or dating) someone else than my partner.
5. My relationship with my partner *would* clearly *be* part of my future life plans.
6. My career (or job, studies, homemaking, childrearing, etc.) *would be* more important to me than my relationship with my partner.
7. I *would* not want to have a strong identity as a couple with my partner.
8. I may not want to be with the same partner in a few years.

*Communal Strength Scale*

Keeping in mind the specific person, answer the following questions. Rate each question on the scale from 0 = **not at all** to 10 = **extremely** before going on to the next question. Your answers will remain confidential.

1. How far would you be willing to go to visit *your partner*?
2. How happy *would* you feel when doing something that helps *your partner*?
3. How large a benefit would you be likely to give *your partner*?
4. How large a cost would you incur to meet a need of *your partner*?
5. How readily *would* you put the needs of *your partner* out of your thoughts?
6. How high a priority for you *would* be meeting the needs of *your partner*?
7. How reluctant would you be to sacrifice for *your partner*?
8. How much would you be willing to give up to benefit *your partner*?
9. How far would you go out of your way to do something for *your partner*?
10. How easily could you accept not helping *your partner*?

Reflecting back on what you remember of when you were a child (around 10 years-old), how do you think your father would have answered the following questions? Rate each question on the scale from 0 = **not at all** to 10 = **extremely** before going on to the next question. Your answers will remain confidential.

1. How far would you be willing to go to visit *your partner*?

2. How happy *would* you feel when doing something that helps *your partner*?
3. How large a benefit would you be likely to give *your partner*?
4. How large a cost would you incur to meet a need of *your partner*?
5. How readily *would* you put the needs of *your partner* out of your thoughts?
6. How high a priority for you *would* be meeting the needs of *your partner*?
7. How reluctant would you be to sacrifice for *your partner*?
8. How much would you be willing to give up to benefit *your partner*?
9. How far would you go out of your way to do something for *your partner*?
10. How easily could you accept not helping *your partner*?

Reflecting back on what you remember of when you were a child (around 10 years-old), how do you think your mother would have answered the following questions? Rate each question on the scale from 0 = **not at all** to 10 = **extremely** before going on to the next question. Your answers will remain confidential.

1. How far would you be willing to go to visit *your partner*?
2. How happy *would* you feel when doing something that helps *your partner*?
3. How large a benefit would you be likely to give *your partner*?
4. How large a cost would you incur to meet a need of *your partner*?
5. How readily *would* you put the needs of *your partner* out of your thoughts?
6. How high a priority for you *would* be meeting the needs of *your partner*?
7. How reluctant would you be to sacrifice for *your partner*?
8. How much would you be willing to give up to benefit *your partner*?

9. How far would you go out of your way to do something for *your partner*?

10. How easily could you accept not helping *your partner*?

## Appendix B

For the web-survey part of the study

### Letter of Information for Implied Consent

---

#### Young adult's views of their parents' and other romantic relationships

You are invited to participate in a study, entitled *Young adult's views of their parents' and other romantic relationships* that is being conducted by Fanie Collardeau and Dr. Marion F. Ehrenberg.

Fanie Collardeau is a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions, by email or phone.

This research study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Marion Ehrenberg.

You may also contact her by email: or phone: .

#### **Purpose and Objectives:**

The purpose of this research project is to investigate how young adults think about their parents' romantic relationships, what is meaningful to them and what are their conclusions on what made their parents' romantic relationship thrive or end. Young adults will also be asked to reflect on their current adjustment and experiences. We are hoping to understand better how children conceptualize their parents' romantic relationship before divorce and what stands out for them in their parents' interactions.

**Importance of this Research:**

This research will help us to understand what children notice of their parents' relationship as a couple, particular as they grow older and are able to reflect on their parents' choices and actions. Most of the research in the field has focused on conflicts or marital communication skills but has not addressed how young adults generally conceptualize their parents' interactions with each other. Thus, this study will help gain insight into what is important to them in defining this relationship and how they come to form this definition. This research will have implications for programs for children experiencing parental divorce. It will be enriched by asking young adults to reflect on another couple relationship present in their environment, which will provide more diversity and insight into what young adults retain about and how they define others' romantic relationships.

**What is Involved:**

Participants in this study were selected based on their current age (18 to 25). They should speak English fluently and have been born in Canada. Participants should have experienced their parents' divorce or separation between their 11<sup>th</sup> and their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Participants should not have children of their own, and their parents should still be alive. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include filling out an online questionnaire prior to the interview session and answering a number of open-ended interview questions. Questions will refer to demographics, family transitions you may have experienced, and your current adjustment. The interview will

be audio-taped and the interviewer will also be taking notes. In total, the study should take you no more than 2 hours.

**Risks:**

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research. You may find the time commitment for participation in the study (approximately 2 hours) inconvenient. Participation for this length of time may cause boredom or fatigue. There is also a small risk of experiencing negative emotions or embarrassment. You will be asked somewhat personal questions regarding your parents' romantic relationship, another couple in your environment and your current adjustment. This could potentially be emotionally triggering for some participants. Participants should feel comfortable talking about their parents' relationship and their own relationship(s) and have emotional support in place. To minimize this risk you will be debriefed after completing the study and information about counselling services will be made available. All data will remain confidential and anonymous.

*Please note:* Although unlikely, under Section 13 of the Child, Family, and Community Services Act of BC, the researcher has a duty to report any potential harm to a minor under the age of 19 and any indication that the participant may be at risk. Under these rare circumstances, interview data would no longer be confidential. All necessary actions will respectfully include the research participant and facilitate support services.

**Benefits:**

You may find it therapeutic to speak with an impartial third-party about your experiences in your family of origin and to have your opinions and insights listened to and recorded.

You may also find it interesting to learn about the research, and may use some of its findings to gain insight into how you perceive your family of origin. The study may lend insight into how young adults form perceptions on their parents' couple relationship and what is important to them in defining those relationships. This knowledge will have implications for understanding how witnessing their parents' couple relationship can influence children later on in their adult life.

**Compensation and Withdrawal:**

Participants signing up through the Psychology 100 Research Pool will be awarded bonus points for undergraduate psychology courses (up to 3 credits). 0.5 points are awarded per 15 minutes in the Research Pool system and those points are then converted into course credits by your course instructor. Participants outside of the Psychology 100 class will be entered for a draw to win one 15\$ Starbucks' card, after the interview session.

Participants from the Psychology 100 pool will be given the choice to be entered for the draw, rather than get participation points. You will receive full compensation (full credits or being entered for the draw) even if you are unable to complete the study.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any point during participation and up to 48 hours following completion of the study without any consequences or any explanation. If you

do withdraw from the study your data will not be used and will be destroyed, and you will receive full compensation.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality:**

In order to protecting your anonymity, all data (interview notes, audiotapes) will be separated from consent forms 48 hours after you have completed the study, and electronic questionnaires will be anonymized. If you wish to withdraw your data from the study, you must contact Fanie Collardeau within 48 hours. After 48 hours have passed, your interview responses will no longer be retrievable.

All data will be stored without identifying information in a locked filing cabinet in the Families in Motion Research and Information Group Lab, accessible only to the research team. Your answers and interviews will only be accessed by the research team, including the principal investigator, her supervisor and the research assistants. Any electronic transcripts and databases will be stored on a password-protected computer. Questions regarding identifying information will be limited to demographic information, such as age and gender, and your name will not be attached to your data in any way. Furthermore, during the transcription of the interviews for analysis, any identifying information will be anonymized (names of family members, cities, etc.). The audiotapes will be magnetically erased after the interviews have been transcribed.

*Please be advised that this research study uses an on-line program located in the U.S. As such, there is a possibility that information about you may be accessed without your knowledge or consent by the U.S. government in compliance with the U.S. Patriot Act.*

*Please note:* The researcher has a duty to report any potential harm to a minor under the age of 19 and any indication that the participant may be at risk. Should this occur, participants will be identified and the circumstances, reported.

**Dissemination of Results:**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the form of scholarly presentations and publications. There will be no way to identify participants. A participant might be directly quoted but it will not endanger the participant's anonymity because 1) all identifying information will have been removed and 2) all identifying information will have been removed (one or two sentences maximum). A summary of the results will be posted on the FMRI website (<http://web.uvic.ca/psyc/fmrig/>) by September 2015.

**Disposal of Data:**

The American Psychological Association stipulates that data must be stored for seven years after publication. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and in files on a password-protected computer in a locked research lab. After seven years, the hard copy questionnaires and interview notes will be shredded, and the computer files will be deleted.

**Contacts:** Fanie Collardeau

Dr. Marion Ehrenberg

Phone:

Phone:

Email:

Email:

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

By completing and submitting the questionnaire, **YOUR FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT IS IMPLIED** and indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

For the interview part of the study

### **Participant Consent Form**

---

**Young adult's views of their parents' and other romantic relationships**

You are invited to participate in a study, entitled *Young adult's views of their parents' and other romantic relationships* that is being conducted by Fanie Collardeau and Dr. Marion F. Ehrenberg.

Fanie Collardeau is a graduate student in the Department of Psychology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions, by email: or phone:.

This research study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Marion Ehrenberg.

You may also contact her by email or phone.

**Purpose and Objectives:**

The purpose of this research project is to investigate how young adults think about their parents' romantic relationships, what is meaningful to them and what are their conclusions on what made their parents' romantic relationship thrive or end. Young adults will also be asked to reflect on their current adjustment and experiences. We are hoping to understand better how children conceptualize their parents' romantic relationship before divorce and what stands out for them in their parents' interactions.

**Importance of this Research:**

This research will help us to understand what children notice of their parents' relationship as a couple, particular as they grow older and are able to reflect on their parents' choices and actions. Most of the research in the field has focused on conflicts or marital communication skills but has not addressed how young adults generally conceptualize their parents' interactions with each other. Thus, this study will help gain

insight into what is important to them in defining this relationship and how they come to form this definition. This research will have implications for programs for children experiencing parental divorce. It will be enriched by asking young adults to reflect on another couple relationship present in their environment, which will provide more diversity and insight into what young adults retain about and how they define others' romantic relationships.

**What is Involved:**

Participants in this study were selected based on their current age (18 to 25). They should speak English fluently and have been born in Canada. Participants should have experienced their parents' divorce or separation between their 11<sup>th</sup> and their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Participants should not have children of their own, and their parents should still be alive. If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include filling out an online questionnaire prior to the interview session and answer a number of open-ended interview questions. Questions will refer to demographics, family transitions you may have experienced, and your current adjustment. The interview will be audio-taped and the interviewer will also be taking notes. In total, the study should take you no more than 2 hours.

**Risks:**

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research. You may find the time commitment for participation in the study (approximately 2 hours) inconvenient. Participation for this length of time may cause boredom or fatigue. There is also a small

risk of experiencing negative emotions or embarrassment. You will be asked somewhat personal questions regarding your parents' romantic relationship, another couple in your environment and your current adjustment. This could potentially be emotionally triggering for some participants. Participants should feel comfortable talking about their parents' relationship and their own relationship(s) and have emotional support in place. To minimize this risk you will be debriefed after completing the study and information about counselling services will be made available. All data will remain confidential and anonymous.

*Please note:* Although unlikely, under Section 13 of the Child, Family, and Community Services Act of BC, the researcher has a duty to report any potential harm to a minor under the age of 19 and any indication that the participant may be at risk. Under these rare circumstances, interview data would no longer be confidential. All necessary actions will respectfully include the research participant and facilitate support services.

**Benefits:**

You may find it therapeutic to speak with an impartial third-party about your experiences in your family of origin and to have your opinions and insights listened to and recorded. You may also find it interesting to learn about the research, and may use some of its findings to gain insight into how you perceive your family of origin. The study may lend insight into how young adults form perceptions on their parents' couple relationship and what is important to them in defining those relationships. This knowledge will have

implications for understanding how witnessing their parents' couple relationship can influence children later on in their adult life.

**Compensation and Withdrawal:**

Participants signing up through the Psychology 100 Research Pool will be awarded bonus points for undergraduate psychology courses (up to 3 credits). 0.5 points are awarded per 15 minutes in the Research Pool system and those points are then converted into course credits by your course instructor. Participants outside of the Psychology 100 class will be entered for a draw to win one 15\$ Starbucks' card, after the interview session.

Participants from the Psychology 100 pool will be given the choice to be entered for the draw, rather than get participation points. You will receive full compensation (full credits or being entered for the draw) even if you are unable to complete the study.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any point during participation and up to 48 hours following completion of the study without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will not be used and will be destroyed, and you will receive full compensation.

**Anonymity and Confidentiality:**

In order to protecting your anonymity, all data (interview notes, audiotapes) will be separated from consent forms 48 hours after you have completed the study, and electronic questionnaires will be anonymized. If you wish to withdraw your data from the study,

you must contact Fanie Collardeau within 48 hours. After 48 hours have passed, your interview responses will no longer be retrievable.

All data will be stored without identifying information in a locked filing cabinet in the Families in Motion Research and Information Group Lab, accessible only to the research team. Your answers and interview will be only accessed by the research team, including the principal investigator, her supervisor and the research assistants. Any electronic transcripts and databases will be stored on a password-protected computer. Questions regarding identifying information will be limited to demographic information, such as age and gender, and your name will not be attached to your data in any way. Furthermore, during the transcription of the interviews for analysis, any identifying information will be anonymized (names of family members, cities, etc.). The audiotapes will be magnetically erased after the interviews have been transcribed.

*Please be advised that this research study uses an on-line program located in the U.S. As such, there is a possibility that information about you may be accessed without your knowledge or consent by the U.S. government in compliance with the U.S. Patriot Act.*

*Please note:* The researcher has a duty to report any potential harm to a minor under the age of 19 and any indication that the participant may be at risk. Should this occur, participants will be identified and the circumstances, reported.

**Dissemination of Results:**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the form of scholarly presentations and publications. There will be no way to identify participants. A participant might be directly quoted but it will not endanger the participant's anonymity because 1) all identifying information will have been removed and 2) all identifying information will have been removed (one or two sentences maximum). A summary of the results will be posted on the fMRIG website (<http://web.uvic.ca/psyc/fmrig/>) by September 2015.

**Disposal of Data:**

The American Psychological Association stipulates that data must be stored for seven years after publication. All data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and in files on a password-protected computer in a locked research lab. After seven years, the hard copy questionnaires and interview notes will be shredded, and the computer files will be deleted.

**Contacts:** Fanie Collardeau

Dr. Marion Ehrenberg

Phone:

Phone:

Email:

Email:

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

---

*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken***

Debriefing Script/Statement:

First, thank you so much again for participating in our study. It was a pleasure to talk with you. I would like to tell you more about the purpose of this study. The goal of this study was to look at whether and, if yes, how young adults' perceptions of their parents' relationship with each other influence their perceptions of what is appropriate in their own romantic relationships. This is especially important since research about parental divorce has identified an "intergenerational transmission of divorce", meaning that individuals from divorced families are much more likely than individuals from intact families to experience divorce themselves as they go on to form their own romantic relationships. We thought part of the answer might lie in what children retain from

witnessing their parents' romantic relationship: what do they think made their parents' romantic relationship succeed or fail? What are the expectations they attribute to both parents in the context of the latter's romantic relationship, especially around notions such as commitment or the amount of effort that should be invested in a romantic relationship? The parents' romantic relationship is the first romantic relationship the child witnesses on a daily basis and we hypothesized it could influence what are young adults' expectations as they enter their own romantic relationships. Furthermore, young adults are exposed to other romantic relationships, and in that context we wanted to know which romantic relationship would they find influential.

All the information we collected today will be kept confidential. In order to protect your anonymity, all data (interview notes, audiotapes) will be separated from consent forms 48 hours after you have completed the study. Your online questionnaire will also be anonymized. If you wish to withdraw your data from the study, you must contact me within 48 hours. After 48 hours have passed, your interview responses will no longer be retrievable. All data will be stored without identifying information in a locked filing cabinet in the Families in Motion Research and Information Group Lab, accessible only to the research team. Any electronic databases will be stored on a password-protected computer. The American Psychological Association stipulates that data must be stored for seven years after publication, after which time it will be destroyed.

If you feel embarrassed or want to talk more about the emotional reactions that came up for you during the interview, you can contact Dr. Marion Ehrenberg. She is a licensed

psychologist and my supervisor and she will be happy to refer you to an appropriate service, or you may wish to contact counselling services on campus. Don't hesitate to contact them or us if anything comes up for you even a few days from now.

*(If the participant seems to be experiencing very strong emotions:* This interview seems to have brought up a lot of emotions for you. It is perfectly understandable, as you have just remembered what it was like for you when you were growing up/in your romantic relationship (as applicable). I would like to offer you to come with me to see my supervisor who is also a licensed clinical psychologist or to come with me to the Counselling services, if you agree. They will be able to provide you with more opportunities to discuss your feeling should you wish to do so.)

*(If the participant has disclosed a risk of harm to a minor:* I have a duty to report any potential harm to a minor under the age of 19. I will therefore contact my supervisor and we will take the necessary steps to inform the Ministry of Children and Family Development in the next 48 hours. I would like for both of us to see her now and discuss the matter with her.)

Your participation was greatly appreciated. If you are interested in this area of research please visit the lab's webpage or see our publications. A summary of the results will be posted onto the lab's page around September 2015. Do you have any questions regarding the study? If you have any further questions or concerns please contact me.