THESIS

PARENTAL CONFLICT AND YOUNG ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: THE

ROLE OF SIBLING RELATIONSHIP QUALITY

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

PARENTAL CONFLICT AND YOUNG ADULT ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS: THE

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Romantic relationship development and maintenance contributes to the overall well-being and psychological health of partners. Decades of research has indicated that parental divorce is negatively associated with psychological adjustment and romantic relationship outcomes later in development. More current research, however, claims that divorce alone does not account for the variability in these outcomes, and that multiple subsytems within the family unit are likely influential. The proposed study aims to examine one family subsystem, sibling relationships, on the association between young adult romantic relationship outcomes and parental conflict and divorce. Three hundred and thirty two young adults provided responses to questions about their parent relationship quality, sibling relationship quality, and four romantic relationship outcomes (attitudes, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, relationship confidence). A linear regression and a moderation test were conducted to examine the associations between sibling relationship quality, parental conflict, and the outlined romantic relationship outcomes. Results revealed support for the powerful association that siblings play in young adults romantic relationship formation and satisfaction. Implications are offered for future studies in this important line of wor

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INTRODUCTION

Systems and Romantic Relationships

The development of romantic relationships often begins in mid to late adolescence, with 36% of 13-year olds, 53% of 15-year olds, and 70% of 17-year olds reporting involvement in a romantic relationship (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). The ability to build and maintain romantic relationships in young adulthood is associated with fewer mental health problems, a smaller likelihood of obesity, and greater psychological adjustment (Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010; Connolly &McIsaac, 2011; Grover & Nangle, 2007). Failure to form healthy romantic relationships is associated with emotional, social, and physical distress (Collins &Sroufe, 1999; Collins, 2003). Overall, it seems that belonging to a romantic relationship is associated with positive psychological adjustment (Kamp-Dush & Amato, 2005).

Beyond simply forming a romantic relationship, the quality of these relationships is critical for individual well-being (Furman, Low, & Ho ,2009; Grover & Nangle 2007). Young adults who perceive their relationship quality as high tend to have more positive perceptions of personal well-being, greater self-esteem, and more positive relationship behaviors than those who perceive their relationship quality as low (Cui & Fincham, 2010). Low levels of satisfaction in romantic relationships is associated with more depressive behaviors, anxiety, and academic difficulties than those who report high levels of romantic relationship satisfaction (Davila, Stroud, Miller, & Steinberg, 2007; La Greca & Harrison, 2005)., given the significant association between romantic relationship outcomes and young adult well-being and adjustment, further exploration of this relationship is critical. Importantly, there are a multitude of factors that might influence the formation and success of romantic relationships. Some of these variables are interpersonal, such as the ability of a couple to manage conflict or the level of commitment between partners (Impett,

Beals, & Peplau, 2002; Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, & Mutso, 2010; Reese-Weber & Bertle-Haring, 1998, Sanders, Halford, & Behrens, 1999), while other variables are intrapersonal, such as the views one holds about divorce and marriage or one's adult attachment style (Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Compelling arguments have been made for the influential role of early systemic experiences on later development, particularly the parent-child and parent-parent dyads. (Van Dulmen, Goncy, Haydon, & Collins, 2008). In the scope of this paper, we focus on the influence of (a) degree of interparental conflict, (b) parental divorce as a control variable, and (c) sibling relationship quality on young adult romantic relationships. We find it pertinent to examine systemic factors surrounding romantic relationship development and maintenance in young adulthood because doing so is a salient developmental task at this stage (Furman & Wehner, 1997). and because these relationships tend to be characterized as more serious and commited than adolescent relationships (Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, & Tellegen, 2004) and thus, provide a better context to examine important romantic relationship outcomes.

Historically, research has suggested that children of parental divorce experience adverse short term and long-term outcomes across a variety of intrapersonal and interpersonal domains (Amato, 2000; Amato, 2001). Parental divorce has been associated with the developmental trajectory of children in terms of academic achievement, psychological adjustment, well-being, lifestyle choices, behaviors, and beliefs (Soria & Linder, 2014; Amato, 2003; Short, 2002; Thuen, Breivik, Wold, & Ulveseter, 2015; Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000). Relationally, adult children of divorce tend to experience greater marital discord, marital dissatisfaction, and marital dissolution than their peers (Wolfinger, 2005; Amato, 2003). Additionally, children of

divorce are two to three times more likely to experience divorce in their own marriages than those from intact families (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

Contemporary research, however, has identified considerable variability in individual outcomes for those who experienced parental divorce (Boyer-Pennington, Pennington, & Spinks, 2001; Amato, 2010; Fowers, Lyons, Montel, & Shaked, 2001). Inconsistencies in the association between parental divorce and adult child outcomes are likely due to examination of more nuanced variables, such as the age of children at time of the divorce, sex and race of children, and adjustment prior to divorce (Booth & Amato, 1994; Orbuch, Thornton, & Cancio, 2000; Malone et al., 2004; Lansford et al., 2006; Lansford, 2009). For example, researchers assert that the diversity in adult child outcomes associated with parental divorce can be attributed to the variability within the parental relationship itself, specifically the level of interparental conflict prior to and during the divorce (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). Surprisingly, Amato and DeBoer (2001) discovered that children of divorce whose parents reported high levels of conflict, experienced improvement in well-being following parental divorce. This may be due to the ceasation of living with two parents who often expose the children to fighting, as the parents now live apart. If parents who reported high levels of interparental conflict stayed together, however, adult children showed significantly higher rates of romantic relationship dissolution (Gager, Yabiku, & Linver, 2016). Thus, the degree of interparental conflict appears to play a significant role in the association between parental divorce and romantic relationship quality. As divorce and interparental conflict are often correlated, this study aims to examine the unique influence of interparental conflict, by itself, on romantic relationship outcomes.Furthermore, while the examination of parental quality on child outcomes is indicative of an increased attunement to the influences of the family system, sibling relationships and the effect of these relationships on later

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romantic relationship development remains somewhat neglected in the literature. As such, this study aims to examine the unique variance in outcomes that can be contributed to parental conflict and sibling relationships, while controlling for divorce.

Family Systems Theory posits that multiple subsystems within a family influence a child's development and adjustment (Demby, Riggs, & Kaminski, 2015). A large body of research supports the influence of sibling relationships in areas ranging from friendship to academic engagement and risky behavior (Slomkowski et al., 2009; Stocker, 2000). Less work has examined the association between sibling relationships and romantic relationship outcomes. Given the longevity of most sibling relationships and the degree of intimacy and support that tend to characterize these relationships, sibling relationships offer unique contexts for the development of skills and perceptions that might contribute to the development and maintainence of romantic relationships (Noller, 2005). In accordance with the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), siblings provide a platform to learn a great deal about behaving and being, and in some ways, a context to rehearse positions that they might take on in adulthood (Young, 2007). In other words, siblings, like parents, may serve as a template from which children observe and form ideas about how interpersonal behaviors are performed. Indeed, sibling relationships have been shown to contribute to the development of conflict resolution skills, power negotiation abilities, social skills, nurturing behaviors, and intimacy (McHale, Updegraff, & Whiteman, 2012; Bedford, Volling, & Avioli, 2000; Lewis, 2005) that might further contribute to the capactty to form and maintain secure relationships in adulthood (Lewis, 2005). Although the literature has strongly established the associations between parental divorce/conflict and adult romantic relationship outcomes, the possible moderating effect of sibling relationships has not yet been examined. While children might be observing poor resolution skills and overt conflict between their parents, siblings provide

a *different* context to learn and practice skills that might differ from those witnessed between their parents. Access to a strong sibling bond in which effective and beneficial conflict resolution and negotiation skills were developed and practiced might change the impact of parental conflict on their belief that they can navigate conflict and their skills to do so and thus, their ability to build and maintain high quality romantic relationships.

From a different angle, social support is one positive aspect of many sibling relationships, wherein siblings may provide or receive support during stressful normative transitions or parental discord (Jacobs & Sillars, 2012). Consistent with Social Support Theory (Albrecht & Adleman, 1987), close and positive relationships allow for receiving advice, affirmation, and affection , all of which may buffer some effects of negative life experiences on individual well-being (Scholte, van Lieshout, & van Aken, 2001). Interviews with adult children of divorce highlighted sibling companionship as a key form of support, both in the opportunity to talk with their siblings about the divorce and by the simple presence of their siblings and the knowledge that this experience was shared (Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003). In some instances, siblings provided even more extensive and direct compensatory support in situations where parental support was unavailable which contributed to ability of children to accept the familial breakup (Jacobs & Sillars, 2012). Taken together, it seems that presence of a sibling during formative years may be impactful for later development and maintenance of important relationships, including romantic relationships, and may act as a buffer to adverse experiences, such as parental divorce or parental conflict. This study fills a unique gap in the literature by examining the moderating effect of sibling relationship quality on the association between parental conflict and romantic relationship outcomes in early adulthood.

Attitudes

One way that parents and siblings may influence young adult romantic relationships is through attitudes formed about romantic relationships. Interparental conflict is negatively associated with adult children's marital expectations, attitudes, and outcomes (Amato, 1996; Kapinus, 2005). Interestingly, Kapinus (2005) discovered that young adults who reported high levels of interparental conflict but whose parents remained married over the course of the study, held more positive views towards divorce and weaker views towards marriage. Importantly, and perhaps intuitively, people with more positive attitudes towards divorce are more likely to think about divorce and to get divorced (Stanley & Markman, 1992; Amato, 1996; Amato & DeBoer, 2001). These beliefs appear to be crucial in premarital unions as well, as young adults may decide to end an unsatisfying relationship rather than work to improve the relationship, perhaps, in part, based on observations of their parents' behaviors (Kapinus, 2005; Cui, Fincham, & Pasley, 2008). Given the correlational nature of these studies, it is important to note the reciprocal relationship between these variables, such that though parental relationship quality may influence child attitudes towards divorce and marriage, children's attitudes towards marriage and divorce might also frame the way they view their parents' relationship, retrospectively. However, given the consistent and significant support of the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977;1986), we believe that children learn how they should feel about relationships and form attitudes about relationships from their parents, and potentially from their siblings.

Siblings have the potential to change the way one views marriage and divorce through closeness and connectedness. Although modern societites are often characterized by decreases in

marriage rates and a significant increase in divorce rates, young adults still tend to hold positive

attitudes towards marriage and aim to nurture a marital union themselves (Ercegovac & Bubic,

2016). Researchers discovered individual differences in relation to initial expectations of the

quality of one's marriage and the possibility of one's own divorce, and that these individual

differences were explained, in part, by one's satisfaction with his or her primary family relations,

including siblings (Reic Ercegovav & Bubic, 2017). Those who were closer to their siblings and

had more satisfying sibling relationships, tended to have more positive views towards marriage

and more negative views towards divorce. Our study aims to further explore the relationship

between sibling quality and these attitudes.

Commitment

Relationship commitment is defined as the desire and intent of an individual to maintain a

relationship long term (Stanley & Markman, 1992), and is one of the strongest predictors of

romantic relationship dissolution (Impett, Beals, & Peplau, 2002; Le, Dove, Agnew, Korn, &

Mutso, 2010). Parental conflict is negatively associated with the degree of commitment held by

young adults within their own adult romantic relationships (Amato & DeBoer, 2001).

Interestingly, children who reported a low degree of conflict between their parents prior to the

divorce, were more likely to experience divorce themselves. Amato (2001) attributes this

association to the "good enough" hypothesis: the dissolution of a parents' marriage that a child

perceived as "good enough" undermines the importance of commitment to marriage. Stated

otherwise, if the perception is that one's parents had a pretty good marriage but still got divorced,

perhaps the belief becomes that divorce is inconsequential. Even more, in a large sample of

emerging adults, parental conflict *in the absence of divorce* was associated with less commitment

in current romantic relationships. However, parental conflict was not related to outcomes when

divorce occurred (Braithwrite, Doxey, Dowdle, & Fincham, 2016). Thus, interparental conflict appears to play a unique influence on commitment apart from divorce and will be explored in the current study.

Low levels of romantic relationship commitment are also related to low levels of satisfaction within the relationship (Braithwrite et al., 2016), which, in turn, is related to relationship dissolution (Impett, Beals, & Peplau, 2001; Amato, 1996). Another way in which commitment is influential to romantic relationship outcomes is by way of attitudes one holds about commitment. Amato and Rogers (1999) discovered that adults who disagree with the notion that marriage is a lifelong, permanent commitment tend to show lower commitment in their romantic relationships. Importantly, this association is apparent in romantic relationships even prior to marriage, such that young adults who experienced parental divorce reported lower levels of commitment in their premarital romantic relationships than those from intact families (Cui & Fincham, 2010). Again, it is important to note that though the relationship between these variables is bidirectional in nature, we believe that children are developmentally shaped by their experiences and that consequently, the ability to commit to romantic relationships and to feel satisfied in that commitment is based, at least in part, by the observations of their parents and siblings.

In childhood and adolescence, siblings often demonstrate commitment to one another through companionship, emotional support, nurturant behaviors, and instrumental support (Myers & Bryant, 2008). Based on the Social Learning Theory and Social Support Theory (Bandura, 1977; Albrecht & Adleman, 1987), it is reasonable to suspect that the demonstration of relational commitment to siblings during formative years might influence adult romantic relationship commitment later in life. For example, learning how to demonstrate commitment

and developing the capacity to feel commitment, would allow for the provision of the same mechanisms and feelings in romantic relatiosnhips. Relational partners experience commitment on cognitive, affective, and behavioral levels. Cognitively, when commitment is established, relational partners develop a long term orientation towards the relationship (Givertz & Segrin, 2005) a development that might be influenced by the formative long-term orientation of sibling relationships. Further, when commitment occurs on an affective level, relational partners report feelings of relational satisfaction, such as liking, loving, trust, and relational closeness (Givertz & Segrin, 2005), characteristics that reflect commitment in sibling relationships. Lastly, behaviors that romantic partners demonstrate to signify commitment closely resemble behaviors observed in sibling relationships: providing affection, providing support, companionship, communication, creating a relational future, and managing conflict (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2002). Thus, experiencing commitment in childhood and adolescent sibling relationships might play a role in the demonstration and sense of commitment one experiences in adult romantic relationships. Even more, the degree of commitment siblings have for another might be influenced by external stressors or adverse familial dynamics. For example, siblings whose parents are going through divorce or who engage in high levels of conflict, might draw closer to one another and develop a relationship in which they are more committed to supporting or nurturing one another. This, in turn, might effect their ability to feel committed to relationships in adulthood and their belief that others can commit to caring for them. This study examines the potential association between sibling relationship quality and commitment, in relation to parental conflict.

Relationship Confidence

Relationship commitment tends to be interconnected with *relationship confidence*, defined as the belief that ones' relationship will be successful in the future, and that one has the skills needed to sustain healthy relationships (Kaplan & Maddux, 2002). Relationship confidence is associated with relationship adjustment, later marital stability, and conflict resolution (Kaplan & Maddux, 2002; Whitton et al., 2008; Nock, Sanchez, & Wright, 2008). Researchers have indicated that exposure to overt conflict within the parental dyad is related to less confidence for young adult children in their romantic relationships (Roth, Harkins, & Eng, 2014). However, other researchers assert that parental divorce, but not parental conflict, is linked with lower relationship confidence (Whitton, et al., 2008). Thus, this study aims to better understand the association between parental conflict and romantic relationship confidence. Adult children who experienced parental conflict and parental divorce may not have had a model on how to maintain healthy, beneficial relationships and this might influence their belief in their own abilities to maintain such relationships. However, the development of conflict resolution and negotiation skills within a safe, dependable sibling relationship could greatly contribute to the confidence that one has in maintaining romantic relationships later in life, such that the individual would have the necessary skills to resolve conflict and negotiate needs. Indeed, conflict resolution styles used with siblings tend to resemble those used in romantic relationships (Reese-Weber & Kahn, 2005). Further evidence suggests that conflict between siblings can serve to enhance social and communication skills by giving youth opportunities to practice expressing their feelings and needs, engaging in problem solving, and negotioating compromise in a safe context (Bedford et al., 2000). Even more, given evidence that connects high levels of sibling intimacy with higher levels of peer competence (Kim et al., 2007), we predict that the same connection

exists between sibling relationship quality and romantic competence.

Relationship Satisfaction

Another important romantic relationship outcome that has been understudied in the context of sibling relationship quality and romantic relationships is relationship satisfaction. Longitudinal studies indicate that relationship confidence and relationship commitment within a marriage are significantly associated with relationship satisfaction (Johnson & Anderson, 2013; Braithwaite et al., 2016), such that those who report low levels of commitment and confidence also tend report lower levels of satisfaction. As such, children who were exposed to a high degree of parental conflict, characterized by maternal and paternal attacks and avoidance, are at greater risk of experiencing dissatisfaction in their romantic relationships (Feeney, 2006), and thus, dissolution of their relationships. Again, this association has been minimally examined in relaton to siblings. However, given previous research that demonstrates a positive relationship between early parent–child or peer relationships and later romantic relationship satisfaction (Crockett & Randall, 2006), the same could be expected for sibling relationships.

Siblings act as a source of closeness, comfort, and support that influences an ability to connect and maintain a satisfying relationships (Milevsky, 2005). Both the experience and expression of emotion and satisfaction in relationships is connected to early rooted experiences within the family context (Bowlby, 1978; Santrock, 2008). As siblings provide a unique platform to develop and practice interpersonal skills (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005), develop internal working models surrounding attachment needs and the expectations of them being met, and develop and maintain emotional ties, sibling relationships might greatly contribute to the satisfaction one is able to experience in romantic relationships. (Bowlby, 1978; Santrock, 2008). Thus, we hypothesize that sibling relationship quality will be related to romantic relationship

satisfaction. Even more, we hypothesize that sibling relationship quality will moderate the association between parental conflict and romantic relationship satisfaction, as they provide a separate context in which to develop emotional connections and the capacity to feel satisfied in a relationship that might not exist within the parent dyad.

CURRENT STUDY

Hypotheses

Based on empirical and theoretical perspectives laid out heretofore, we predict that interparental conflict (H1a) and sibling relationship quality (H1b) is related to relationship confidence. Similarly, we predict that interparental conflict (H2a) and sibling relationship quality (H2b) is related to romantic relationship satisfaction. Next, we predict that parental interparental conflict (H3a) and sibling relationship quality (H3b) is related to romantic relationship commitment. We also predict that interparental conflict (H4a) and sibling relationship quality (H4b) is related to attitudes towards divorce and marriage. More specifically, we are interested in examining how parental conflict and sibling relationship quality uniquely contribute to the variance in each of these outcomes. Finally, we hypothesize that sibling relationship quality will moderate the association between parental conflict and the interpersonal romantic outcomes of satisfaction (H5a), commitment (H5b), relationship confidence (H5c), and attitudes towards marriage (H5d). These hypotheses will be analyzed while controlling for divorce. See Figures 1 and 2 for clarity.

Participants

The data were drawn from 332 college enrolled participants who were recruited from various undergraduate level classes at a large university in the western United States. Given that our study aimed to understand the unique association between sibling relationships and romantic relationship outcomes, 31 participants who indicated that they didn't have a sibling and 46 participants who indicated that they had never experienced a romantic relationship were eliminated from analyses. As such, our sample consisted of 255 participants, 82.7% female, 15.7% male, 0.8% transgender, .4% gender queer participants and .4% of data was missing. In

this sample, 90.2% of participants identified as heterosexual, 6.2% identified as bisexual, 2% of data was missing, 1.2% identified as gay, and 0.4% identified as other. Regarding ethnicity, the sample was 72.2% White, 10.2% Hispanic, 7.5% Mixed Race, 3.5% Black/African American, 2.7% Asian, 0.8% Pacific Islander, 0.4% Indian, 0.4% Native American, and 0.4% Turkish. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 38 (M=19.81, SD= 2.13). The majority of participants (58.5%) reported current involvement in a romantic relationship (M=1.42, SD=.49), with 18.4% reporting involvement in a committed monogamous relationship (M=.42, SD=.50), 1.2% in a non-committed relationship (M=.03, SD= .163), .8% in a committed relationship and dating other people (M=.02, SD=.134), and .4% reported being married (M=.01, SD=.095) The average number of relationships experienced was 1.9 (SD= 1.189)and 29% of participants reported having divorced parents (M=.298, SD=.46).

Procedure

To recruit participants, the primary investigator reached out to faculty within a Human Development and Family Studies Department to request a one- time visit to their classroom to distribute surveys. Students were informed that participation was entirely optional and that only those who were 18 or older were invited to fill out the survey. Those who decided to participate were asked to take one of the survey packets (paper and pencil) that were passed around the room; if students chose not to participate, they were given an alternative assignment. Upon signing the informed consent document on the first page of the survey, the participants completed the self-report measures. Completed surveys were collected by the principal investigator and the graduate student on the research team. Survey data were then transferred to an electronic spreadsheet and stored in a locked lab on a password protected encrypted computer. No identifying information

was collected. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Colorado State University.

Measures

Parental Conflict. Children's Perceptions of Inter-Parental Conflict (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) was used to assess participants' perceptions of parents' marital quality. The CPIC was orginially developed for use with children, and was subsequently validated for use among young adults (Bickham & Fiese, 1997). Participants who experienced parental divorce were asked to report on parental conflict before the divorce, and those who did not experience parental divorce were asked to assess their parents' marital conflict growing up. The original scale of 49 items were organized into nine aspects of conflict: frequency, intensity, resolution, content, self-blame, perceived threat, coping efficacy, triangulation, and stability. Factor analyses grouped these aspects into three important subscales: conflict properties, self-blame, and threat (Grych et al., 1992). Given findings that Conflict Properties was the only subscale that significantly correlated to parental reports of conflict, and the findings that Conflict Properties was more related to child adjustment outcomes than the childrens' reports of internalized responses to conflict (Self-Blame and Threat subscales), this study only examined the Conflict Properties subscale (Kline, Wood, & Moore, 2003). Even more, Frequency and Intensity items had the highest internal consistency. The decision to use this single subscale was also related to the length of the questionnaire and the intent to reduce participant fatigue. Participants rated their response to each of the 19 items on a three-point scale, with *1=true, 2=sort of true, 3=false*. Higher scores on the frequency scale indicate more frequent parental conflict. Higher scores on the intensity scale indicate more intense parental conflict. The resolution scale was reverse scored; higher scores on this scale indicate less observed resolution following parental conflict.

In this sample, chronbach alpha was .94.

  Sibling Relationship Quality. The Sibling Relational Maintenance Behaviors scale (SRMB; Meyer & Weber, 2004) was used to assess the degree to which individuals felt close to their siblings, felt supported by their sibling, and felt connected to their siblings while growing up. The SRMB was adapted for adults by changing the wording to past tense. Example items include, "I *showed my sibling(s) affection*" and "*My sibling(s) made me laugh*" and participants rated their level of agreement on 21 items using a 7-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Eighteen questions were reversed scored so that higher scores indicated higher levels of sibling intimacy. The SRMB was found to be highly reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of .93.

  Attitudes towards Marriage. The Marital Attitude Scale (MAS; Braaten and Rosen, 1998) is a 23-item scale that measures individuals' attitudes toward marriage (e.g. "people should marry" and "people should stay married to their spouse for the rest of their lives"). Participants rated their responses to each item on a Likert type scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, 4= Strongly Disagree) with some of the questions being reverse scored. The MAS has a range of scores from 24 to 69, with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward marriage. The authors reported internal consistency of the MAS with a coefficient a of .82 (Braaten and Rosen, 1998). Chronbach's alpha for this measure was .86.

  Romantic Relationship Satisfaction. The four-item Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS- 4; Sabourin, Valois & Lussier, 2005) was derived from the 32-item Dyadic Adjustment Scale and was used to assess participants' romantic relationship satisfaction. The items are: *"How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?", "In*

general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?", "Do you confide in your mate?", and *"Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.* Previous studies have found reliability alphas to be .73 (e.g., Owen, Quirk, & Manthos, 2012). Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .77

    Romantic Relationship Confidence. The Relationship Confidence Scale (RCS), developed by Stanley, Hoyer, and Trathen (1994) was used to measure individuals' confidence in the future of their relationship. Participants rated their level of agreement on 10 items using a 7-point scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Examples include: "*I believe we can handle whatever conflicts will arise in the future"* and *"I feel good about the prospects of making a romantic relationship work*". RCS scores reflect participants' mean response across items. The RCS has demonstrated internal consistency and evidence of construct validity (e.g. Stanley et al., 2004). Chronbach's alpha for this measure was .87

    Romantic Relationship Commitment. Commitment was measured using the dedication subscale from the Revised Commitment Inventory (RCI; Owen et al., 2011, Stanley & Markman, 1992). The dedication subscale from the RCI has eight items that assess the degree individuals are committed to the future of the relationship, perceptions of their couple identity, and the primacy of the relationship. An example item is: *"My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life."* The items were rated on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating more commitment. The validity of the dedication subscale has been shown in several studies (Einhorn et al., 2008; Owen et al., 2011).Chronbach's alpha for this measure was .96

Parental Divorce. Parental divorce was assessed by asking participants, "*Have your parents ever been divorced?*" to which they responded yes or no. Responses were coded 1 for divorce and 0 for not divorced.

Demographics. Age and race were assessed using open format. Sexual orientation was assessed with the following options: *heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, other*. Gender was assessed with the following options: *male, female, transgender, gender queer*.

Number of Serious Romantic Relationships. Number of romantic relationship experiences was assessed by asking participants "*How many serious romantic relationships have you had, including any you are in now?*"

Current Romantic Relationship. Participant relationship status was assessed by asking students "*Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship?*" to which they can respond yes or no.

Data Analytic Approach

To examine the hypotheses proposed in this paper, we conducted the following analyses; to test hypotheses 1-4, we conducted four separate linear regressions with each of the romantic outcomes (satisfaction, commitment, confidence, and attitudes towards marriage) as the dependent variables. For each of these analyses divorce was entered as a control variable and then parental conflict and sibling relationship quality were entered as predictors (see illustration in Figure 1). To test hypotheses 5a-d, we conducted a separate test of moderation (see illustration in Figure 2). To conduct this test of moderation, we centered the variables around the mean and created an interaction term (between predictor and moderator) and used this interaction term in the regression analyses models.

RESULTS

Descriptive information was obtained for the variables (for bivariate correlations, see Table 1, for means and standard deviations, see Table 2). Thirty-one participants were deleted from analyses as they indicated that they did not have a sibling and 46 participants were eliminated as they indicated that they had never experienced a romantic relationship.

Four separate linear regressions were conducted to examine the unique associations between the predictor variables and each of the outcomes. For each of these analyses, divorce was entered as the control variable at step one. At step two, parental conflict and sibling relationship quality were entered as predictor variables. The interaction term was entered at step three.

Test of the first hypothesis revealed partial support wherein, after controlling for divorce (B=.092, p=.15), sibling relationship was a significant predictor of relationship confidence, B= .38, p < .001, with those reporting higher sibling relationship quality reporting higher relationship confidence (thus supporting H1b). However, parental conflict was not found to be a significant predictor, B = -.13, p= .074, (thus, not supporting hypothesis H1a). In addition, the interaction between parental conflict and sibling relationship quality was significant in the model, B= .07, p = .03, thus supporting hypothesis H5c. Next, a regression analysis was conducted predicting relationship satisfaction. After controlling for divorce (B=-.35, p=.20), results supported the association between sibling relationship quality and relationship satisfaction, B= -.28, p < .001, in that the higher one rated their sibling relationship quality, the lower their relationship satisfaction ratings, thus supporting hypothesis 2b. Parental conflict was not found to be significant in the association with relationship satisfaction, B = -.014, p = .89,

thus not supporting hypothesis 2a, and the interaction of parent conflict and sibling relationship quality was also not supported, $B = .06$, $p = .49$, thus not supporting hypothesis 5a. Regression analyses examining commitment found no significance, with parental conflict $B = .048$, $p = .63$, sibling relationship quality $B= -.20$, $p =.02$., and the interaction of conflict and sibling relationship quality $B = -.034$, $p = .70$, not predicting relationship commitment, thus not supporting hypotheses 3a, 3b, 5c. Lastly, tests examining attitudes toward marriage found that sibling relationship quality was a significant predictor of attitudes toward marriage, $B = .21$, $p < .001$, in that higher ratings of sibling relationship quality relate to higher positive attitudes toward marriage, thus supporting hypothesis 4b. However, hypotheses 4a and 5d were not supported, in that parental conflict $B = -.09$, $p = .20$, and the interaction of parental conflict and sibling relationship quality $B = -.00$, $p = .96$, were not significant predictors of attitudes towards marriage. Thus, we found no support for hypotheses 4a and 5d.

DISCUSSION

Research has long highlighted the importance of romantic involvement in socio-emotional development and overall well-being and adjustment (Loving &Slatcher, 2013). Further well-examined and supported is the significance of systemic experiences for individuals' later romantic relationship success. However, much of the work has been devoted to highlighting the importance of divorce on ones's ability to form and maintain romantic relationships in adulthood. Sibling relationship quality has been minimally examined in the context of adult romantic relationship formation. The current study tested the main effects of sibling relationship quality and parental conflict on romantic relationship outcomes, as well as the moderating effect of sibling relationship quality on the association between parental conflict and romantic relationship variables.

Romantic Relationship Confidence

First, we found that sibling relationship quality and parental relationship quality were linked to young adult's perceived romantic relationship confidence. Individuals who reported higher quality sibling and parental relationships tended to report a higher degree of romatic relationship confidence. This finding is supported by Social Learning Theory's and Family Systems Theory's claims that skills learned and practiced in the family are reflected in relationships beyond the family (Bandura, 1977; Bowen, 1978). This finding speaks to the potential importance of sibling relationships as a context for the social learning processes that underlie the development of the skills necessary to feel equipped in romantic relationships, and is consistent with past research that suggests that sibling interactions provide unique learning opportunities (Dunn 2007; Katz et al. 1992). Even more, supportive ties with siblings might be a

resource for adult children in the romantic context, such that they can turn to their siblings for advice and support in the face of romantic uncertainty or relational problems (Albrecht & Adleman, 1987). Most importantly, that sibling relationship experiences may carry over to romantic relationships further demonstrates the importance of expanding the development literature to better include the impact of sibling relationships.

Romantic Relationship Satisfaction

Interestingly, a negative association was found between sibling relationship quality and romantic relationship satisfaction, such that participants who reported a higher quality sibling relationship tended to report lower levels of satisfaction within romantic relationships. There are many potential mechanisms that might explain this finding. First, evidence from Social Support Theory (Albrecht & Adleman, 1987), suggests that perceived support from a close social network on the romantic relationship can influence the perceived quality, commitment to, and satisfaction within the relationship (Rodrigues, Lopes, Monteiro, & Prada, 2017). An important limitation of the current study is that perceived support from siblings and parents was not assessed. Those who report a high quality relationship with their siblings might value the acceptance and validation of their romantic partner to a greater degree than those who report a low quality relationship. Thus, a close sibling who does not approve of one's romantic partner might effect the degree of satisfaction one is able to feel within that romantic context (Parks & Adelman, 1983).

Second, it is possible that the findings represent a product of a triadic dynamic between the participant, their sibling, and their romantic partners. In accordance with family systems theory, tension between partners can arise as a resut of a third party's involvement in their lives (Bowen, 1978). Navigating relationships with siblings-in-law, or in this case, the sibling of a

boyfriend or girlfriend, may be especially problematic as these relationships are more peer-like and lack social interation guidelines (Polenick et al., 2017). In this study, high sibling quality was operationalized by feelings of closeness, connectedness, and trust. Thus, there is the possibility that the presence of a porwerful sibling bond might have diminished the role of the participans' romantic partner. In other words, an individual's lack of differentiation from his or her family of origin can be problematic for the relationship and could potentially influence the degree of satisfaction both partners are able to experience (Polenick et al., 2017).

Lastly, siblings might play a role in relationship satisfaction by contributing to the development of internal working models (Bowlby, 1978) surrounding our needs in relationships and our expectations that they will be met. Given the longevity of sibling relationships, as well as the shared experiences and degree of emotional intimacy often found in these relationships, it could be argued that siblings understand individuals to a greater degree than a romantic partner might, especially in relationships characterized as close and connected. In romantic relationships, we expect our partners to provide us with a "safe haven" and to respond in a supportive manner in times of need and distress (Collins & Feeney, 2000), like our siblings might have done growing up. If a romantic partner is not able to adequately read and respond to one's needs as expected, relationship satisfaction decreases significantly and the likelihood of dissolution increases (Sullivan et al., 2010).

Relationship Commitment

Though previous research indicated a significant link between parental relationship quality and romantic relationship commitment, our study did not yield such results. Even more, there was not a signicant link between sibling relationship quality and romantic relationship commitment. One possibility for this lack of significant associations is the absence of social

support measures related to parents and to siblings. Existing literature suggests that if young adults perceive their family and friends to be supportive of their romantic relationship, they tend to report higher commitment to these relationships and tend to have higher quality relationships. For young adults, support from friends is an important source of validation of romantic partner choices that can influence the initiation and maintenance of romantic relationships (Etcheverry, Le, & Hoffman, 2013). As these relationships become more future oriented, parents often play a bigger role by providing validation, advice, comfort, and the perception of greater barriers preventing relationship dissolution, thus promoting romantic relationship maintenance. As such, there is a positive association between parental support and romantic commitment and satisfaction (Rodrigues, Lopes, Monteiro, & Prada, 2017). Thus, perhaps the observation of conflict between parents is less important in relation to the degree of commitment one experiences in the romantic contexts compared to the support they receive from their parents within these romantic relationships.

Similarly, siblings remain understudied in relation to social support research. One can imagine, however, that support of and potential approval of a romantic partner by a sibling can play a significant role in one's commitment to that partner, similar to the influence of friends and of parents.Thus, future research needs to be done examining the link between sibling relationship quality and social support, and the potential link between sibling social support and romantic relationship commitment.

Attitudes Towards Marriage and Divorce

Individuals who reported high quality sibling relationships tended to report more positive atttitudes towards marriage. Previous research discovered that one's satisfaction with his or her primary family relationships was a significant predictor of attitudinal outcomes (Reic Ercegovav

& Bubic, 2017). While our study did not examine satisfaction directly, high sibling quality was operationalized as feeling connected to and supported by one's sibling(s) and could be related to feelings of satisfaction. Of course, further research should be done to examine this connection more directly. Nonetheless, these findings represent an important process in which we form ideas about future relationships: if we experience satisfying, beneficial relationships in our family of origin, we hold the belief that we can experience them in the romantic context as well.

In accordance with Social Learning theory (Bandura, 1977; 1986), we hypothesized that the observation of parental divorce would lead to more negative views towards marriage and more positive views towards divorce, given that they have experienced and witnessed the dissolution of their parents' marriage. However, a significant relationship between parental divorce and attitudinal outcomes was not discovered. Despite the dissolution of their parents' marriage, participants still might feel satisfied with the relationship they experience with their parents. Given the dichotomous nature of our divorce measure, we were not able to accurately measure the perception and experience of the participant in relation to their parent's divorce. When divorce is related to triangulation, high conflict, and emotional neglect, children tend to experience worse outcomes than those whose parent's maintained a healthy parenting partnership and consistently responded to the needs of their children (Bowen, 1978). Differences in the way that divorce was handled could play a role in the satisfaction one feels towards their parents and thus, influence their attitudes towards marriage and divorce.

Moderation

In our test of moderation, the interaction between the predictors, sibling relationship quality and parental conflict, was not found to be significantly associated with romantic satisfaction, attitudes towards marriage, or commitment. Typically, parental conflict and sibling

relationship quality have been found to be highly correlated, in that a positive relationship between parents often translates to a positive relationship between siblings. In this case, the lack of moderating effects could be contributed to this similarity in relationship ratings. However, our study did not yield a significant correlation between sibling relationship quality and parental quality and thus, our results could possibly be contributed to low sibling mean or to the lack of variability in our sample.

Importantly, however, the interaction between sibling relationship quality and parental conflict was significantly associated with romantic confidence. In other words, sibling relationship quality changed the association between parental conflict and one's confidence in their ability to build and maintain a romantic relationship. Perhaps the unique context that siblings provide to learn and practice skills such as conflict resolution, nurturing behaviors, and emotional support can make up for the poor model they might have been exposed to in the parental dyad.

Considerations and Future Directions

Although the present study provides important information crucial to the understanding of the role of sibling relationships in the formation of healthy young adult romantic relationships, these findings must be viewed in the light of several limitations. Importantly, the data was collected at one time point, and therefore, causal relationships cannot be inferred. Still, the associations found in the present study highlight important directions for future research in understanding the role of sibling relationships in the context of parent conflict and divorce. Secondly, our sample comprised undergraduate students from a western university, most whom were non-Hispanic, White females in a dating relationship. Thus, future research is needed to test generalizability of the findings to other ethnic groups, education levels, developmental stages, and geographic

locations. In particular, there were far more female participants than male participants in our study and thus, future studies need to include larger numbers of participants of both genders in order to further examine potential gender differences. A third limitation to our study was the dichotomous nature of the parental divorce. We did not collect information on the timing of parental divorce or on later family structure, which could play an important role on the examined romantic relationship outcomes. Furthermore, the mean score for sibling relationship quality was low which might have altered some of the results. This low mean may be indicitave of the developmental stage of young adults in which they are trying to establish their own individual identity and thus, may be recalling their experience with their sibling with diminished affection and attachment.

The self-reported nature of the study, particularly as it relates to retroactive responses, creates another limitation. Similarly, though findings provided support for only measuring the Conflict Properties subscale of the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict (CPIC; Kline et al., 2003), neglecting to consider the association between internalized reponses to conflict (Self-Blame and Threat) and romantic relationship outcomes produces a significant limitation to results. Importantly, intensive literature suggests that closeness in sibling relationships differs by the timepoint in the life course, the gender constellation of the sibling dynamic, and sibling birth order (Dixon, Reyes, Leppert, & Pappas, 2008; Pollet & Nettle,2007). We did not examine these intricacies and thus, future research should be done to examine how these factors influence romantic relationship outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the importance of sibling relationship quality in romantic relationship development and maintance. This study further advances the

literature on divorce and parental conflict on later romantic relationship functioning,

emphasizing the sibling subsystem as a potential influence on outcomes. For each model tested,

sibling relationship quality was a stronger predictor than parental conflict and divorce. This

challenges the long-held notion that parental divorce, by itself, accounts for poor adult romantic

relationship outcomes. Although the literature has begun to unpack the role of parental conflict

on these outcomes, this study underscores the need for a more nuanced exploration of the role

and power of sibling relationships on adult romantic relationship outcomes.

Table 1. Correlations Among Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Parental Divorce	1.00						
2. Parental Conflict	.546**	1.00					
3. Sibl Rel Quality	.07	-.123	1.00				
4. Attitudes	.17**	-.17**	.26**	1.00			
5. Confidence	.085	-.16*	.25**	.43**	1.00		
6. Satisfaction	-.109	.108	-.36**	-.44**	-.59**	1.00	
7. Commitment	-.123	.142	-.130	.01	-.341**	.20*	1.00

*p <.05, **p

<.01

Notes: Parental Conflict refers to scores on the Children's Perceptions of Inter-Parental Conflict
(CPIC) to measure parental relationship quality; Sibl Rel Quality refers to the Sibling Relational

Maintenance Behaviors scale; Attitudes refers to the measure of Attitudes Towards Marriage scale; Commitment refers to degree of romantic relationship commitment; Confidence refers to the level of romantic relationship confidence; Satisfaction refers to romantic relationship satisfaction. Parental Divorced refers to those whose parents did divorce.

Table 2. Descriptive Information with Demographic Characteristics

Variable	M	SD	Range
Parental Conflict	2.32	.60	1.00-3.00
Sibling Relationship Quality	2.41	1.00	1.00-6.65
Attitudes towards Marriage	2.25	.61	1.00-4.45
Commitment	4.44	1.84	1.00-7.00
Confidence	2.02	.55	1.00-4.00
Satisfaction	4.45	.69	1.00-5.00
Variable			Cumulative Percent
Non-Divorced Parents			70.2
Divorced Parents			29.8

Notes: Parental Conflict refers to scores on the Children's Perceptions of Inter-Parental Conflict (CPIC) to measure parental relationship quality; Sibling Relationship Quality refers to the Sibling Relational Maintenance Behaviors scale; Attitudes Towards Marriage refers to attitudes towards marriage and divorce; Commitment refers to degree of romantic relationship commitment; Confidence refers to the level of romantic relationship confidence; Satisfaction refers to romantic relationship satisfaction. Non-Divorced refers to those whose parents did not divorce while Divorced Parents refer to those whose parents did divorce.

Table 3. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Confidence

Model	Variable	B	SE	b
1	Divorce	0.11	0.76	0.09
2	Divorce	-0.003	0.084	-0.001
	Parental Conflict	-0.12	0.065	-1.26

	Sib Quality	0.21	0.03	0.37***
	Divorce	-0.01	0.08	-0.01
3	Parental Conflict	-0.156	0.07	-1
	Sib Quality	0.2	0.03	0.38***
	Sib x Parent	0.07	0.03	0.14

Notes: Sib Quality refers to sibling relationship quality; Parental Conflict refers to parental relationship quality; Sib x Parent refer to the interaction of parental relationship quality and sibling relationship quality.

Table 4. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Satisfaction

Model	Variable	*B*	*SE*	*b*
1	Divorce	-0.17	0.13	-0.11
2	Divorce	-0.147	0.147	-0.1
	Parenal Conflict	-0.016	0.112	-0.014
	Sib Quality	-0.25	0.6	-0.35
3	Divorce	-0.149	0.147	-0.01
	Parenal Conflict	-0.04	0.12	-0.034
	Sib Quality	-0.24	0.06	-0.34
	Sib x Parent	0.04	0.05	0.06

p < .05. **p* < .01. p < .001 ***

Notes: Sibl Rel Quality refers to sibling relationship quality; Parental Conflict refers to parental relationship quality; Sib x parent refer to the interaction of parental relationship quality and sibling relationship quality.

Table 5. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Commitment

Model	Variable	*B*	*SE*	*b*
1	Divorce	-0.05	0.35	-0.12
2	Divorce	-0.37	0.41	-0.09
	Parenal Conflict	0.15	0.31	0.05
	Sib Quality	-0.04	0.15	-0.195
3	Divorce	-0.36	0.41	-0.9

	Parenal Conflict	0.19	0.33	0.06
	Sib Quality	-0.36	0.16	-0.2
	Sib x Parent	-0.05	0.14	-0.034

p < .05. **p* < .01. p < .001 ***

Notes: Sib Quality refers to sibling relationship quality; Parental Conflict refers to parental relationship quality; Sib x parent refer to the interaction of parental relationship quality and sibling relationship quality. Commitment refers to romantic relationship

Table 6. Summary of Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Attitudes

Model	Variable	*B*	*SE*	*b*
1	Divorce	0.19	0.07	0.17
2	Divorce	0.12	0.084	0.105
	Parenal Conflict	-0.083	0.065	-0.095
	Sib Quality	0.11	0.033	0.207
3	Divorce	0.12	0.084	0.105
	Parenal Conflict	-0.084	0.067	-0.096
	Sib Quality	0.11	0.033	0.207
	Sib x Parent	0.001	0.032	0.047

p < .05. **p* < .01. p < .001 ***

Notes: Sibl Rel Quality refers to sibling relationship quality; Parental Conflict refers to parental relationship quality; Sib x parent refer to the interaction of parental relationship quality and sibling relationship quality. Attitudes refers to attitudes towardsa marriage and divorce.
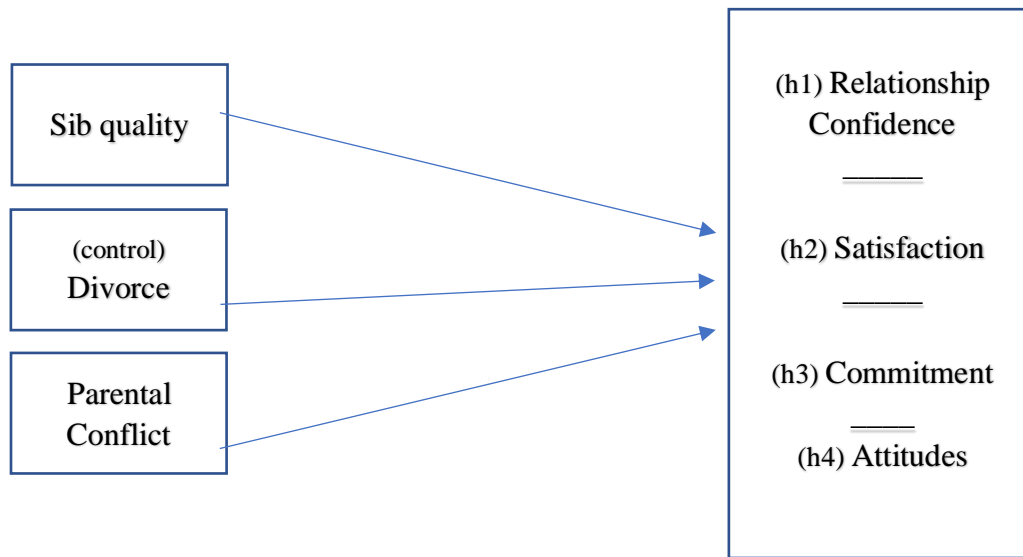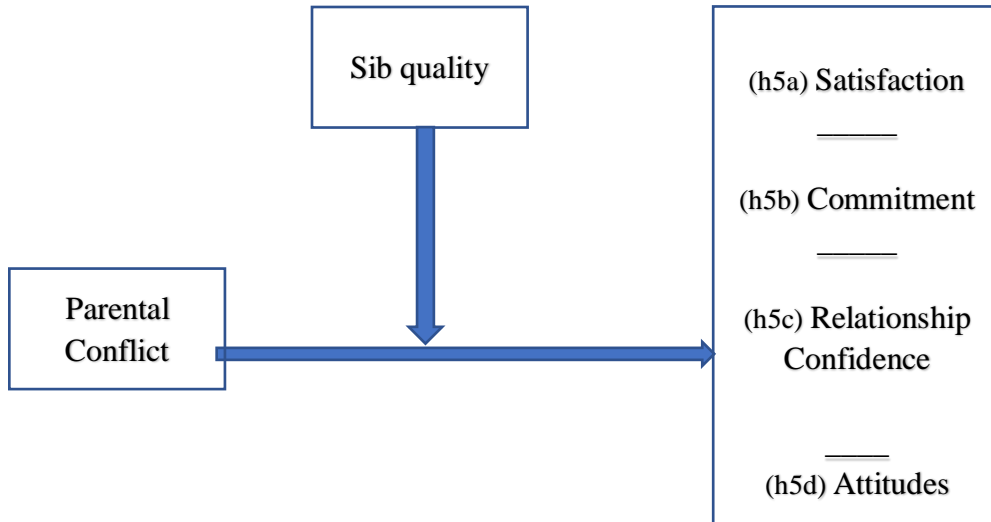
Figure 1. Linear regression hypotheses

Sib quality

(control)
Divorce

Parental
Conflict

(h1) Relationship
Confidence
_____

(h2) Satisfaction
_____

(h3) Commitment
_____

(h4) Attitudes

Figure 2. Tests of moderation hypotheses

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