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Attitudes of Marriage and Divorce in Adult Children of Gray Divorce

Brittany M. Freeze
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Walden University

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Brittany M. Freeze

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Attitudes of Marriage and Divorce in Adult Children of Gray Divorce

by

Brittany M. Freeze

MA, Walden University, 2018

BS, Brigham Young University-Idaho, 2015

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services

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November 2021

Abstract

Divorce over the age of 50 years is called gray divorce and has been steadily on the rise. Past studies have shown the impact divorce can have on children regarding attitudes toward marriage and divorce, but research has not investigated the attitudes of adult children whose parents divorce late in life. An intrinsic, single case study was done using eight participants who were adult children of gray divorce. Semi-structured interviews were completed, guided by the principles of social learning theory. Data were analyzed into codes, categories, and then into seven overarching themes using categorical aggregation. Six themes regarding the attitudes toward marriage and divorce are discussed along with one additional theme that was discovered. Themes include a desire to marry, attitudes of marriage and divorce were impacted by their parents' experiences, that divorce is not ideal but is sometimes best, a determination to make their marriages work and not repeat their parents' mistakes, and gladness that their parents divorced. The participants were impacted in terms of feeling a sense of marital impermanence, a determination to succeed in their relationships, and an understanding and acceptance of divorce in unhealthy and unhappy circumstances. Learning the impact that late-life divorce has on adult children of divorce can assist therapists, educators, human service professionals, social programs, as well as parents and children affected by gray divorce.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family. Without your support and encouragement, I could have never made this dream a reality.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank my family for encouraging and helping me in this journey. I could never have reached this goal without your love and support. A special thank you to my husband, parents, and siblings for helping with my children during residencies, tough semesters, interviews, and many other occasions. Thank you to my children who were so patient with me as I studied and did homework every day for many years. Thank you to my husband, Drew, for supporting me in all of my long days and late nights and pushing me to achieve my dreams. I appreciate and love you all of you tremendously.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The impact of divorce has been studied for decades, but there has been an increase of marriages ending later in life that has yet to be studied and understood (Bowen & Jensen, 2015; Brown & Wright, 2019; Crowley, 2019b). Divorce after the age of 50 years of age has been coined “gray divorce” (Brown & Lin, 2012). Gray divorce affects the individuals divorcing as well as their adult children and subsequent generations (Shanholz et al., 2021). Adult children tend to be overlooked because of their age and independence, but they too have difficulty coping with and adjusting to divorce (Abetz & Wang, 2017). Adult children of divorce (ACOD) are documented to have increased risks of depression and feelings of being caught in the middle of parents, and they tend to feel responsible for their parents' health and wellbeing throughout and after the divorce (Abetz & Wang, 2017; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017).

The effects of divorce on young children have been studied. Young children of divorce (COD) suffer from psychological, emotional, and mental difficulties, as well as have increased relationship troubles and substance abuse problems (Shimkowski et al., 2018; Vezzetti, 2016). COD tend to hold negative attitudes toward marriage and positive attitudes toward divorce (Morrison et al., 2017; Shimkowski et al., 2018; Wolchik et al., 2019). Attitudes of marriage and divorce have been studied in COD and ACOD, but the attitudes of marriage and divorce are unknown in adult children of gray divorce.

Background

Divorce was rare at the start of the United States, but as the years progressed and laws regarding divorce relaxed, rates increased to roughly half of all marriages ending in

divorce (Hendi, 2019; Shimkowski et al., 2018). Divorce was originally permitted strictly for reasons of adultery, abandonment, and abuse, but as divorce laws changed, divorces for irreconcilable differences or desiring autonomy increased (Crowley, 2017). The 20th century was influential in the way Americans think about and accept divorce. Today, 40-50% of first marriages fail (American Psychological Association, 2021). Divorce has significantly increased within the United States in the last 100 years, with the greatest increase taking place in the second half of the 20th century (Smock & Schwartz, 2020).

Gray divorce is a phenomenon comprised of individuals aged 50 years and older (Bowen & Jensen, 2015; Crowley, 2019a; Fields, 2016). One quarter of all divorces in the United States are considered gray divorces (Brown & Lin, 2012). One out of every three gray divorces occur after more than 30 years of marriage (Stepler, 2017). The reasons for early-life and late-life divorce included a decreased quality of marriage, abuse, and falling out of love (Canham et al., 2014; Lin et al., 2018). Bair (2010) found that gray divorcees were waiting for children to leave the home before separating, but Lin et al. (2018) stated that couples were not waiting for children to leave the home before divorcing. Although some of the reasons for late-life divorce have been discovered, much is still unknown about gray divorce.

Divorcing later in life includes different challenges for the couple and their children than those who divorce earlier (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017). Divorce is known to be harmful to individuals and their dependent children (Sharma, 2015; Shimkowski et al., 2018; Vezzetti, 2016). Gray divorce impacts older adults and their independent children differently than younger couples and dependent children (Ascandra et al., 2019).

The older generations do not have to battle for child custody or child support, but they do worry about financial instability (Franz, 2017). Adult children state that the time it takes for parents to recover emotionally, socially, and financially is a challenge, along with scheduling time with parents and feeling caught in the middle of the divorce (Abetz & Wang, 2017; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017; Shimkowski et al., 2018).

COD commonly suffer emotionally, physically, socially, academically, financially, relationally, as well as other areas of their lives, but research needs to be done regarding how ACOD are impacted by a parent's decision to separate (Cunningham & Skillingstead, 2015; Goisis et al., 2019; Shimkowski et al., 2018; Vezzetti, 2016). When parents divorce while their children are young, it is common for those children to think unfavorably of marriage and be more accepting of divorce (Shimkowski et al., 2018; Wolchik et al., 2019). As for ACOD, research is unclear about how late-life divorce impacts adult children's views on marriage and divorce (Vezzetti, 2016). Because of the lack of current research regarding ACOD, it is unknown how ACOD feel about marriage and divorce after the late-life divorce of their parents.

Problem Statement

The United States holds one of the highest percentages of divorce in the world (Wang & Schofer, 2018). First marriages in the United States have a divorce rate of 45-50%, and subsequent marriages have even higher rates of divorce (American Psychological Association, 2021). Although divorce rates have decreased for young and middle-aged adults, they have increased for those over the age of 50 years (Stepler, 2017). Within the last two decades, gray divorce has doubled (Brown & Lin, 2012). As the

acceptance of divorce in America continues to rise, the statistics for gray divorce are expected to rise along with the number of children affected by divorce (Brown & Wright, 2019).

Divorce impacts all the family members economically, academically, emotionally, and socially (Shimkowski et al., 2018). The United Nations (2020) stated that family units act as a stabilizing factor for social networks and economies. Divorce has been studied and examined over many decades, but a growing trend of late-life divorce is creating a new cohort of divorcees, ACOD, and new societal problems (Crowley, 2019b).

Divorce has lasting impressions on children regarding their attitudes toward marriage and divorce (Lee, 2018; Shimkowski et al., 2018). COD suffer in future relationships and are more likely to end a marriage than children of intact families (Lee, 2018). COD have greater divorce rates, hold more positive attitudes toward divorce, and have lower interest in marriage compared to children from intact families (Wolchik et al., 2019). Because gray divorce is on the rise, further research needs to be done concerning the impact it has on adult children (Abetz & Wang, 2017).

Although the aforementioned research regarding marital attitudes of COD illuminates important findings, I have found no research on marital and divorce attitudes of adult children of gray divorce. Further research is warranted on the marital and divorce attitudes of adult children of late-life divorce and how their parents' divorce impacts their views on marriage and divorce in an effort to address the documented problem of increased divorce rates among the 50 years and older generations and the unknown impact on the subsequent generations (Jensen & Bowen, 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this intrinsic, single case study is to explore and understand how adult children of gray divorce are impacted regarding their attitudes towards marriage and divorce after witnessing his or her parents' late-life divorce. The goal of this study is to understand if and how the marital and divorce attitudes of ACOD are impacted because of their parents' gray divorce.

Research Question

RQ1: What are the attitudes of marriage and divorce among adult children of gray divorce?

Conceptual Framework

This study will be grounded in social learning theory. According to social learning theory, people learn through observation and are influenced by what they witness and are taught by others (Bandura, 1971; Learning Theories, 2020). Bandura (1971), the founder of this theory, claimed that individuals learn through modeling and imitating behaviors and are shaped by the people around them. According to the philosophy of social learning theory, COD have not observed a healthy or enduring marriage, thereby teaching that marriage does not last, and that people are not required to stay in an unsatisfying relationship (Wolchik et al., 2019). Social learning theory states that people are conditioned to think or behave differently after witnessing an event or action, consequently, increasing the likelihood of repeating that behavior (Bandura et al., 1961).

Social learning theory will provide the framework for how the study will be interpreted as well as guide the development of the interview questions. The questions will

be based on how the participants' attitudes were shaped or changed after observing their parents' marriage and divorce. Families remain the strongest influence in a person's life so a theory founded upon modeled behavior can shed light on how adult children may be consciously or unconsciously impacted after observing their parents' gray divorce (see Bandura, 1971).

Nature of Study

An intrinsic, single case study will be performed to explore the impact of gray divorce on adult children's attitudes toward marriage and divorce. A qualitative design was selected for an in-depth look at each participant's experience (Stake, 2005).

Comprehensive qualitative interviews are designed to allow the participants to speak in a thorough and complete manner to better explain feelings, behaviors, and experiences (Grant et al., 2019). Yin (2016) agreed that qualitative case studies are used to gain insight from people's thoughts and behaviors, as well as offer perspectives and understanding about experiences. This study seeks to comprehend and understand how a specific event has altered the attitudes and thoughts of a particular population and this is best understood through in-depth interviews.

I selected a case study because it allows for the exploration of phenomena using more than one lens, and it does not limit the content in the same way as a quantitative study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2016). Case studies are ideal for research questions that require a contextual answer (Yin, 2003). The intrinsic case study was selected because I am not seeking to explain or describe a phenomenon, but am interested in context and a better understanding of the attitudes of children of gray divorce.

The sampling strategy for this intrinsic, single case study will be both snowball and purposive sampling. Snowball sampling, also known as referral sampling, is ideal for accessing hard-to-find populations (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Purposive sampling then fulfills the requirement of recruiting only participants who meet the specific criteria (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The participants will be obtained through social media platforms, word of mouth, and the Walden participant pool. Social media and the Walden participant pool were selected for data collection because it allows for unbiased participants to be recruited rather than enlisting individuals from listservs or blogs who may hold strong feelings about the topic of study.

I will begin with an estimated eight interviews for this study. Further interviews will be conducted if the saturation of data has not been achieved (see Saunders et al., 2018). The interviews will consist of participants over the age of 18 who have had parents divorce late in life. The interviews will take place via video conferencing or telephone per the participant's request. The semistructured interview will include open-ended questions aimed at understanding attitudes of marriage and divorce prior to and after their parent's divorce.

After the interview phase, I will begin analyzing the data collected. Thematic analysis will be used to process the data that are collected by organizing data into statements, phrases, or paragraphs that will be given a word or phrase that represents the data collected (see Gaya & Smith, 2016). I will then categorize the words and phrases as suggested by Ravitch and Carl (2019), to show commonalities between the data and determine which statements are relevant to the purpose of the study. I will continue to

collect and analyze data with the assistance of the program Dedoose until there is an overall theme or themes found in the data (see Constantinou et al., 2017).

Definitions

Gray (or grey) divorce: Separation or divorce of a couple where at least one partner was age 50 years or older (Crowley, 2019b).

Institutional marriage: Marriage between a man and woman in which each participates in a gendered role and the marriage takes precedence over individual feelings (Amato, 2017; Wilcox & Dew, 2010).

Companionate marriage: A blend of falling in love while still incorporating some gender roles (Wilcox & Dew, 2010).

Individualized marriage: A marriage contract with the agreement that both partners maintain their independence and remain in the relationship as long as individual needs are being met (Lauer & Yodanis, 2010).

Patriarchy: The state in which the father or man of the home has control over resources, behaviors, and people within the home (Coontz, 2004).

Assumptions

There are many assumptions within this study. This study is a qualitative case study consisting of in-depth interviews, meaning that I am assuming that individuals will talk with me for an extended period of time. I am assuming that those entering this study will be honest in answering the qualifying and interview questions. I am assuming that they will answer all of the questions in the interview with detailed and rich data. Because this study is based on past experiences, I am also assuming that the participants will have

an accurate memory of what they observed and will remember how they felt in the past. Lastly, I am assuming that the individuals were impacted in some way by their parents' divorce.

Scope and Delimitations

This study is focused on understanding the attitudes of marriage and divorce among adult children of gray divorce. I will seek eight individuals for this study with the understanding that more participants may be included. All participants will be 18 years or older and have parents who experienced a gray divorce. Although individuals under the age of 18 years can be affected by gray divorce, this study focuses on adults over the age of 18 who are impacted by gray divorce. These requirements will ensure that the participants are legal adults who qualify for the study. This study is specifically regarding gray divorce in the United States, so all participants and their parents must be residents of the United States. I will target participants who are on social media or who are in the Walden participant pool. Interviews will be conducted using video technology and telephone, thereby excluding any persons without internet capability or telephone accessibility.

Prior to selecting social learning theory, other theories were considered. The divorce-stress-adjustment framework, self-perception theory, and Bandura's social cognitive theory were considered for the framework of this study. Amato's (2000) divorce-stress-adjustment framework states that divorce is a process that unfolds slowly and will negatively affect people throughout each adjustment phase. This framework states that the negative effects of divorce can begin months or even years before the

divorce (Amato, 2000). I did not choose this theory because my study will focus on independent adult children who are not living in the home, and who may not be aware of the marital decline before the divorce decision.

Another theory considered for the conceptual framework was the self-perception theory. Bem's (1972) self-perception theory addresses the adjustment phases and transition of a large event in someone's life. The main objective of Bem's self-perception theory is to understand how individuals adjusted to their parents' divorce. Because the purpose of this study is to understand how the participants feel about marriage and divorce after witnessing the event, rather than through the adjustment phases, this theory did not align with the purpose of the study.

The social cognitive theory was also considered for this study. Social cognitive theory is used commonly for divorce because it discusses how people can be influenced by the decisions of those around them (Bandura, 1999). Bandura's (1999) social cognitive theory is similar to social learning theory but it includes an element of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy involves looking at an individual's views about their capability of gaining control over certain events in their lives (Bandura, 1999). Although this theory aligns with the study, the element of self-efficacy was not essential in this study and was therefore excluded.

Although this study is designed specifically for adult children of gray divorce, there is a possibility of transferability. This study can be transferable to understand marital and divorce attitudes among other associations similar to parent-child relationships. Although transferability is possible, it is not the main desire of qualitative

research and is limited in intrinsic studies. (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Quality Research International, 2020).

Limitations

There are many limitations to this study. Rahman (2017) and Choy (2014) both stated that the time-consuming nature of qualitative studies is a limitation. The time it will take for interviews, analysis, and data transcription will be a limitation within this study. Researcher bias is also a limitation for this study because I will perform the interviews and translate the data, allowing me the opportunity to interpret the data according to my agenda or beliefs (Galdas, 2017). To mitigate researcher bias in this study, I will strive to remain impartial throughout the data collection and analysis process. In addition, I will ensure that I am not personally affiliated with any participants in the study. I will use a journal to record my thoughts, feelings, and experiences during the study process. Richards and Hemphill (2018) stated that the use of a journal can help mitigate bias in the study. I will also use bracketing to eliminate bias. Bracketing is the ability of the researcher to know, acknowledge, and set aside preconceived ideas and personal beliefs during the study (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Fischer (2009) claimed that through this technique of bracketing, biases can be recognized and separated from the actual data collected to allow for unclouded judgment during the study. Through bracketing and recording my thoughts, experiences, and beliefs, I can help ensure that I do not misinterpret the data collected or bias the data with my prejudices.

In this study, I will be using snowball sampling which has some limitations. Snowball sampling requires asking for referrals. A limitation of snowball sampling is that

participants who recruit others for the study may have transferred their thoughts and feelings onto the new participant (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). To address this possible bias, I will ask referring members not to discuss the study.

Purposive sampling will also be used in this study. Purposive sampling requires participants to meet a specific criterion in order to qualify for the study (Vasileiou et al., 2018). One limitation of this method is that participants are personally selected by the researcher allowing for researcher bias (Etikan et al., 2015). Another limitation is that all participants experienced gray divorce at varying times so those who experienced it more recently may have stronger feelings than those who experienced the phenomenon many years ago.

Limitations may arise during the interview process as well. Participants will be volunteering for this study, meaning that those who self-select to be in the study, may hold higher interest in the topic (Lefever et al., 2007). The views of those who willingly participate may differ from those who do not participate. I will use semistructured interviews to assess the experiences of the participants. If any participant does not answer a question or a group of questions, additional interviews may have to be done to reach understanding and saturation thereby expanding the time of the study further. Participants will not be selected or excluded from this study based on race, gender, or age, so the study may lack diversity. Lastly, interviews will be conducted using video conferencing technology or telephone interviews. These forms of interviews limit visual contact and will decrease or eliminate the non-verbal cues that may have been seen during the interview process (Alsaawi, 2014).

Significance

This study will contribute to previous research regarding how divorce impacts society and family members by exploring the perceptions of marriage and divorce of adult children of gray divorce. The results of this study may serve as information to government programs. It can also be resourceful to individuals who are considering a late-life divorce or who have been impacted by gray divorce. Understanding the implications of divorce on an adult child may bring new information about the benefits or risks associated with gray divorce.

Knowledge of how divorce decisions impact adult children can bring about positive social change with new insight for future programs to assist individuals affected by gray divorce. Greater interest and additional resources for marital counselors, mediators, lawyers, social workers, as well as the potential for divorce education programs for the divorcing individuals and their adult children. Programs or classes can decrease divorce and reduce the negative effects of divorce in the lives of adult children. Programs could educate gray divorcees on how to talk to their children about late-life divorce as well as understand the best way to cope with the transitions of divorce later in life. Lastly, new programs could emerge for ACOD that aid in the transition period, offer comfort, allow for support groups, and teach coping skills to manage the changes in their lives.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I described the rise in gray divorce within the United States and how divorce affects people's lives as well as influences the attitudes of marriage and divorce

of children and adults. An intrinsic, single case study has been selected so that I can openly discuss the thoughts and attitudes of marriage and divorce with adult children of gray divorce. In the interview process, I will explore how, or if, this phenomenon has impacted their thoughts regarding marriage and divorce.

The number of late-life divorces in the United States has doubled since the 1990s, with 1 in every 4 divorces being categorized as a gray divorce (Brown & Lin, 2012). Late-life divorce brings different challenges to the older families than those affected by early divorce (Ascandra et al., 2019). COD have been studied regarding their emotional, physical, mental, social, and academic status after divorce and are known to have lasting impressions that affect attitudes of marriage and divorce in adulthood (Lee, 2018; Shimkowski et al., 2018). Because late-life divorce is a new phenomenon, little is known about how ACOD or adult children of gray divorce are impacted regarding their attitudes of marriage and divorce (Abetz & Wang, 2017).

The purpose of this study is to understand how attitudes of marriage and divorce are impacted by gray divorce. This will be done using an intrinsic, single case study guided by social learning theory. Social learning theory states that individuals are influenced consciously and unconsciously by the environment and the people around them (Bandura, 1971). I am seeking to understand how an adult witnessing their parents' divorce, after observing a long-term marriage, impacts the child's attitudes toward marriage and divorce. Understanding the impact of gray divorce on adult children is important to expand the knowledge about late-life divorce. Other theories were explored before selecting social learning theory, but social learning theory was selected for its

observational element and because it has been used in previous studies regarding divorce and parent-child relationships.

Interviews will be conducted to inquire what the participants observed about their parent's marriage and how they felt about marriage and divorce as children as well as how they view marriage and divorce after their parent's late-life divorce. Participants will be selected according to their qualifications of the study and will be collected using social media networks and the Walden participant pool. Limitations of this study were addressed along with the planned efforts to address those limitations.

This study aims to contribute to the research regarding the impact of divorce on families and society. The information seeks to assist government programs, counselors, lawyers, individuals impacted by gray divorce, and all other organizations and individuals that work with marriage, divorce, or family-related issues. Providing further information regarding the impact of gray divorce may lead to reform within organizations or to the introduction of new programs for those affected by gray divorce.

Chapter 2 addresses the theoretical foundation of this study. It explains social learning theory and how it has been used in related studies, how it will guide this study, and why it is the appropriate framework for this study. Chapter 2 includes a review of marriage and divorce in the United States and discusses the social and legal changes regarding marriage and divorce over the last 500 years. Chapter 2 goes on to explain gray divorce and the issues associated with divorcing later in life, including, the positive and negative effects of divorce on individuals, their children, and the adult children of divorce. I review the previous and current literature regarding the attitudes of marriage

and divorce of each of these populations and how it has shifted and impacted the marriage and divorce rates and attitudes in the United States.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The majority of cultures around the world expect adults to marry at some point in their lives and are socially and economically affected by the institution of marriage (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Goldstein & Kenney, 2001). Marriage traditions vary according to time period and culture, but marriage itself has been essential in shaping policy, laws, and cultural norms for thousands of years (Cott, 1976). Although the cultures and rituals of marriage around the world vary, I will focus only on heterosexual marriage and divorce trends in the United States.

Marriage influences culture and society, but divorce was one of the most influential changes in the United States, especially in the 20th century (Amato, 2017). Divorce has been available in the United States since before its official founding, but the increase in divorce in the last 120 years has raised questions about the short and long-term effects of divorce (Amato, 2000; Celello, 2009; Onuorah, 2018). The United States Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) estimated that over 1 million children and more than 750,000 adults are impacted by divorce annually.

The increase of divorce in the last century has led to studies on the short-term and long-term effects of social, educational, individual, and economic impacts following divorce (Amato, 2000; Onuorah, 2018). Divorce remains a common occurrence within families in the United States and is increasing in families with adult children (Franz, 2017). The rapid rise of divorce among the 50 years and older generations is important to study to understand how and if gray divorce is shaping the attitudes of marriage and divorce in the subsequent generations. Research needs to be done to determine if late-life

divorce has an impact on subsequent generations' attitudes regarding the importance of marriage, the value of marriage, or has little to no effect on people's attitudes about marriage and divorce.

Throughout Chapter 2, I will discuss the methods and theory used to complete this study and discuss why they are appropriate. I will discuss the history of marriage as well as divorce. I will explain the past and current research that has been done regarding the effects and attitudes of divorce over the last century. Understanding the history of marriage and divorce will provide a foundation for recognizing the need to continue research on the effects of divorce. In Chapter 2, I will explain what research has been completed regarding marriage, divorce, COD, ACOD, gray divorce, attitudes of marriage and divorce, and what further studies are warranted for the future.

Literature Search Strategy

Web-based search engines were the primary source to locate peer-reviewed articles regarding this case study. The main sites used were SocIndex, APA PsychInfo, PubMed, Education Source, Social Sciences Citation Index, Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and National Databases. The keywords searched to gather data regarding this study were the following: *gray divorce, divorce, children of divorce, adult children of divorce, adult children of gray divorce, attitudes of divorce, history of divorce, risk of divorce, marriage, history of marriage, attitudes of marriage, marriage in the United States, Colonial America, marriage in the 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st century, divorce in the 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st century, marriage trends, divorce trends,*

effects of divorce, effects of gray divorce, effects of divorce on children, social norms, cohabitation, social learning theory, and Albert Bandura.

These searches generated thousands of articles, so subcategories and topics were used to filter the articles. Articles, regardless of year, were used if they were relevant, peer-reviewed; appropriate to the topic; and shared insight regarding marriage, divorce, or attitudes related to marriage and divorce. The articles gathered data from research regarding marriage, divorce, adults, and COD throughout American history. The question used to gather information was the following: What are the attitudes of marriage and divorce among adult children of gray divorce? This question guided the terms searched, questions asked during interviews, and the interpretation of the data collected.

Theoretical Foundation

Social learning theory was selected to guide this study. Social learning theory states that people are influenced by others and what an individual sees influences their attitudes and behaviors regarding future situations (Stuart & Jacobson, 1986). This theory states that people can be influenced by more than personal experience; they can be influenced by the written word and by observing others (Leonard & Blane, 1999). Bandura (1977a), the founder of social learning theory, discovered that while people learn from their own experiences, they are equally influenced by and learn from the experiences of others. Children are proof of this concept; as it has been documented that children are influenced by their parents' actions and tend to repeat the behaviors seen, even when a verbal contradiction is given (Bandura, 1971; Jackson & Fife, 2018). For example, children who have witnessed divorce in their homes as children tend to suffer in future

adult relationships (Amato, 1996; Bartell, 2006; Conway et al., 2003; Fagan & Churchill, 2012; Kelly, 2000). Although social learning theory cannot explain all failed COD relationships, it demonstrates that the actions of parents do influence their children's behaviors in adulthood (Bartell, 2006).

Bandura's (1977b) theory explains that people use others' behaviors to model their own in unknown situations. Social learning theory states that a person does not have to personally experience an event to be shaped by that event, and witnessing that event can change the on-looker's future attitude and behavior (Stuart & Jacobson, 1986). Social learning theory occurs in four stages or processes. The first stage includes an observation stage of noticing an action or behavior, the second stage is retaining that information, the third stage is learning through actual diction or by applying symbolic representation to the modeled behaviors, and the fourth stage is when the observer takes the information learned and observed and either applies it or rejects it in their own lives (Bandura, 1977b; Jackl, 2016). Using this model, Cartwright (2006) and Kapinus (2005) found that COD tend to either emulate what their parents did wrong in a relationship, or they take what they have observed and transform it into a lesson of what to avoid in future relationships.

Kapinus (2005) used social learning theory to demonstrate that not only are parents' actions transferred to their children, but attitudes can also be transferred. Kapinus discovered that children who have parents with tolerant views of divorce tend to share that opinion. Segrin et al. (2005) found that when children who witnessed conflict in their homes as children, they were more likely to hold negative attitudes about marriage when they were adults. Although the children within these studies had never experienced

divorce personally, the secondary experience and the observations of their parents' behavior and their parent's attitudes influence their actions and attitudes.

Social learning theory has been used for studies regarding children and divorce. Research related to child and adult well-being after divorce, relationship stability and patterns, and attitudes of divorce have all been studied using social learning theory as the guide (Greenwood, 2014; Herzog & Cooney, 2002; Johnson & Bradbury, 2015; Kapinus, 2005; Mack, 2001). Social learning theory pairs well with parent-child-related studies because the observations of the child transfer into behavior, attitudes, and action, as the child enters into similar situations in adulthood (Kapinus, 2005; Lee, 2018). Cui et al., (2011), Kapinus (2005), Jorgensen and Johnson (1980), and Mack (2001) used social learning theory to understand how children are impacted by the attitudes and actions of their parents.

Social learning theory will be the guiding influence in this study because I will be speaking with adult children who have observed the marriage and divorce of their parents. Social learning theory fits well with this study because it is designed to help understand how an adult child's observation of their parents' divorce influences their attitudes of marriage and divorce. Social learning theory states that people are influenced by what they see and that a parent's actions and attitudes shape the way that children approach and feel about their own personal and romantic relationships in adulthood (Jackson & Fife, 2018). These adult children have seen and been impacted by both marriage and divorce; in this study, I will explore whether the marriage they witnessed as

a child or the divorce witnessed as an adult, is more prominent in their attitudes towards marriage and divorce.

Literature Review of Marriage and Divorce in the United States

Over the past several centuries, economical, educational, and social evolution have changed the appearance and function of marriage within the United States (Lundberg & Pollak, 2015). Marriage was crucial to the survival of societies and individuals but has transitioned into an institution of individual fulfillment and accommodating the existing social norms (Amato, 2017; Areen, 2014; Carlson, 2015; Coontz, 2004; Yamin, 2012). Divorce has evolved as well. Society was opposed to divorce, no matter the legal status or reasoning, but divorce gradually has become more accepted. At the end of the 19th century, divorce was allowed for extreme reasons including abandonment and abuse, but by the late 20th century, divorce was permitted regardless of the reason (Brown & Lin, 2012; Canham et al., 2014; Crowley, 2017; Fields, 2016). Although the styles of marriage, social norms, divorce rates, and marital roles have varied over the centuries, the majority of Americans still marry at some point in their lives (Cherlin, 2004; Copen et al., 2012; Lauer & Yodanis, 2010). Although half of the marriages in the United States are ending in divorce, and marriage is no longer socially or economically required, Americans are still choosing to marry (Brown & Wright, 2019; Lauer & Yodanis, 2010; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007; Uecker & Stokes, 2008).

The social norms of marriage and divorce have shifted over the centuries and will be discussed in the following sections. Each section will be divided into a time period

that encompasses the social norms of that time. Although some centuries remained largely unchanged, others shifted within specific decades and will be divided to incorporate the changes made to marriage and divorce at that time in history.

1600-1700

Colonial America was a difficult place to live with more than half of the immigrants dying in the first few years of arrival from harsh climates, disease, or disputes with Native Americans (Areen, 2014; Thompson, 1974). Marriage was vital to survival in the New World so the early settlers married quickly and at young ages (Areen, 2014; Carlson, 2015; Greven, 1972). Marriage between a man and woman was considered the “basic cell of society” and it was believed by the European settlers that the American Colonies could only survive on a foundation of strong God-fearing families that raised righteous new generations (Carlson, 2015; Onuorah, 2018).

Marriage acted as the foundation for how the American Colonies were settled. Marriage was the means to claim a spouse, property, and inheritance, and it was the only means to provide rights for women and children (Cherlin, 2004; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006). The marriage practiced at this time is referred to as “institutional marriage” (Amato, 2017). Institutional marriage is comparable to a business transaction, centered on ensuring financial gain and status, and is focused on the greater good of the family rather than personal happiness (Amato, 2017; Carlson, 2015).

Marriage was a religious and social ceremony between a man and woman, performed by a clergyman or magistrate, to ensure validity and grant permission for sexual relations and procreation (Killias, 2000; Onuorah, 2018; Smith, 2010; Strong,

1973). Husband and wife pledged emotional, sexual, and financial allegiance to one another regardless of future circumstances (Onuorah, 2018). The selection of a mate ensured personal survival and was focused on the practicalities of securing a comfortable life rather than fulfilling the desires of love (Coontz, 2004).

Economic factors played a key role in mate selection. Women at this time could marry above their station due to the surplus of men, as social status was not given high consideration in Colonial America (Carlson, 2015; Lantz et al., 1968). Due to this uneven proportion of men to women, women had more control over whom they married (Thompson, 1974). The uneven ratio of men and women helped women maintain power throughout the marriage and allowed them to influence their husbands in matters that would normally have been deemed inappropriate for a woman to interject (Lantz et al., 1968).

Although divorce was uncommon within society, it could be awarded to those who were considered barren or who could prove an invalid marriage had occurred (Areen, 2014; Carlson, 2015; Cherlin, 2014). Couples who were unable to conceive had the option of continuing in a childless marriage, or they could dissolve the marriage on the grounds of sterility, but it was not unheard of for the individual to have to undergo an extensive examination to prove that they or the other spouse was sterile (Carlson, 2015; Lafleur, 2017). An example of an invalid marriage would be if a man married a woman when he was already married. A divorce, or more commonly, an annulment, could be sought after an invalid marriage but the action of seeking a divorce did not guarantee that it would be granted (Areen, 2014; Lafleur, 2017). When a divorce was granted, spouses were left

socially alienated and the party at fault suffered harsh legal repercussions (Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Eekelaar, 2003; Lafleur, 2017).

Divorce became more popular as the European revolutionary Martin Luther adopted new beliefs that those deserted or in unfaithful marriages should be granted a divorce (Areen, 2014; Cherlin, 2009). Because the immigrants were influenced by the European culture, Luther's perspective was accepted, and it liberalized the standards for divorce in Colonial America (Lantz et al., 1968). These changes in divorce attitude led to additional reasons for divorce to be approved including abandonment, as well as a push for state-regulated marriage rather than religious marriage (Areen, 2014; Carlson, 2015).

1700-1850

The 1700s brought changes to marriage and divorce, but it did not change the attitudes or beliefs of those living in this era. Marriage was a community affair rather than a private matter, supported by friends, neighbors, and church members, who assisted and rallied around the newly wedded couples as they advanced into adulthood (Amato, 2017; Coontz, 2004; Yamin, 2009). This move to an independent life was pivotal because the couple stepped into new roles of providing for themselves, creating a family, and building a strong marriage to ensure a successful society (Amato et al., 2007; Onuorah, 2018).

The status and class of individuals were now considered important and were determined by money, title, and marital status (Eekelaar, 2003; Smith, 2010). Individuals were so concerned with social opinion that it did not matter if they liked their spouse if they were able to fulfill their gendered roles and were respected in society (Strong, 1973). Institutional marriage was still practiced at this time and the selection of a mate was

crucial to the long-term livelihoods of each family (Cott, 1976). Marriage selection determined power, money, and social status for the current and subsequent generations (Bernard, 2013; Coontz, 2004; McDougall & Pearsall, 2017).

Status and power carried over into the community and home life. Men held the lead or patriarchal position within the family taking full control of money, land, and all other decisions, even if it left the family destitute (Cherlin, 2014; Smith, 2010). People may have viewed marriage as a partnership, but men had legal and financial control in the family decisions (Smith, 2010). Men and women were expected to put their family's interests above their own and fulfill the designated responsibilities assigned to them regardless of individual happiness (Amato, 2004).

Community members were aware of and invested in the marriages of the couples in their towns and would attempt to reconcile marital disputes or follow those whom were thought to be unfaithful (Cott, 1976). When individuals were caught in adultery, they were confronted (many times during the act), and spouses and local authorities were notified (Cott, 1976). Although the attitudes regarding infidelity in the 1700s were that unfaithful men should be ostracized and women should be sympathized with, the actual consequences were that men did not receive any repercussions, and women were shamed, ostracized, and could spend up to 2 years in prison (Lantz et al., 1968).

Rulings for divorce were based on the circumstances of infertility, abandonment, or adultery (Cott, 1976; Lafleur, 2017). Infertile partners could petition for divorce, but a petition stating infertility was not always sufficient enough to be granted (Lafleur, 2017). Infidelity, as well as, abuse were regarded as family issues although some states issued

laws stating that divorce could be sought due to abuse (Barr, 2012; Cherlin, 2009; Lantz et al., 1968; Ryan, 2015). Spousal abuse was considered a husband's right until the American Revolution when the governments took a higher interest in creating laws against abuse due to a high volume of divorcements claiming abuse (Barr, 2012; Ryan, 2015). In 1760, 0.005% of women filed for divorce and by 1800, that had increased to 0.036% of women petitioning for divorce (Ryan, 2015). The majority of divorces at this time stated adultery, not abuse, as the main complaint for divorce, but divorce was seldom sought even though both adultery and abuse were illegal and present in marriages (Cott, 1976; de Tocqueville, 2006).

Although women could petition for divorce stating adultery and abuse, divorce was not always granted (Ryan, 2015). Lower-class and middle-class women more commonly filed for divorce because they had less to lose financially and socially, but illiteracy kept many women from filing for divorce because they could not sign their names (Cott, 1976; Ryan, 2015). Because women were dependent on their husbands for financial support and were not allowed to own land, divorce was financially and socially devastating (Barr, 2012; Cherlin, 2014). It was common for women to delay for an average of 5 years before filing for divorce or to remain in the marriage until death despite the emotionally and physically harmful environment (Cott, 1976). Because everything legally belonged to the husband, women were left with no money, land, or inheritance after divorce, leaving them to look for another husband who would care and provide for them and their children (Barr, 2012; Smith, 2010). When divorce occurred, the matter of

children was rarely discussed because divorce concerned the adults, and children's opinions or feelings regarding the divorce were irrelevant (Cott, 1976).

1850-1920

When the Industrial Revolution began around the Civil War era, the changes in the U.S. economy and societal norms "transformed every aspect of American life" (Williams, 2003, p. 48). Some researchers claimed that these changes also brought about the fragmentation of the family unit (Rosenfeld, 2006). Before the revolution began, 80% of the population worked on farms and lived on what they provided for themselves (Williams, 2008). The Industrial Revolution created jobs in urban areas and changed the everyday life of families by providing jobs in factories and mills (Cherlin, 2004; Rosenfeld, 2006; Williams, 2008). With these changes in lifestyle and migration to urban areas, came the introduction of breadwinner and homemaker roles where men worked long hours at a factory or mill and women stayed home to complete all of the indoor chores and tend the children and boarders in the home (Amato, 2017; Cherlin, 2014).

The years 1880 through 1920 are referred to as the Progressive Era, partly due to the change in family life and marriage selection (Yamin, 2009). People recognized that they desired love within their marriages rather than status alone, but love was not always a feasible element, and the practicality of everyday life was still at the forefront of how to choose a mate (Coontz, 2004). Marriage in the Progressive Era primarily served a political, social, and economic function, leaving the needs and desires of women and children unfulfilled (Coontz, 2004). Marriage was required to be considered respectable; it served the purpose of function, provided a means for survival, and ensured that each

person had a role to fulfill (Cherlin, 2005). Marriage and divorce were considered a community and state affair (Yamin, 2009).

Divorce was viewed as socially unacceptable, but legally it was allowed for adultery, desertion, or partners who had a condition deemed “revolting” like epilepsy, schizophrenia, or a sexual disease (Willrich, 2000; Yamin, 2009). This stigma of divorce kept the divorce percentage low. In 1900, 8.1 % of people divorced and by 1916, 11% of Americans divorced, with one-quarter of those stating desertion as the reason (Willrich, 2000).

1920-1960

In the 20th century, love was considered vital rather than only desirable within marriage (Davis, 2008). Some of the changes relating to the family within this century were that spouses began sharing financial and childcare roles, individuals married at later ages, partners cohabitated prior to or without intended marriage, children were born outside of marriage, and the law was changed to allow divorce for any reason (Glick, 1988; Lauer & Yodanis, 2010). These adjustments began gradually but gained momentum as the century continued. Although some of the modifications have been beneficial for marriage and society, others have led researchers to declare that marriage has become deinstitutionalized and irrelevant for sex, children, cohabitation, societal progression, and life satisfaction (Cherlin, 2004; Wilcox & Dew, 2010; Wilcox et al., 2015).

In 1924, a new category of marriage emerged called “companionate marriage” that created a more equal approach between spouses embraced a partnership mentality (Davis, 2008; Wilcox & Dew, 2010). Companionate marriages have high levels of

commitment, maintain traditional roles within the family, have low levels of self-interest, and hold the highest levels of marital satisfaction (Davis, 2008; Wilcox & Dew, 2010). Although companionate marriage is similar to institutional marriage in gendered roles and responsibilities, companionate marriage included love, affection, and cooperation (Amato, 2017; Celeslo, 2009). Couples chose who they married, with or without the consent of the family, and married for love rather than status or financial gain (Davis, 2008; McLean & Syed, 2015). The strength of marriage increased within companionate marriage (Wilcox & Dew, 2010). Marriage was a voluntary commitment rather than a tradition expected for bearing children, engaging in sex, and advancing within a social network (Wilcox & Dew, 2010).

The pattern of people choosing their partners, living in a less patriarchal system, and men being the financial providers and women being homemakers continued from the 1920s through the 1950s (Pessin, 2018). The man of the home would contribute to the chores of mowing the lawn, caring for the automobile, and maintenance within the home, while the woman was responsible for cooking, cleaning, shopping, laundry, and childcare (Grunow et al., 2012). Children lived with both of their biological parents and family roles were structured (Cherlin, 2005). The success of companionate marriage and the increase in marital satisfaction led to a marriage boom following World War II (Sanchez-Dominguez & Lundgren, 2015). This marriage boom was disrupted by a new form of marriage that led to the “marriage bust” in the coming decades (Sanchez-Dominguez & Lundgren, 2015; Schellekens, 2017; Schoen & Canudas-Romo, 2006; Wilcox & Dew, 2010).

1960-1970

The 1960s were an era of psychological, gender, and sexual revolutions (Wilcox & Dew, 2010). The Vietnam War, “free love,” The Beatles, Civil Rights activists, President Kennedy’s assassination, and Rock and Roll culture along with avid drug use mark the 1960s as a memorable and influential era. The 1960s are marked as a time of fighting for individual rights as well as creating social change. Women’s rights, Black rights, and sexual equality were transformed in this decade due to reform and new laws advocating for these populations (Marwick, 1988; McWilliams, 2021).

The revolutions created a shift from collectivism to individualism within marriages that led to increased divorce in the United States (Wilcox & Dew, 2010). These transitions led to delayed marriage, more children out of wedlock, cohabitation, and an increase in the number of national divorces in the United States (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Glick, 1988; Hendi, 2019). The 1960s are said to be the most influential decade regarding marriage and divorce in the United States. Marriage took an individualistic direction by altering the family structure, behaviors within marriage, and marital expectations (Amato, 2000; Cherlin, 2004; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006).

The new kind of marriage that emerged is called “individualistic marriage.” This marriage is based on love, personal needs, desires, fulfillment, progression, and satisfaction within the marriage; if one person is not satisfied within the marriage, the marriage has failed (Amato, 2017; Cherlin, 2004; Killias, 2000). This is a shift from the previous decades and centuries where marriage and family centered around God, family, children, and societal expectations (Amato et al., 2007; Coontz, 2004; Wilcox & Dew,

2010). Individualistic marriages consist of individuals focused on personal progress, achievement, and maturity, but still desire love and a partner (Cherlin, 2004). This shift lessened the significance of marriage (Amato et al., 2007). Individualistic marriage and the “free love” movement of the 1960s pushed for egalitarian roles between spouses; removed the stigma of premarital sex, children out of wedlock, and divorce; decreased fertility; and increased cohabitation and divorce (Amato, 2000, 2017; Hendi, 2019; Pessin, 2018; Swinth, 2018).

1970-2000

The 1970s and 1980s were significant regarding the family and brought further changes to family dynamics and social norms. Women working outside the home increased; couples were more diverse in terms of race, age, and gender; marriages including stepchildren increased; and the egalitarian movement began dissolving the breadwinner and homemaker roles (Amato et al., 2007). How society viewed marriage, as well as roles within marriage, shifted in the years approaching and after 1980 (Amato et al., 2007; Knox, 1980).

One of the most significant shifts in the family in the 1980s was that women were taking high-profile careers outside the home and contributing to the income of the household (Knox, 1980; Swinth, 2018). The increase in job equality for women and the number of women working outside the home led to more independence as well as a decrease in men’s pay (Cahn, 2018). Although this change was beneficial to families of single mothers, it challenged the traditional lifestyle of fathers as breadwinners because men were no longer able to support the household with one salary (Cahn, 2018). This

lifestyle change also increased the family stress and conflict levels within marriage (Amato et al., 2007). Cherlin (2014) and Pessin (2018) stated that after the economy dipped and companies moved overseas, families were forced to compensate for the income loss. Cherlin and Pessin implied that women who did not work before the recession were more likely to work outside of the home following the recession. The household and childcare responsibilities transitioned from the breadwinner and homemaker roles into an egalitarian movement leading to fewer marriages and births (Pessin, 2018; Swinth, 2018; Uecker & Stokes, 2008). Although couples struggled with this change originally, the stress and conflicts of an egalitarian marriage lessened each year as long as the wife did not work excessive hours (Amato et al., 2007). By 2000, women working outside the home was no longer viewed as detrimental to the health of the marriage (Amato et al., 2007; Pessin, 2018).

The stigma attached to divorce disintegrated and divorce rates increased exponentially between 1970 and 2000. The greatest increase in divorce occurred after the no-fault divorce law was passed in 1969, meaning that one spouse could file for divorce without the consent of the other partner (Amato, 2017; Cherlin, 2004; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Wardle, 1991). After this law was implemented, divorce was increasingly accepted by society, and divorce rates increased 136% from 1960 to 1980, which was the greatest increase the United States has ever seen (Amato, 2010, 2017; Amato & Hohmann-Marriot, 2007; Cherlin, 2004; Hendi, 2019). Nakonezny et al. (1995) found that after the change in law was implemented, there was an increase in divorces filed in 44 of the 50 states. Hendi (2019) and Glenn (1999) disagreed that the no-fault divorce policy

was the sole reason for the increase in divorce, but they stated that marriages have changed since the 1960s. Glenn (1999) stated that the no-fault divorce law may have lessened the stigma of divorce, thereby increasing the number of individuals petitioning for divorce, but does not hold the law as the sole reason for the increase of divorce.

2000-2020

Marriage is no longer required to obtain property or social status because the law recognizes women and children outside the bounds of marriage (Coontz, 2004). Marriage is also not mandatory for beginning a sexual relationship, cohabitating, or having children (Amato, 2017; Cherlin, 2004; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Wilcox et al., 2015). Before the 1960s, sex before marriage was illegal and considered offensive, but as it became more socially acceptable, the stigma of premarital sex and cohabitation before marriage dissolved (Killias, 2000; Kuperberg, 2018) Sex before marriage is still legally a misdemeanor in some states, but has become the new socially accepted American culture and is deemed irrelevant (Leins, 2020). Marriages in the 21st century consist of two independent individuals choosing to love and share their lives rather than individuals seeking social or financial status (Cherlin, 2004). The average household is egalitarian, with dual-income homes and an equal split in childcare, chores, and financial obligations (Cherlin, 2004).

Expressing love within a marriage in the mid-1900s transformed marriage from a financial and practical obligation to a desire to have a meaningful relationship based on love, intimacy, and friendship (Cherlin, 2004; Yamin, 2012). Along with the requirement of love, individuals and couples have higher expectations within marriage (Brown &

Wright, 2019). Although individuals hold themselves to a lower standard after marriage, they believe their spouse needs to perform the financial, emotional, and romantic expectations to keep them satisfied, rather than both people contributing to a successful family unit (Amato, 2000; Cherlin, 2004; Finkel et al., 2014).

The deinstitutionalization of marriage has begun taking place over the last few decades and marriage is no longer associated with living together, sex, and childbearing as it has been in the past (Cherlin, 2004; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Wilcox & Dew, 2010). If marriage were deinstitutionalized, couples would no longer view marriage as a necessary or vital stage in life. Cherlin (2004) stated that the deinstitutionalization of marriage would not be an unexpected change in relationships as the number of individuals desiring independence, cohabitating, and having children outside of marriage increases. Not all researchers agree with this standpoint. Lauer and Yodanis (2010) stated that for marriage to be deinstitutionalized, marriage would need to cease to exist because people will always desire the rules and regulations that guard the relationship. Lauer and Yodanis' standpoint is supported when observing how Americans claim to value the symbol of marriage and how many individuals marry each year (Amato, 2017; Pessin, 2018). Although individuals are choosing to live with their partners and marry later than in previous decades and centuries, they are still choosing to marry and make a formal commitment (Willoughby et al., 2015).

In the last 120 years, divorce has significantly altered American culture. Divorce rates in the early 1900s were less than 10% and were for reasons of abandonment or adultery (Willrich, 2000). Divorce in the second half of the 20th century increased to

nearly 50%, giving the United States one of the highest divorce rates in the industrialized world (Amato, 2000). Once individualized marriage began, divorce was not limited to adultery, fraud, or abuse, but allowed divorce for “changes on priorities, expectations, and commitment” or when one person does not feel the relationship is beneficial to them any longer (Shimkowski et al., 2018, p. 1). If either spouse’s needs were not being met, divorce was seen as an inevitable and necessary step, thereby increasing the number of couples who divorced (Amato, 2010).

Gray Divorce

The 20th century included three different marriage styles and introduced a new kind of divorce. Gray divorce, which is divorce after one partner is 50 years or older, became a new phenomenon in the 1990s and doubled by 2010 (Brown & Lin, 2012). This phenomenon is predicted to rise further as divorce becomes more socially accepted by all age groups in the United States (Brown & Lin, 2012; Canham et al., 2014; Crowley, 2019a; Fields, 2016). Life expectancy has increased since the 1970s from the early and mid-1970s to the early and mid-1980s contributing to the increase in the number of individuals over the age of 50 within the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). From 1980 to 2018, the number of women over the age of 65 years who were divorced increased from 3-14% and divorced men over the age of 65 years increased from 4-11% within that same time period (Mather et al., 2019). As of 2017 in the United States, one-quarter of divorces were categorized as gray divorce (Brown & Lin, 2012). Gray divorce occurs most often within couples who have been married multiple times and for short periods (Brown & Lin, 2012; Lin et al., 2018). Thirty-four percent of gray divorced individuals

have been married for at least 30 years (Stepler, 2017). Studies have been done to determine a cause for gray divorce, the divorcee's attitudes of marriage and divorce, the overall well-being of the individuals who divorce, and the financial effects that follow gray divorce (Brown & Wright, 2019; Crowley, 2019b; Dunleavy, 2010; Ferguson, 2013; Gray et al., 2011; Kirby & Leopardi, 2016).

Abuse, marital dissatisfaction, addiction, falling out of love, lack of trust, individual fulfillment, and issues related to sex are listed as common reasons for early life divorce as well as gray divorce (Canham et al., 2014; Wu & Schimmele, 2007; Zineldin, 2019). Although individuals who divorce later in life are confident in their decisions, gray divorcees struggle with financial security, depression, and social isolation (Amato, 2000; Franz, 2017; Kirby & Leopardi, 2016; Wu & Schimmele, 2007). Crowley (2019b) explained that the varying changes in marital styles over the last century may account for an increase in gray divorce. Crowley stated that couples may desire differing marriage styles or may disagree about roles or violations within marriage. This differing belief in marriage systems may lead to divorce because divorce has become a socially acceptable option (Crowley, 2017; Kuczynski, 2004.). Although divorce is socially accepted more than in the past years, it still is accompanied by challenges involving finances, physical, mental, and emotional health, and social wellbeing.

Financial

Financial challenges of dividing assets, determining alimony, and configuring healthcare expenses are part of the divorce process. Divorce among older couples is associated with having to downsize financially (Gray et al., 2011; Wind & Dewilde,

2018). Although the one spouse may be required to pay alimony or spousal support temporarily or permanently, men tend to worry less about finances after a late-life divorce (Cao & Torres, 2018; Justia, 2021). Alimony is based on the number of years the couple was married; when married less than 20 years, alimony is paid for half of the duration of marriage in years, or until cohabitation or remarriage (Find Law, 2021). When couples are married for more than 20 years, alimony may be required until cohabitation, remarriage, or death (Find Law, 2021).

When divorcing at an older age, the potential for earning an income lessens (Kirby & Leopardi, 2016). The increase in working women over the age of 50 has been speculated to account for the increase in late-life divorce because women are financially capable of providing for themselves (Canham et al., 2014; Sharma, 2015). For the women who are not financially stable, they may receive alimony and their share of assets, but more than a quarter of divorced women over the age of 62 receive less in social security and live below the poverty line (Ellin, 2015). Women suffer more than men financially after divorce because they tend to have a less steady career history and may lack the skills needed to reenter the workforce (Cao & Torres, 2018; Kirby & Leopardi, 2016).

Health insurance costs are also an issue for those who divorce later in life. Couples who use an employer's medical coverage are required to find a new individual or employer insurance or they qualify for COBRA for up to 36 months after the divorce (Goodell, 2020; Kirby & Leopardi, 2016). The nonemployer spouse can transfer to a COBRA policy for up to 36 months, but this change in health insurance is costly

(Crowley, 2021; Engle, 2020; Kirby & Leopardi, 2016). Divorce later in life tends to lead to the use of more government programs for assistance (Canham et al., 2014).

Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health

Divorce has been determined to be one of the top traumatic transitions in a person's life (Colen & Periera, 2019; Lin et al., 2019; Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007; Ordway et al., 2020). Along with the emotional issues that accompany divorce, physical issues also are associated with divorce. Divorce can bring about a temporary or permanent physical, mental, or emotional decline for individuals (Tosi & van den Broek, 2020). The quality of marriage prior to the divorce can determine how long the effects last and if the individuals experience added stress or relief following the marital dissolution (Stokes et al., 2020; Tosi & van den Broek, 2020).

Divorced individuals report higher rates of poor health after divorce and are at higher risk for psychological, cognitive, and physiological conditions later in life (Sbarra & Nietert, 2009; Zulkarnain & Korenman, 2019). Amato (2000) found that divorced individuals tend to have lower levels of well-being in physical and mental health. Depression is one of the most stated issues during and following a divorce. Lin et al. (2019) discovered that the depressive effects of divorce lasted on average about 4 years for gray divorcees and that those with adult children tend to remain in a depressive state longer. Although the mental, physical, and emotional stressors of divorced individuals tend to reduce or dissolve with time or remarriage, they still are a concern for the individuals leading up to and at the time of divorce (Lin et al., 2019; Zulkarnain & Korenman, 2019).

Social Health

Men struggle socially following a divorce. Women tend to keep the social calendar and activities going for married couples and continue with their social lives after divorce (Crowley, 2019b). Once the marriage has dissolved, men tend to have less interaction with their children and lose prior friends because the wives had stronger bonds with the friends (Cao & Torres, 2018; Crowley, 2019b; Dykstra & Fokkema, 2007). Dykstra and Fokkema (2007) state that women tend to either have stronger relationships with friends or are better at creating new relationships than men. After divorce, men's social lives lessen until they remarry and then they again rely on the new wife to maintain their social lives (Crowley, 2019b). Although individuals who divorce later in life struggle socially for a time with determining family schedules and which friendships will remain, gray divorcees mention increased new social activities as they become active in old hobbies again (Canham et al., 2014; Ellin, 2015).

Children and Adult Children of Divorce

The study of COD started gaining popularity in the mid-20th century as researchers such as Woltmann (1954), Rowntree (1955), and Monahan (1955) began publishing articles and books about the effects of divorce on family structure and children's health. Although the thoughts and feelings of children regarding divorce in previous centuries were determined irrelevant, over the past few decades, researchers have begun listening to children in an attempt to understand how children feel about and have coped with divorce (Brand et al., 2017; Cott, 1976; Dreman, 2000). With more than 1 million children affected by divorce each year in the United States, researchers have

done numerous studies to understand the effects of divorce on children (Amato, 2000; Conway et al., 2003; Vezzetti, 2016).

The majority of researchers have discovered that COD struggle with emotional, social, academic, physical, and mental health issues in childhood and into adulthood (Amato, 1993, 2000, 2010; Ferguson, 2013; Frisco et al., 2007; Gray et al., 2011; Sharma, 2015; Shimkowski et al., 2018; Vezzetti, 2016). These core issues for COD, along with, decreased overall well-being and elevated family financial burdens have been a concern for mental health professionals, schools, public health, and other family-related programs (Amato, 2000, 2010; Ferguson Jr., 2013; Gray et al., 2011; Sharma, 2015; Shimkowski et al., 2018; Vezzetti, 2016).

ACOD are children who are over the age of 18 when their parents divorced. ACOD suffer from some similar effects of divorce as well as some different or additional effects because they are more mature and at a different stage in life when the divorce occurs (Greenwood, 2014; Uphold-Carrier & Utz, 2012). Because of the increase in late-life divorce, more adult children have been impacted by their parents' marital dissolution than in previous decades.

Emotional

Divorce is stressful for all family members, and the effects can last into adulthood for children (Amato, 1993; Conway et al., 2003). Although divorce can lead to a more positive life, the events before, during, and after a divorce can be stressful for all the parties involved (Amato, 1993, 2000; Amato & Afifi, 2006). The emotional trauma of a divorce, no matter the age of the child, can affect relationships that children have with

their parents, friends, and future partners because they feel they have to protect themselves and tend to create less close relationships (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Bartell, 2006; Conway et al., 2003; Greenwood, 2014; Shimkowski et al., 2018) This emotional trauma of divorce can manifest in different ways including alcohol abuse, drugs, risky sexual behavior, or marrying young (Amato, 1996; Conway et al., 2003; Shimkowski et al., 2018). In addition to the observed issues, one-third of COD tend to feel some self-blame for the divorce (Healy et al., 1993). Self-blame then leads to harmful internal or external behavior or depression (Storksen et al., 2006; Wauterickx et al., 2006). Although not all children are negatively affected after divorce and can go on to become more self-aware and mature, divorce still influences them and researchers have found a slight decrease in overall well-being after divorce (Amato, 2000; Conway et al., 2003; Mandemakers & Kalmijn, 2014).

ACOD, along with COD, have a heightened risk of depression and tend to question why their parents got divorced (Greenwood, 2014). ACOD also struggle with feeling strained about the new boundaries regarding whom they will visit and what topics are allowed for discussion (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017; Shimkowski et al., 2018; Uphold-Carrier & Utz, 2012). When an adult's parents divorce, the decisions relating to visits, holidays, and other issues that would have normally been decided in mediation or court, now fall on the adult child (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017).

Divorce in later life leads to relationship breakdowns between the child and one or both parents due to uncertainty in the relationship, a tendency for role reversal, increased likelihood for the child to blame one parent for the divorce, and feelings of

being caught in the middle (Abetz & Wang, 2017; Greenwood, 2014; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017). ACOD worry about what they do and do not want to know about the divorce and how to emotionally support themselves and their parents (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017). The information given to an ACOD differs from what is given to a COD because parents tend to treat their adult children like friends and divulge hurtful information regarding the divorce (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017). Increased information about the divorce leads ACOD to feel responsible for their parents' and younger siblings' financial, physical, mental, and emotional support (Conway et al., 2003; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017). Many parents, especially mothers, turn to their adult children for emotional support during divorce, and this role reversal is harmful to the ACOD's emotional state as well as their relationship with both parents (Bowen & Jensen, 2015). ACOD suffer emotionally and physically with stress as they try to care for their parent's needs (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017).

Physical

Divorce leads to issues regarding children's physical health. Increased blood pressure and anxiety disorders are positively correlated with COD along with diabetes, depression, and obesity (Vezzetti, 2016). Alcohol and substance abuse is higher in COD, making this a public health issue in the United States (Vezzetti, 2016). COD tend to search for, but are able to find, an emotional connection at early ages, are more likely to engage in sex, and are at greater risk for sexual abuse when they do not live in a two-parent household (Amato, 1996; Conway et al., 2003; Vezzetti, 2016). Divorce can lead to the relocation of the family, thereby changing schools, friends, neighborhoods, and

creating a new challenge for children to maintain any sense of normalcy (Amato, 1993, 1996). Physically moving homes may be a result of lower financial stability, which is also tied to a decline in nutrition and overall health (Amato, 1993).

Although ACOD do not share all of the same concerns regarding physical relocation as COD, they do suffer some physical effects from the divorce of parents. The decisions relating to whom they will visit on weekends or holidays, and other issues that would have normally been decided in mediation or court, now fall on the adult child increasing their stress level (Greenwood, 2014; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017; Shimkowski et al., 2018). For those without a permanent home, this can be a big stressor as they must decide who to return “home” to on school breaks (Shimkowski et al., 2018). The other stressor can be the physical caring of parents who are ill since they no longer have a spouse to help care for them (Hughes & Fredenburg, 2020). Many adult children of gray divorce are relied on to be the emotional, financial, and physical support for their now parted parents (Abetz & Wang, 2017; Hughes & Fredenburg, 2020).

Mental and Academic

COD are at greater risk for mental health problems including increased risk of depression, stress, anger and aggression, and alcohol and substance abuse (Amato, 1993, 2000; Vezzetti, 2016). When a child’s lifestyle is changed dramatically, the effects can be immediate, but some are not fully witnessed until later in life (Wauterickx et al., 2006). For example, when a child’s lifestyle is downsized after divorce, this change in financial stability has also shown to have a lasting impression by increasing stress and the potential to increase the chances of depression and divorce in adulthood (Wauterickx et al., 2006).

COD are known to decline in academic achievement in the areas of reading and math in the years following the divorce, but these issues of mental health and lower achievement carry into adulthood with lower educational attainment, less employment opportunity, and lower-paying jobs (Ferrer & Pan, 2020; Frisco et al., 2007; Wauterickx et al., 2006).

ACOD who are attending college when their parents divorce struggle financially as well as developmentally and feel that they lack assistance and stability as they try to start life independently (Cooper-Sumner, 2013; Hughes & Fredenburg, 2020). Because of the changes within their home life, it is not uncommon for ACOD to alter their college plans to help their parents or because they can no longer afford school (Greenwood, 2014). Although ACOD do not suffer as much as children in regards to mental health, adolescents do report higher anxiety and depression and Ross and Wynne (2010) found that parental divorce is tied to the child's mental health. The impact on the mental health of COD and ACOD also is impacted by the mental state of the parents, especially if they suffer from depressive symptoms (Brennan et al., 2002; Pilowsky et al., 2006)

Social Health

COD suffer in relationships as they reach adulthood with earlier relationships, more relationships, and an increased risk of divorce if they do marry (Amato, 1996; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Bartell, 2006; Conway et al., 2003; Fagan & Churchill, 2012; Kelly, 2000; Pan, 2014). The risk of divorce is believed to be higher among COD because they have not observed conflict resolution in their homes and do not know how to emulate a healthy relationship (Bartell, 2006; Cunningham & Skillingstead, 2015; Gager et al., 2016). COD are more likely to marry before the age of 20 even though they

have a fear of a multigenerational pattern of failure, lower levels of relational confidence, less interest in marriage, and lower confidence in relationships (Bartell, 2006; Wolfinger, 2003). COD enter into a marriage at a young age in search of filling an emotional hole in their lives but then terminate the marriage quickly because they view marriage differently and have different expectations regarding passion, loyalty, and intimacy than children of non-divorced families (Amato, 1996; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Conway et al., 2003; Cunningham & Skillingstead, 2015; Segrin et al., 2005; Shimkowski et al., 2018; Wolfinger, 2003). COD have a 70% chance of marriage dissolution in the first 5 years of marriage (Bumpass et al., 1991). COD have higher divorce rates as well as hold differing attitudes towards marriage and family formation with a more positive view of divorce and lower interest in marriage than those who come from intact families (Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Boyer-Pennington et al., 2001; Shimkowski et al., 2018; Wauterickx et al., 2006).

The COD who do not marry young may understand the gravity of choosing a partner and can be hesitant to marry at all (Bartell, 2006; Cartwright, 2006). COD tend to create less-intimate and lower quality relationships in their lives, have issues of trust, anticipate failure, and are less likely to marry their partners even if they are cohabitating increasing the risk of divorce again (Cartwright, 2006; Conway et al., 2003; Shimkowski et al., 2018; Uphold-Carrier & Utz, 2012). According to Bartell (2006) and Boyer-Pennington et al, (2001), adults who have witnessed divorce as a child show less interest in marriage, hold less-positive views of marriage, and have a difficult time in committed relationships. Although some researchers have contradicted the findings that COD are

impacted by the divorce itself, they do confirm that COD are more hesitant in relationships, have lower expectations of marriage and higher expectations of their partners, and are more likely to seek divorce as a solution to the problems they face (Christensen & Brooks, 2001; Cooper-Sumner, 2013; Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001; Lee, 2018).

ACOD hold similar risks in relationships with more relationships and a higher likelihood to break up with their partners or to divorce even though their parents were still together when they were children (Furstenberg & Kiernan, 2001). ACOD are more aware of the issues related to divorce and tend to worry about future relationships more than COD causing feelings of insecurity and losing confidence in long-term commitments (Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Conway et al. (2003) conducted a study that consisted of graduate students whose parents were divorced. Within the study, 88% of the population had parents who were divorced prior to the child turning 18 years of age (Conway et al., 2003). Conway et al. concluded that the time in which parents divorce did not impact the ACOD's attitudes toward intimate relationships but did generate a statistically significant difference from children of intact homes, thereby supporting the previous findings.

Lastly, with the changes in the family unit, it is common for children and parents as well as siblings to have relationship issues (Greenwood, 2014). This breakdown in relationships can occur because parents confide too heavily in one child, siblings take the side of differing parents, or because siblings feel obligated to support both parents and lose time with each other (Greenwood, 2014; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017). These

relationships within the family suffer and affect the immediate family members as well as the extended family relationship (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017).

Although ACOD have different issues than COD, ACOD may not have an easier time adjusting to divorce than COD as previously thought (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017). Numerous studies have been done regarding the long-term and short-term effects of divorce on COD, studies regarding the impact on ACOD are lacking (Conway et al., 2003.) Researchers have yet to study the well-being of the adult children affected by this phenomenon (Abetz & Wang, 2017; Canham et al., 2014).

Attitudes of Marriage and Divorce

The changes in marriage and divorce have impacted the American peoples' attitudes regarding marriage and divorce over the few decades and have been studied because these attitudes affect individual's actions and how they care for future own relationships (Amato & Rogers, 1999; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Martin & Parashar, 2006; Shimkowski et al., 2018). American people through the beginning of the 20th century married for financial, practical, and social reasons and were against divorce unless dire circumstances were evident (Amato, 2017; Areen, 2014; Barr, 2012; Carlson, 2015; Cott, 1976; Lafleur, 2017). As of 2018, only 3% of people feel that marriage should be for financial gain rather than love (De Coninck et al., 2021). This is down from 3.5% in 1995 (Levine et al., 1995). De Coninck et al. (2021) stated that not only is love seen as a requirement for marriage, but that the U.S. population holds a more positive attitude toward divorce. The rate of divorce significantly increased from 20-48% between the years of 1960 and 1980 (Hendi, 2019). With the increase in divorce, divorce became

just as much a part of American culture as marriage and has become more accepted by the American people (Amato, 2000; Cherlin, 2005).

A change in attitudes of marriage have been seen in the last few decades as increased numbers of couples live together, create families, or remain together without marriage and may support the assumption that marriage is becoming deinstitutionalized in the American culture (Amato et al., 2007; Cherlin, 2004; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Wilcox et al., 2015). The rise in divorce, along with a 7-year delay in marriage since 1960, has changed how and when Americans marry and supports Cherlin's theory of the deinstitutionalization of marriage (Knox, 1980; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007). The increase in age at first marriage and cohabitation has increased because marriage has become optional and holds less commitment than it did in earlier years (Amato et al., 2007; Lauer & Yodanis, 2010). Although fewer people are marrying and staying married and some are choosing to not marry at all, 90% of American people will marry at some point in their lives and claim to value the symbol of marriage, even if it has become more for pleasurable purposes than practical reasons (Lauer & Yodanis, 2010; Pessin, 2018).

Attitudes of marriage and divorce have been shown to change according to age, religious and political standings, marital expectations or roles, and education levels of individuals (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Brown & Wright, 2019; Hawkins et al., 2002). Increased acceptance of divorce led to an increased rate of divorce from the 1960s through the 1980s, as well as lower levels of satisfaction within relationships (Amato, 2010; Amato & Rogers, 1999; Morowatisharifabad et al., 2018). Those who have previously been divorced, COD, and those with lower education or economic levels are

generally more at risk and accepting divorce (Amato, 2010; Brown & Wright, 2019; Martin & Parashar, 2006; Uecker & Stokes, 2008). Brown and Wright (2019) observed that adults over the age of 50 years were more accepting of divorce than those of the younger generations and that this age group had a 10% increase in divorce between 2002 and 2012, partially explaining the increase in gray divorce. Individuals who adhere to traditional gender norms within marriage have higher education levels, regularly attend religious services, are less at risk for divorce, and have less accepting attitudes of divorce (Brown & Wright, 2019; Hawkins et al., 2002). According to Brown and Wright (2019), older generations are growing in acceptance toward divorce while the baby boomer generations and younger are holding steady at about a 50% acceptance level of divorce.

Daugherty and Copen (2016) conversely found that individuals may be decreasing in their acceptance of divorce with fewer women and men in favor of divorce between the years of 2011-2013 but more research needs to be done among specific age groups to understand which populations are increasing or decreasing in acceptance of divorce. Martin and Parashar (2006) supported Daugherty and Copen's findings and discovered that women of higher educations are becoming less accepting of divorce than they were in the 1970s. Although these studies are helpful, not all populations are accounted for and more research needs to be done to determine attitudes among the missing populations.

Children of Divorce

COD have been studied regarding their attitudes towards marriage and divorce, but not all of the findings support each other. Many researchers determined that COD are more accepting of divorce and less enthusiastic about marriage (Amato & Booth, 1991;

Axinn & Thornton, 1996; Boyer-Pennington et al., 2001; Kapinus, 2004). This claim was supported by Lee (2018) when Lee determined that because COD witness the divorce as well as the recovery after divorce, COD may hold more positive attitudes for divorce. Wolchick et al (2019) claimed that there are two possible theories to the attitudes of marriage of COD: COD hold more favorable attitudes of divorce because they have not seen a successful marriage, or they hold a less favorable attitude of divorce because of the trials and hardships it created for them as children.

Amato (1988) originally found that COD hold the same attitudes of divorce as children of non-divorce. Cartwright (2006) agreed with Amato and found that COD were highly against divorce and would choose not to marry rather than to have risk divorce. However, Shimkowski et al., (2018) contradicted these findings and discovered that COD are likely to support divorce and have a more positive view of divorce. Greenberg and Nay (1982) and Boyer-Pennington et al. (2001) found that COD are more favorable of divorce, but stated that COD are similar to children of intact families regarding attitudes of marriage and a desire to one day marry. The marriage statistics in the United States support Greenberg and Nay as well as Boyer-Pennington et al., by showing that 90% of Americans will marry at least once in their lifetime (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Goldstein & Kenney, 2001; Lauer & Yodanis, 2010). Although some of these studies were done in past decades and can be dismissed as outdated data, the current studies still contradict the findings regarding COD's attitudes of marriage and divorce of whether COD are supportive or unsupportive of divorce.

Amid all of the contradictory findings, researchers determined that the gender of the child may be important to consider when determining the attitudes of marriage and divorce as well as custodial parent. It was then discovered that daughters of divorce expressed more support for divorce than girls of two-parent homes, especially when the divorce occurred in their early teen years (Copen et al., 2012; Kapinus, 2004; Kapinus & Flowers, 2008; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2004). Brown and Wright (2019) also found that children of divorced women are more likely to support divorce, but not children of divorced men.

Amato (2000) and Vezzetti (2016) stated that it may not be the divorce, but events and dysfunction before the divorce, that influence the child's behaviors and attitudes. Theories that parents' attitudes determine the child's attitudes, the child's age at divorce impacts attitudes, and the time of modeled behavior influences attitudes of divorce in children are also present in current literature (Gager et al., 2016; Rootalu & Kasearu, 2016; Wolchick et al., 2019). Although the studies differ in the findings, there is evidence that witnessing divorce at a young age creates a long-lasting impact on a child's future familial relationships and thoughts and feelings about marriage and divorce (Bartell, 2006; Boyer-Pennington et al., 2001; Greenwood, 2014).

Adult Children of Divorce

The attitudes of marriage and divorce have been studied in adults of divorce and COD, but few studies have been done on the marital attitudes of adult children affected by gray divorce (Cunningham & Thornton, 2006; Duran-Aydintug, 1997). Duran-Aydintug (1997) found that ACOD were not less favorable toward marriage than those of

intact homes but did hold more positive attitudes towards cohabitation before marriage as a way to test the marriage. Duran-Aydintug also discovered that ACOD who were over the age of 18 had more trust issues and a fear of commitment in relationships than those who were under the age of 18 when their parents divorced. Although Duran-Aydintug's research is valuable, it is outdated and did not determine the attitudes of divorce among ACOD.

With the rise in gray divorce, it is important to understand if mid-life divorce impacts ACOD in similar ways as COD. Further research needs to be done to determine if mid or late-life divorce affects ACODs' attitudes toward current and future relationships. Willoughby et al. (2015) discovered that attitudes of marriage and divorce are fluid and may change as people age or have new experiences. Researchers have also discovered that no matter the age of the child, divorce will have an impact on their long-term relationships with their parents and with others (Duran-Aydintug, 1997; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017). This study will help to understand how and if gray divorce impacts ACOD's current and future relationships by assessing their past and current attitudes of divorce and marriage.

Summary and Conclusions

All three marriage styles (institutional, companionate, and individualistic) are practiced in the United States, and Amato (2017) stated that the majority of marriages in the United States tend to be a blend of all three types. Those who practice marriage with the institutional approach are more likely to have long-lasting relationships molded on the foundation of social, religious, and cultural structures that strengthen and support

marriage, but are only successful if both partners feel that strict gender roles and traditional ideals are appropriate for their marriage (Amato, 2017; Wilcox & Dew, 2010). This form of marriage may have suited the earlier eras in the United States when love was considered a luxury and marriages were based primarily on the concern of survival and social status but that is not ideal for many marriages today (Coontz, 2004). Once the 1920s emerged, companionate marriage shifted the norms of marriage to a love-based commitment. Companionate marriages are considered the strongest form of marriage and hold the highest satisfaction rates and the lowest rates of divorce (Wilcox & Dew, 2010). Companionate marriages adhere to traditional gender roles, but the roles are decided by the couple, embracing a more equitable relationship founded on love (Davis, 2008). Individualistic marriage focuses on fulfilling the emotional, social, and romantic needs of individuals that were not imperative in a marriage previous to the 20th century and holds the highest risk of divorce (Cherlin, 2004).

As the marriage styles have evolved, so has divorce. Divorce increased to almost 50% in 2010 in the United States (Hendi, 2019). Divorce has become more socially acceptable and has been increasing in acceptance among American citizens (Glenn, 1999; Kuczynski, 2004; Pessin, 2018). Although divorce rates have stabilized for the younger age groups, divorce has increased among the older generations (Brown & Lin, 2012; Hertlein et al., 2017; Steverman, 2018). The new phenomenon of late-life divorce called gray divorce emerged in the 1990s and has doubled in the last 30 years (Brown & Lin, 2012). Gray divorce is affecting the older generations as well as their adult children economically, emotionally, and socially (Amato, 1996, 2010; Axinn & Thornton, 1996;

Conway et al., 2003; Fagan & Churchill, 2012; Ferguson., 2013; Gray et al., 2011; Sharma, 2015; Shimkowski et al., 2018). These changes over the last century have impacted the adults who divorce, their young children, and now adult children, showing that divorce affects more than just the current generation (Kuczynski, 2004; Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017).

The attitudes of marriage and divorce will continue to be studied because family professionals and government programs are interested in lowering the rates of divorce in the United States (Hawkins et al., 2002). The practical element and necessity of marriage to begin a family has declined as the nonmarital family formation has increased in popularity (Cherlin, 2004; Cunningham & Thornton, 2006). Although Americans still value the symbol of marriage, they do not agree on when, how, or why people should choose to marry (Amato, 2017; Pessin, 2018).

Americans differ on what laws and restrictions should be related to divorce as well. Sixty-two percent of Americans feel that divorce should be harder to obtain and that counseling should be encouraged before divorce (Hawkins et al., 2002). Acceptance of divorce has increased with the numbers of divorce petitions, and has been affected by the social acceptance of cohabitation and nonmarital family formation (Amato & Rogers, 1999; Morowatisharifabad et al., 2018). Acceptance of divorce has increased in adults over the age of 50 years from 53% in 1994 to 62% by 2012 (Brown & Wright, 2019). Although acceptance for divorce has increased for the older generations, divorce acceptance has decreased for the younger population by 5-10% points between 2002 and 2013 (Brown & Wright, 2019). Brown and Wright (2019) discovered that those born

between 1915 and 1934 had the highest supportive attitudes of divorce with 75% of people supporting divorce and numbers slowly dropping in acceptance with each decade. Overall, Americans have become more accepting of divorce despite feeling that it should be a last resort (Morowatisharifabad et al., 2018).

Although the effects and impacts of divorce on adult children and children differ, there are repercussions to COD no matter the age at which the parents divorce. Much is known about the long-term effects of divorce on children, but the studies on long-term effects of ACOD are limited (Conway et al., 2003). ACOD question their upbringing, feel betrayed by their parents, question their history as a family, and feel confused about how to maintain or transform their new family structure (Mikucki-Enyart et al., 2017). More research needs to be done regarding their attitudes toward marriage and divorce and how they are affected by parental divorce in adulthood.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design and rationale for this study. It explains the role of the researcher and discusses the methodology of the study in full detail. Chapter 3 will explain who will take part in the study, how it will be carried out in a step by step manner, and how this method will answer the research question. I describe how the data will be collected and analyzed. I also discuss the manner in which participants enter, engage, and leave the study. Chapter 3 concludes with a section about researcher credibility, trustworthiness, and any ethical considerations that were taken into consideration within the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this intrinsic, single case study was to explore how adult children of gray divorce were impacted regarding their attitudes towards marriage and divorce after witnessing his or her parents' late-life divorce. I wanted to understand the observations, affects, and experiences of those who have witnessed a parental gray divorce to understand if it has impacted their feelings or thoughts of marriage and divorce. I wanted to learn if there were common themes among this population regarding attitudes towards marriage and divorce.

Within this chapter, I discussed why I selected a qualitative methodology, why I chose an intrinsic, single case study, and review the design of the study. I included the information about where I received my population sample and why they were selected. I discussed my role as the researcher and my affiliation, if any, with the participants of the study. I also elaborated on the collection method for the data and the interaction I had with the participants. I then proceeded to explain how the data was compiled and analyzed. This chapter concluded with information regarding the credibility and dependability of myself and the study.

Research Design and Rationale

For this study, I used a qualitative methodology with the purpose of understanding participants' attitudes of marriage and divorce and whether their attitudes have been impacted by observing their parents' marriage or divorce. McGrath et al. (2019) supported the use of qualitative studies because it seeks a deep exploration of issues and experiences that may affect specific populations. Rather than accounting for

the number of times an instance has occurred, a qualitative design allowed me to explore the attitudes of individuals and the meaning behind their attitudes (see Stake, 1995).

Qualitative research focuses on behaviors, experiences, and social issues in an effort to understand a certain event or phenomenon (McGrath et al., 2019). The qualitative method was chosen for this study because it allowed for open-ended questions that are specific to the topic and permitted the participants to share extensive and data-rich detail (Barrett & Twycross, 2018). The purpose of this qualitative study was to comprehend this specific populations' attitudes toward the gray divorce phenomenon that have affected them, and not to generalize the results to other populations (see McGrath et al., 2019).

A case study focuses on a single example or single case within a phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Gerring, 2004). A case study is based on the “why” rather than the “what” and on the specific individuals within the case to explore a setting, phenomenon, experience, or other instance with the aim for further understanding (Cousin, 2005; Polit & Beck, 2008; Stake, 2010). Polit and Beck (2008) also stated that case studies are ideal for groups or populations that are understudied, and that case studies provide rich and deep data. A case study provided an opportunity for a deep investigation within the case population of adult children of gray divorce and helped increase understanding of how this phenomenon affected this specific group of individuals (see Gerring, 2004).

This was a single case study because it included only one case or set of individuals (see Gustafsson, 2017). Stake (1995) clarified that a case can be any person, item, or population that is complex and can be specified and bounded. This single case

study was specified to only adult children who have been affected by the gray divorce phenomenon.

An intrinsic study “examines in detail a single case” to better understand the population (Cousin, 2005; Hyett et al., 2014; Stake, 2005). Intrinsic case studies are guided by the interest of the researcher and do not seek to find generalizations but look for richness within the data (Grandy, 2010). This study was exploratory and led by my interest in this phenomenon and population. I sought to understand the intricacies of the case population (Grandy, 2010). I used an intrinsic case study because I was interested in understanding the individuals within the case as to their feelings and attitudes of marriage and divorce and why they believe they hold those attitudes (see Cousin, 2005; Grandy, 2010).

Research Question

What are the attitudes of marriage and divorce among adult children of gray divorce?

Role of the Researcher

Rumman and Alheet (2019) stated that a researcher identifies the problem, collects data, finds the correct study population, and analyzes the data. By taking part in all of these processes, the researcher has become an instrument in the study and is essential in every step of the study (Stake, 2010). The researcher must remain organized within the study to ensure that all documents (interview transcripts, authorization forms, notes, journals) are filed and preserved for the data analysis stage as well as interpreted according to the view of the participants.

For this study, I had a critical role in finding, vetting, and interviewing the participants. Building rapport with the participants was important to ensure that they felt comfortable enough to share personal information. I asked questions that were clear and unbiased, as well as remained non-judgmental at all times. I was there to ask and listen rather than share personal thoughts or feelings. I did my best to help the participants feel comfortable by providing an outline of what the study entailed, as well as allowed them to share or withhold any information during the interview. I also ensured that I asked open-ended questions that allowed for information-rich answers.

The participants for this study were collected using social media networking, word of mouth, and the Walden participant pool. There was not an incentive offered within this study; I relied strictly on individuals who desired to participate. I ensured that I did not know any participants on a personal level. When a potential participant approached me that I had a relationship with, they were not be allowed to participate in the study due to the risk of bias. I also made certain that no participants felt pressured to participate and that they understood that they could be removed from the study at any time.

Methodology

A qualitative study using an intrinsic, single case study was selected to explore the attitudes of adult children of gray divorce regarding marriage and divorce. This method helped me discover the particulars of the individuals within the case. The steps used to direct this study are described in detail within the following sections to allow for future researchers to duplicate the study.

Participant Selection

The sampling strategy for this study was snowball and purposive sampling. Snowball sampling, also known as referral sampling, is ideal for accessing hard-to-find populations (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Purposive sampling fulfills the requirement of recruiting participants who meet a specific criterion (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The participants were obtained through social media platforms, the Walden participant pool, and word of mouth. The use of social media as a networking platform in research has increased in the last decade and is expected to rise further as it is a proficient way to recruit a broad population of participants (Galdas, 2017). Social media was selected as one means of finding participants because it holds less risk of bias than listservs or blogs. The Walden participant pool was selected because it allowed a diverse population to access this study and can broaden the population of the study. Word of mouth was selected because this is a difficult population to reach so increased advertising and assistance from others helped increase the probability of finding enough participants for the study.

I began collecting participants for this study by placing notices on social media accounts to announce the study and seek volunteers (See Appendix C). The message included a brief synopsis of the study and my contact information. I asked others to post and share the message to increase variation in population and increase chances of finding participants. The same post was used for the Walden participant pool. The description of the message asked for only adult children of gray divorce. When approached by the willing participants, I asked the qualifying questions to determine if they could move forward in the study. All participants were required to be over the age of 18 when their

parents divorced, be a U.S. resident, and have parents that divorced after the age of 50. Specific age, gender, and race was not a qualifying factor for participants to enter into the study.

This study began with eight participant interviews. Further interviews were going to be conducted if the saturation of data was not reached within those interviews (see Saunders et al., 2018). Malterud et al. (2016) stated that beginning with eight interviews is sufficient because the emergence of common themes and the quality of the information are more important than obtaining a high quantity of participants. If I were unable to reach eight interviews, I would have broadened my search for participants. I would post my study again to the original social media sites used as well as different social media networks that were not previously utilized. If I were again unable to reach eight interviews or reach saturation of data, I would analyze the data collected and seek to find meaning within the data the participants have provided (Yazan, 2015).

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used for this study followed interview protocol (See Appendix A). The protocol began with the participant asking to take part in the study. After a brief interaction via phone, email, or messaging to ensure qualification, a consent form was emailed to the participant. I informed the participant that a signed consent form would need to be returned before the interview could take place. Once the participant qualified and I had received consent, I scheduled the interview.

I created the interview questions and conducted the interviews with each participant (see Appendix B). The interview questions were inspired by social learning

theory as well as by current literature regarding adult children of gray divorce. The interview questions consisted of open-ended questions that sought to explore a specific aspect of the participant's experience related to their attitudes toward marriage and divorce. The interview consisted of six questions but were followed up with probing questions to allow for further understanding or clarity. I closed the interview by stating my gratitude for them taking the time to participate and asked if the participant had any other information they wish to share.

As the creator of the interview questions, and as the interviewer within the study, I was an instrument in this study. I designed and asked the questions as well as interpreted the data. To limit researcher bias, the interview questions were reviewed by my committee members, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed for transparency purposes. The interviews were scheduled in 30-60-minute increments but were flexible if less or more time was needed. The recordings and transcriptions were done using Tapeacall. The transcripts were digitally and manually transcribed for accuracy purposes.

Recruitment, Participant, and Data Collection

Once I was approved by the institution review board (IRB), with the approval number 07-19-21-0617752, I began advertising for my study via social media, word of mouth, and the Walden participant pool. Willing participants were directed to my email, social media messaging, and phone number. I contacted them within 3 days and asked them the qualifying questions again to ensure that they met the criteria for the study.

Once the participant had decided to take part in the study, I emailed the consent form to obtain consent and permission to proceed. I informed the participant that the

interview could be completed when the consent was received via email. Once consent was obtained, I scheduled the interview. I asked them to ensure that they had ample time to talk, as well as suggested that they find a place in which they felt comfortable sharing personal details regarding the topic of their parent's divorce and their feelings about marriage and divorce. The interviews were done via telephone or video conferencing dependent on the participant's request. I conducted the interviews as quickly as possible after the participants had approached me.

All interviews were done in a private setting and were recorded via a recording feature on iPhone, Zoom, TapeACall, or other recording capabilities. The calls were recorded and transcribed via the recording program as well as transcribed manually for accuracy and data collection purposes. One copy of the transcription was saved for data collection and a second was sent to the participant when and if it was requested. All emails and contact between participants and myself were journaled and saved for information and data purposes. This process continued until all needed participants were selected and interviewed.

Prior to the interviews, I followed the suggestion of Antes et al. (2019) and emailed or texted the interview questions to the participant. This gave them time to thoughtfully reflect on the questions. Sending the interview questions before the interview, allowed the participants to examine and ponder each question and arrive ready to share their thoughts and feelings in full detail.

I talked with all of the participants telephonically or virtually. Interviews were scheduled for 30-60-minute periods. Although most interviews concluded before the 30-

60 minutes, they did not exceed a 90-minute limit. Once an interview had begun, I shared relevant information regarding the study (see Stacy, 2012). I asked simple questions to build rapport with the participant and created a comfortable environment for the participant (see Stacy, 2012). After gathering general data, I moved on to the interview questions.

Following each interview question, I asked probing questions for clarity or depth. Adhabi and Anozie (2017) as well as Barrett and Twycross (2018) stressed the importance of allowing for probing questions for further elaboration, exploration, and flexibility. Once all of the interview questions had been asked, the participant were asked to share any additional information they felt would enhance the study.

When the interview was complete, I asked if they wished for a copy of the transcription. I thanked the participants for their participation, informed them that a written synopsis of the conversation would be emailed to them within one week, and would notify them that if they felt they need to clarify any understanding, they could send those changes to me via email. I included within the synopsis email that they had officially completed the study and thanked them again for their participation.

Data Analysis Plan

After each interview was completed, I began analyzing the data collected. Following each session, I typed the transcription as well as a summary of the participant's interview replacing their name with a pseudonym (P1, P2, P3, etc.) to protect the privacy of the participants. I sent the transcript (if requested) and the summary via email to the participant to ensure that I correctly interpreted the meaning of the content. I asked that

they contact me if there are any errors or alterations that need to be made. I concluded the email with a thank you message and informed them now that their portion of the study had been completed.

Once the interview had been transcribed, I analyzed the data. Categorical aggregation, a form of thematic analysis, was used to process the data that were collected by organizing data into statements, phrases, or paragraphs that were given a word or phrase that represented the data collected (see Gaya & Smith, 2016). Ravitch and Carl (2019) suggested sorting the words and phrases to show commonalities between the data to determine which statements are relevant to the purpose of the study. I used the program Dedoose to assist in coding and organizing the data of each interview. If the program Dedoose were not available, accessible, or is unsuccessful in supporting the analysis, I would have used the program NVivo. I used the data to develop an overall theme or themes from the findings of the study (see Constantinou et al., 2017). The analyses of the data proceeded until the content had reached an overarching theme. Once the analysis was completed, a 1-2 summary of results were be sent to the participants via email.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To ensure that the study was valid and trustworthy, precautions were made to ensure credibility, dependability, and confirmability (see Ellis, 2019). Transferability is also discussed within this section. Ellis (2019) stated that qualitative studies do not follow specified rules in collecting and assessing data in the way that quantitative studies do, so it is important for qualitative studies to include the steps necessary to ensure quality and

show how data is collected and interpreted. Elo et al. (2014) stated that for issues of trustworthiness to be decreased, the study needs to be well organized, include full documentation, and include ways in which credibility, dependability and confirmability were incorporated into the study.

Credibility

Credibility is when the findings of the study are truthful, believable, and have the approval of the participants within the study (Grandy, 2010). To ensure credibility I incorporated rigor in the ways of integrity, transparency, saturation, and confirmability (Gaya & Smith, 2016; Morse, 2015). Richards and Hemphill (2018) suggested recording a journal of feelings, assumptions, and personal beliefs. I journaled throughout the study process to ensure that my own biases and beliefs were not influencing any portion of the study. I strived to be transparent by recording all procedures within the study and including interactions with participants, interviews, saving all corresponding documents, documenting in a journal, and keeping extensive notes. As suggested by Gaya and Smith (2016), I continued with interviews and analyses until saturation within the data that presented a clear and overarching theme or themes. I connected and confirmed the finding(s) with context from the data. The participants were allowed to review the transcript as well as my interpretation of the data to ensure I had interpreted their thoughts and feelings correctly.

Transferability

The transferability of this study was limited because the study is specific to adult children of gray divorce. However, it may be transferable to other ACOD who have

stepparents divorcing or to those whose parents divorced later in life but are not yet considered with the gray divorce category. It may also transfer to adults who have parent-like figures who divorce later in life.

The data within this study can apply to individuals divorcing, their adult children, counselors, state programs, legal advisors, and other organizations that are involved in family interventions or the divorce process. Understanding the issues related to marriage and divorce before and after a late-life divorce can assist those going through the process. The data collected could be used to help understand how individuals affected by divorce later in life are impacted regarding their feelings towards divorce and marital commitment. These findings could be a useful tool within the psychology, counseling, marriage and family studies, and social fields.

Dependability

Dependability means that the study was carefully planned, is consistent, and follows the rules of qualitative research (Ulin et al., 2005). Dependability can be established by using an audit trail and reflexivity (see Finlay, 2002; Guest et al., 2014; Statistics Solutions, 2020). I incorporated an audit trail by recording my thoughts, values, and biases within a journal during the data collection and analysis stage. I strived to remain unbiased and transparent throughout the study and periodically took part in self-reflection to again separate personal biases and feelings from the study (see Darawsheh, 2014).

Confirmability

Confirmability indicates that the study's results can be replicated by any other researcher (Guest et al., 2014; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To enhance credibility, I included detailed descriptions of the study design, the participant collection method, and the interview questions and analysis process. I included the audit trail, detailed notes regarding data collection and interpretation of the data, and a rationale for how I arrived at the final results (see Guest et al., 2014). This process would make it simple for another individual to decipher how I reached the overall theme.

Ethical Considerations

This study was centered on people's feelings and thoughts towards marriage and divorce, which can be a sensitive issue. I understood that the participants were trusting me with delicate information. I respected them by confirming that I was translating their feelings correctly and not misinterpreting their words. All participants were emailed a consent form prior to the interview to indicate their willingness to participate in the interview and be informed that they could opt-out of the study at any point before completion. The participants were telephonically or virtually interviewed allowing them the freedom to select the mode of contact and location that they felt comfortable and safe. I treated all participants equally and respectfully and analyzed and interpreted the data quickly and honestly.

The data collected throughout the study was done in confidence. All participants were given a pseudonym in place of their names within the transcriptions and analyses. The data were uploaded to my computer as well as the program Dedoose but did not

consist of identifying names and could only be accessed with a password. All data will be held on a password-protected computer for 5 years to ensure that no other parties have access to the data. All correspondence including signed consent forms, emails, text messages, and other research-related materials were uploaded to a password-protected computer. Any hardcopy materials were stored in a locked cabinet until the completion of the study, after which, they will be shredded and only the electronic form will be saved.

Summary

An intrinsic, single case study began with eight qualifying participants who were over the age of 18 and are adult children of gray divorce. Interviews took place via telephone or video conferencing. The data were collected and analyzed using a recording and transcription program as well as the program Dedoose. Categorical aggregation, or thematic analysis was used to determine the over-arching theme or message within the data. Ethical considerations were made to ensure the privacy and comfortability of the participants. Organization and structure within the study ensured credibility and reliability throughout the study process. Documentation containing emails, interviews, and consent were collected and stored within my locked computer.

Chapter 4 will include the data collected throughout the study. It will include information regarding the setting of each interview, the demographics of the participants, how, when, and where the data was collected. It will also include any variations from what was planned in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 will go into detail regarding the deciphering of data and describe how the data was transformed into an over-arching theme. It will again discuss credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability and how those were

implemented into the study. Lastly, it will present the overall theme that answers the research question as well as any discrepant cases within the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this intrinsic, single case study was to learn and understand the attitudes of marriage and divorce of those whose parents divorced late in life. To address this purpose, interviews were conducted that asked the participants about their attitudes of marriage and divorce prior to and after their parents divorced. These interviews were open-ended and allowed participants to elaborate on the areas they felt were appropriate and relevant. They were asked what they had observed in their parents' marriage and what their attitudes of marriage and divorce were before and after their parents' divorce.

Within Chapter 4, I address the demographics of the participants, the data collection process, the number of participants used, the settings of the interviews, how the data were recorded, and any variations made from Chapter 3. I state any unusual circumstances in the collection process, and I discuss the data analysis process regarding how the data were coded, interpreted, and analyzed. I address trustworthiness in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability within the study. Lastly, I provide the results of the study with the supporting materials as well as discuss any discrepant cases related to the case.

Setting

I requested that all participants find a quiet location for the interview to ensure privacy and comfort. I sent the questions via email 24-48 hours before the interview to ensure they had time to review and ponder the questions, as well as understand what kind of questions would be asked in the interview. Two participants had not reviewed the questions prior to the interview so they were given a few minutes to review the questions

and were told that if they had further information they wished to share after the interview process, they could email or contact me to have that data included. Neither participant contacted me to add any data. I scheduled the interviews at the times requested by the participants. All interviews were done via telephone rather than video conferencing, but there were no modifications or issues regarding the interview or interpretation process. All participants attended the scheduled interview times, and all calls were recorded, transcribed, and interpreted with no technical difficulties. There were no variations to the study that affected the interviews, the participant's experience during the interview, or the interpretation of the study.

Demographics

The participants consisted of eight females who qualified for the study by answering "yes" to all of the qualifying questions (see Appendix D). The participants ranged in age from 25-52-years-old. They varied in marital status with five participants as married, two divorced, and one as never married. Seven of the participants were White and one was Black. All participants were residents of the United States. All participants were female. The participants were given a pseudonym after their interviews and will be referred to as P1 through P8.

- Participant 1 was a 25-year-old female. She was White and married. Her parents divorced at the ages of 48 and 53 when the participant was 25-years-old.
- Participant 2 was a 37-year-old female. She was White and married. Her parents divorced at the ages of 59 and 58 when the participant was 24-years-old.

- Participant 3 was a 45-year-old female. She was White and married. Her parents divorced at the age of 65 years when the participant was 40-years-old.
- Participant 4 was a 39-year-old female. She was White and divorced. Her parents divorced at the age of 62 years when the participant was 31-years-old.
- Participant 5 was a 43-year-old female. She was Black and had never been married. Her parents divorced at the ages of 54 years and 52 years when the participant was 21-years-old.
- Participant 6 was a 36-year-old female. She was White and married. Her parents divorced at the ages of 52 years and 59 years when the participant was 26-years-old.
- Participant 4 was a 33-year-old female. She was White and married. Her parents divorced at the ages of 64 years and 65 years when the participant was 28-years-old.
- Participant was a 52-year-old female. She was White and divorced. Her parents divorced at the ages of 52 years and 54 years when the participant was 23-years-old.

Data Collection

I recruited eight individuals for this intrinsic, single case study. Participants were recruited via social media and the Walden Participant Pool. I posted the ad (see Appendix C) the day after I received approval from the IRB. Instagram and Facebook were the social media platforms used for participant collection. I also posted on a Facebook page called “Gray Divorce: Stories, Advice, and Support” after I received permission from

IRB as well as the administrator of the page. The ad (see Appendix C) requested that interested participants contact me via email, phone, text, or chat to discuss participating in the study. I received requests to participate in the study through email, text, and social media messaging. Prospective participants were sent a list of qualifying questions (see Appendix D) in the same manner in which they contacted me. Those who did not qualify were thanked for their willingness to participate and informed that they did not qualify to take part in the study. For those who did qualify, I emailed the consent as well as recommendations for the interview process. After consent was given by the participant, an interview was arranged. All interviews had the option of an audio phone call or video conferencing. None of the participants requested a specific interview mode so all interviews were scheduled and completed on a telephone recorded audio line using the app TapeACall.

I emailed the participants a reminder of the scheduled interview time as well as the interview questions (Appendix B) 24 to 48 hours before the interview. All interviews started with the understanding that the call would be recorded. I discussed the process of the interview and the option to withdraw at any point or to not answer any questions they were uncomfortable answering. I used the questions previously designed with the addition of five questions (see Appendix E) that sought deeper data regarding the participant's attitudes of marriage and divorce throughout their lives. The additional questions asked participants how their attitudes have shifted over their lifetime as well as questions regarding how or if their parents' relationship had impacted their relationships and/or marriages. The interviews were recorded using the app TapeACall and were all

completed without any technical issues or delays. There were not any alterations from the method design discussed in Chapter 3.

I thanked the participants for their willingness to volunteer and discussed with them the next stages of the study process after the interview was completed. I informed them that I would create a summary of the interview within 7 days and would email it to them for their approval or alterations. I asked that they correct or approve the summary and that after the summary had been corrected or approved, their portion of the study would be completed. I then notified the participants that I would then send a summary of the results after the conclusion of the study.

All data were collected via audio-recorded phone calls using the app TapeACall. For all participants, excluding Participant 4, from who I collected the data from a private room in the library. The interview with Participant 4 was done in a private location in my home. I conducted one interview with each participant and the interviews ranged from 33 minutes to 1 hour and 12 minutes, with the majority of calls lasting between 30 and 40 minutes.

Data Analysis

When the interviews were completed, I used TapeACall's ability to transcribe the interviews. I emailed the transcription to my email and transferred it into a Word document. The transcriptions created within TapeACall were inaccurate, so the interviews were corrected manually line by line until the transcription was correct. I read the transcriptions several times and began the summary portion of the process. I looked at each question and then read what the participant had stated. I summarized each question

or group of questions into paragraph form for the participant to review. I proofread the summary multiple times and sent it to the participant via email. The email requested that the participant read the summary and approve or correct any misunderstandings or misinterpretations. All summaries were approved without alterations.

The first round of coding was done by using the “comments” capability within Word to write notes along the margin of the transcripts. I wrote phrases and words that reflected what the participant had stated. Some of these phrases or words were, “fear of marriage, unbalanced, abuse, fear of ending up like parent’s marriage.” This continued until all of the questions had been commented on. This process was done for all participants. The first round of coding was done informally with the statements consisting of my original thoughts. The codes given to each participant within this first round of coding held similar ideas but did not contain exact verbiage.

For the second round of coding, I created another Word document that was organized by interview questions and color coded to each participant. All of the questions were listed with the participant’s color-coded answers directly below each section. This allowed me to see all of the answers close together to determine similarities among participants. Seeing the participants’ answers, along with the comments that were previously coded, helped me discover similarities between participants. For example, the first question I asked was to describe what was observed in their childhood and teenage homes. I saw a trend of participants who mentioned conflict in their homes at an early age, that their mothers had the bulk of responsibility in the home, varying forms of abuse,

and that some parents lived separate lives while they were married. This round of coding gave insight into common ideas or statements made by the participants.

The third round of coding consisted of transferring the transcripts into the program DeDoose. Within this program, I marked and coded the document with the codes from Stages 1 and 2. After all of the documents were coded with the original codes, I discovered codes that were assigned to some documents that were appropriate for other documents. I coded each document again and merged similar codes and included new codes for things that were previously missed. For example, if there were a code labeled “parents were unhappy” as well as a code labeled “unhappy parents,” the codes were merged.

The fourth round of coding involved finding similar codes and grouping them into broad codes. I discovered that the participants talked about their parents’ marital issues they observed in their childhood and adult life. From here, I created the code “Issues observed by children” in which similar or supporting codes were placed as subcategories. These subcategories included codes like abuse, conflict in the home, mom did everything, unhappy parents, tension, and so on. The main categories produced were created from the groups of codes consisting of similar and supporting ideas. Grouping the codes into categories allowed me to see the emerging themes as well as the codes that were not relevant to the study.

Some of the codes were interesting but not relevant. Those codes were deleted after the main categories were made. The removed codes were about specific issues or actions within their parents’ divorce, codes that were unrelated to the effect of their

parents' marriage or divorce, were not attributed to their attitudes of marriage or divorce, and were deemed irrelevant to the study's question. These codes were removed from the analysis because they were unrelated to the study question.

The last round of coding was consolidating the groups of codes that were related to attitudes of marriage and divorce and forming a phrase or word that generalized those codes together. For example, the categories "not desired but understood," "been hard," "people should be happy," "more understanding of divorce," and "new perspective of divorce" were gathered together to create the theme, "Divorce is not ideal but is sometimes the best option." This process was repeated until the final themes within the study were recognized. Six themes emerged that were relevant to the research question and one additional theme was discovered. All seven themes will be discussed in the results section.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Throughout this process, I documented each interaction with the participants and did my best to ensure that the study remained transparent. All documents were saved in participant folders within my secure school email account. I was truthful in my dealings with the participants as well as when reading and coding the data. Following each interview, I sent a summary of my interpretation of each interview to the participants to confirm that I had interpreted their words correctly. All participants agreed that I had interpreted their words and feelings correctly and made no alterations to the summary.

During coding, I considered the context of each phrase or word in order to code it according to the participant's intention.

Richards and Hemphill (2018) suggested keeping a journal to reflect on and share assumptions or thoughts throughout the process. I kept a journal to record the study events and what I accomplished throughout the study. I shared what inspired me, irritated me, and ideas or phrases that I felt biased to or that may have influenced me. I was transparent in my feelings, beliefs, and biases throughout this process. I respected the participants and this study and made the effort to understand the context of the participant's words and did all I could to ensure the intended meaning was not lost.

Transferability

There are no alterations for transferability within the study from Chapter 3. This study explored the lives of adult children whose parents divorced later in life. Although this study explored the specific case of eight individuals, it has the potential to transfer to other adult children of gray divorce. It also has the potential to transfer to adult children who were impacted by a divorce of stepparents, adopted parents, grand-parents, or other parent-like relationships. The goal of this study was to learn the attitudes of adult children of gray divorce within this specific case study and not the possibility of transferability to any other populations.

Dependability

Throughout the study, I kept a journal that recorded my actions, thoughts, emotions, and biases. I journaled about the aspects of interviews that had impacted me or left a positive or negative impression. I recorded in the journal often and took time to sit

and reflect upon the happenings of the study. I examined my views concerning what I had discovered to ensure that I was not interpreting data based on my values or ideas, but on the participants' experiences and words. The summary sent to the participants was done to confirm that I had interpreted the interviews correctly and that I had not imposed my values or biases onto the interview. All of the summaries were read and approved by the participants and the meaning and context behind the words were upheld throughout the analysis process.

Confirmability

A detailed description of how this study was performed is available in the methods section contained in Chapter 3. The method did not vary from the original design. A journal was kept documenting the interactions between myself and the participants, when interviews were completed and transcribed, journals regarding the interpretation and possible biases, and rationale for how the final results were discovered are recorded within the journal. I created a spreadsheet that kept track of participant progress and study phases to ensure that all procedures were completed in the time frame required for each participant. These documents and tools have made it possible for the study to be duplicated.

Results

The research question for this study was "What are the attitudes of marriage and divorce of adult children of gray divorce?" The results were broken down into themes that were discovered regarding the research question. Seven themes were discovered during the data analysis. The first six themes answer the research question. The seventh

theme did not answer the research question but was relevant to understanding the experiences of the participants and gave support to the other themes listed. Within each theme, subthemes are listed with supporting evidence for each claim.

Desire to Marry

All of the participants expressed a desire to marry when they were children and stated that they expected to marry at some point in their lives. P4 stated that she, “always believed wholeheartedly in marriage. I always wanted to be married.” P1 remembered that she, “looked forward to getting married,” and P8 stated, “I actually was looking forward to that [marriage] someday.” P6 said, “I always wanted to be married,” and P3 viewed marriage as “something you do and hopefully do well.” All of the participants expressed that they desired marriage as a child and that they hoped to have the opportunity to marry in their lives.

Six of the participants within the study held a desire to remain married or to be married. P3 stated that “marriage is a potential blessing” to “team up with someone and create and build a strong, lasting bond and life.” P2 felt that “it’s [marriage] important” and that “it’s amazing to have a partner you know, go through life with and raise kids, and you know, go on adventures.” P7, who was married at the time of the interview, stated, “obviously, I think marriage is an awesome thing” and P8, who is currently divorced, said, “I do believe in marriage” and “I do want to be married again someday.” Desiring marriage was a theme that held for six of the eight participants throughout their lives despite their parents’ late-life divorce.

P4 was a discrepant case within this theme. P4 was married and then divorced after a long-term relationship in which her partner was unfaithful and terminated the relationship without warning. She disclosed that her attitude toward marriage “comes from all my own baggage at this point” rather than the impact of her parents’ marriage or divorce. P4 is a discrepant case because her feelings toward marriage were influenced by her marriage experience rather than the impact of her parents’ gray divorce.

Observing Parents’ Marriage and Divorce Affected Marital Attitude

Six of the participants stated that observing their parents’ marriage affected their attitudes of marriage. The answers were varied, but the answers indicated that watching their parents’ marriage and divorce affected how they felt about marriage. Although six of the participants still desired marriage, the participants claimed that watching their parents’ marriage and divorce altered how they viewed marriage and divorce. Some of the participants stated that they were made aware of the realities within marriage and others were cautious about entering into marriage. Participants P3, P4, P6, and P7 discussed a sense of impermanence tied to marriage after watching their parents divorce after so many years together.

Eyes Wide Open

Half of the participants said that their eyes were opened to the realities of marriage after observing their parents’ marriage and divorce. P8 stated that “my eyes are a little more wide open about marriage and what it takes” and P1 felt that her understanding of marriage had “become a lot more realistic and a lot more eye-opening.” P5 noticed the hardships related to marriage when she was in her teenage years and stated

that she started “to see things become a little different, as the older I got, things got a little bit more clear to me with my, my family, my household...I didn’t know it was going to be so hard.” P4 discussed the seriousness of commitment and how she goes into relationships with “my eyes much more open now.” These four participants stated that they had learned the realities and hardships that can accompany a marriage from watching their parents’ marriage and divorce.

Cautious of Marriage

Cautiousness about marriage and commitment was expressed by four participants when discussing their attitudes toward marriage. P1 stated that she was more “defensive and on guard” in her relationships and marriage than she “would have been if it weren’t for my parent’s marriage” and P8 was “a little bit more cautious at least” after watching the mistakes of her parents. P4 discussed the gravity of marriage and said, “marriage is a huge decision, and it should be taken very seriously.” P1 called off an engagement because of issues that reminded her of her parent’s marriage and because she “was so scared about going into it [marriage]” after watching her parents go through countless issues. P8 talked about desiring marriage, but not rushing into it. P8 dated her husband for 5 years before marrying him, and P4 dated her husband for 12 years before marrying him. These women were cautious before entering into marriage and the participants who were not married at the time of the interview continued to express their caution about entering into marriage. P4 was engaged but she stated that she was not in a rush to marry. She said that if he [her fiancé] wants to get married, “it’s fine” but that she does not see the rush or necessity of marriage anymore. P8 was divorced and said that watching her

parents' divorce has taught to about "not rushing into a relationship" and that she has "been with somebody for a while but we're not rushing to get married."

Impermanence

Four of the participants discussed a feeling of impermanence after their parents' divorced. P7 stated that "people can change" and marriage doesn't "mean it will stay forever," while P6 stated that she became "aware maybe that it [divorce] can happen even if you are married over thirty years was a little eye-opening." P3 expressed that she felt like her parents' marriage was "never going to end and it did. So does that mean that any commitment can be severed at any time? It's a little scary." P3 said that she felt "more worried that things just aren't forever" after her parents divorced. A sense of impermanence was discussed by half of the participants when talking about marriage.

Divorce is Not Ideal but Sometimes is the Best Option

All eight participants expressed that divorce was not ideal, but that divorce is understood and sometimes inevitable and necessary. The subthemes discovered within this topic were that divorce has been hard for the participants in their lives, divorce should not be sought but was understood, and that people should be happy. All of the participants expressed that divorce is not something to strive for, but that there are situations in which they felt divorce was the best solution.

The participants stated that divorce was not ideal and should be avoided when possible but that sometimes divorce is the best option or necessary. P8 stated, "of course, you don't want to get divorced, but if it's what you need to do, it's what you need to do...I'm certainly not opposed to it." P1 said that "divorce affects a lot of people...it is

sad” but, “there’s a lot of circumstances that can happen in marriage, that I totally would get a divorce.” She then stated, “it’s obviously just something I still don’t want to go through” in my life. P2 said, “I think that there’s times divorce is just inevitable and sometimes things just can’t be salvaged” and

I think sometimes ultimately it’s, it is the best option... is not necessarily the end of the world, it’s tough, but I think, you know, there are times when it is the right thing to do...when it’s just inevitable, and it’s okay.

P6 felt that, “in some marriages, I think it’s necessary,” and P7 said that divorce can be a “very messy thing” but that divorce can be “something that needs to happen, but obviously something you should try to avoid and work out.” P5 stated, “I feel like divorce should be an option” when there are hardships or abuse within a marriage. All of the participants discussed the difficulty that divorce can bring to a person or family and that it should try to be avoided, but none of them were opposed to ending a marriage when necessary. The participants felt that there were circumstances within a marriage when divorce would be the best option even though it is not the ideal circumstance.

Divorce is Hard

Seven of the participants mentioned that their parents’ divorce has been hard. The challenges ranged from added responsibility and financial struggles to more pressure within their marriages and the practical challenges of orchestrating holidays. P1 talked about increased pressure to be a good example for her younger siblings. She said, “I definitely feel more pressure on my marriage because I do have three younger brothers who are not married, and I kind of feel like at this point we are their role models for

marriage.” P2 stated that the divorce has created a challenge in her “parents’ ability to be grandparents” and that has been hard on her. P3 stated, “I’ve been a kid of divorce now, a forty-year-old kid, but it’s not fun at all...it’s been quite terrible.” She discussed that the divorce “cost all of us a lot of money, just extra, and it just keeps adding up it seems.” P6 discussed the added responsibility that has been put on her and her family since her parent’s divorce. She said that “even her kids get hit with it” and that “I’m taking time out of my life and my family to take care of theirs because they don’t have each other to take care of.” P7 pointed out the hardships of holidays and said, “holidays are extremely difficult...there was too high of expectations put on us to drag our kids fifty different places.” Although the hardships were different, the theme that divorce has been hard on the participants was shared.

People Should Be Happy

Personal happiness was a subtheme that emerged within the topic that divorce is sometimes best. Seven of eight of the participants talked about the importance of personal happiness. P8 said, “you’ve gotta do what you gotta do to be happy in life” and that “if you can’t be happy together, get divorced and move on with your life and find someone you can be happy with.” P2 acknowledged that “my parents weren’t happy, and I don’t want to ever be in that situation where I’m just not happy...ultimate happiness is more important than a marriage or divorce.” P1 said her mom is “a lot happier” since she divorced her father and P4 said, “I think divorce should be an option if people aren’t happy.” P5 felt like, “... a person should be happy” in life. The participants felt that

personal happiness was essential in life and that if divorce was necessary for happiness, then divorce may be the best decision.

Determined to Make My Marriage Work

Seven out of eight of the participants were married at the time of their parents' divorce and mentioned that they were determined to make their marriages work after watching their parents' marriage fail. The participants stressed that they wanted their marriages to last and listed what they would do to ensure their relationships last. P 1 stated that "if we were able to have an open and honest communication about issues or anything in the future, you know, I could move past it [the issues that arise]" and that "I have the mindset, you know, I don't, I don't intend on ever getting a divorce." P2 said, "I want to work harder to make things work" and mentioned that she has an attitude of, "we're going to make this work and if issues come up, we're going to deal with them head-on and we're committed, and we are both going to do our best." P3 was, "even more determined...super determined to stay married" and that she will "do all I can to keep a healthy relationship." P4 stated that after observing her parents' and sister's divorce, she "intentionally had conversations with him [her husband], checked in a much more direct way" to ensure they did not make the same mistakes as her family members. P6 stressed the importance of "going on dates and keeping it fun" as well as "working on our relationship, like, not to be complacent." P7 put effort into her marriage by going "on dates and try[ing] and spend time together" and stressed the importance of putting marriage "first." This theme of investing effort into marriage and a determination to stay

married was discussed by all participants who were married at the time of their parents' divorce.

Marriage is a Potential Blessing

The participants were determined to make their marriages work and saw marriage as a potential blessing and were willing to put in added effort into their marriage. The idea of marriage as a potential blessing was discovered through the participants' desire to have a partner in their lives. The word potential was used because all of the participants stated that they do not oppose divorce when it is necessary but desired a partner in life. Although the participants stated that marriage could be difficult, they remarked on the potential that marriage could enhance their lives and the lives of others. This theme of marriage as a potential blessing was expressed through the benefits of having a lifetime partner, the practical benefits of marriage, and that marriage can be a great experience.

Participant 3 said that marriage “has the potential to really team up with someone and create and build a strong lasting bond and life.” P2 thought that it was, “amazing to have a partner to, you know, go through life with and raise kids, and you know, go on adventures, and have the house and the dogs, and all of the things” and said that when she is older, she doesn't want to be “alone.” P4 wanted “to have someone to take care of and love and nurture” and P7 did not want to go “through life alone by yourself.” The participants valued having a partner in their lives and saw the partnership of marriage as a potential blessing.

P5 was a discrepant case in the matter of this theme. She did not consider marriage a potential blessing, but as a limitation. She stated that “if I put it on paper and

say I'm married, I feel like that's when the scrutiny would come in" and that marriage increases the chances of losing yourself. She said, "I feel like not being married, I could, still keep who I am who I am and my own personality and my own personal space. And then when you're married, I feel like you, you might lose that." She felt that her parents were soulmates and that if "they can't make it work, I'm not sure anybody can." She "watched my mom struggle" through her marriage and felt that her mother was trapped in her marriage. She stated that she doesn't "ever want to get married...because if I don't get married, I don't have to get a divorce." P5 saw marriage as a potential for losing herself and a potential for divorce.

Seek Help When Needed

The participants were open about seeking help for themselves and for their marriages. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P6 mentioned that they sought help and good examples from outside sources to understand what a healthy marriage looked like and to help them achieve a healthy marriage. P2 said that it took "a whole lot of therapy to really, you know, realize what a healthy relationship or marriage was" and then stated that she was "more open and willing to ask for help when I need to." P1 said that she "would feel comfortable reaching out to people and like talking about it and like either getting help or advice." Participant 4 started therapy before her marriage to "find my own sense of self or confidence or esteem" so that she could take part in a healthy marriage. Participant 6 not only found good examples of marriage in her in-laws, but her in-laws encouraged counseling and took away the stigma she associated with counseling. She said that her husband's family "kind of pointed out that, you know, like counseling isn't a dirty word"

but view it like car maintenance and encouraged them to “look under the hood and fix some spark plugs” and that there was “nothing bad about it.” P3 found good role models in her in-laws as well. She said, “we also have the really good models of his parents and...spend more time with them than anyone, and you know, we view their marriage as kind of a goal for when we’re old.” The participants felt that asking for help and finding good role models was beneficial to keeping a healthy marriage.

Glad Parents Divorced

The participants expressed relief about, and an understanding for, why their parents divorced. They were happy their parents’ marriages ended after years of unhappiness. Five of the participants wished the marriage would have ended sooner. P3 stated, “I am glad their marriage is over” and “I am glad my parents are not together anymore,” while P4 was excited when her parents divorced and stated, “That’s good for you guys! It’s better for you both...it’s about time”. She went on to ask, “why didn’t you do it before?” P5 wished her father would have sought a divorce sooner because she believed that “my mom would have been a lot happier” and that her relationship with her father would have been better if her parents had divorced when she was younger. P2 discussed the trauma caused by her parents’ marriage and the hardships of living in an unhealthy home and stated, “I wish they would have divorced a lot sooner than they did”. P8 was, “glad they did it” but stated, “I wish they wouldn’t have dragged it out so long.” The participants were glad their parents ended their unhealthy marriages.

Determined to Not Be Like Parents

All of the participants were determined not to follow the example of their parents. The participants stated that observing their parents' unhealthy relationships helped them understand "what not to do" in their relationships. This theme was expressed through a desire to avoid unhappy relationships by learning to overcome modeled behavior, preventing unbalanced relationships, and avoiding relationships with people who hold similar qualities as of one or both of their parents. P2 mentioned that her "parents weren't happy and I don't, I don't, want to ever be in that situation where I'm just not happy." P1 ended a serious relationship because she felt that, "if it's going to end up anything like my parents, it's doing to be a total headache and something that I don't want to go through." P2 stated that she "wanted opposite of what they had" and P3 "did want to avoid the same kind of marriage my parents had. Definitely set out to avoid that." P4 was "striving to have a healthy marriage because of the example I had seen from them [her parents]" and P6 "saw with my parents what didn't work." P7 was adamant that "my marriage is not going to be like yours [her parents']". The participants were unanimous in voicing that they would not mirror the examples that their parents had set for them.

Overcome Modeled Behavior

All of the participants discussed overcoming modeled behaviors they observed in their childhood homes. Some discussed attending therapy to help overcome habits learned at home while others recognized repeated traits from their parents in their adult lives. P2 said that she needed "a whole lot of therapy" to understand a healthy relationship after observing the unhealthy marriage her parents had. P3 had to "kind of

change my behavior” because she discovered that she was a bully like her father and did not want to continue that trend. She wanted to “have a relationship that was successful and fair.” P4 discovered that she was “communicating to my husband...the same way my parents communicated, and I knew I did not want that” so she embraced therapy to help reverse “some damage that was done” in her youth. P6 recognized and changed her modeled behavior too: “I have to catch myself from like doing everything [like my mom did] cuz that’s how I was raised.” These participants were aware of the unhealthy modeled behavior and were determined to adjust their own lives to correct this behavior.

Avoid Unbalanced Relationships

The participants did not want to model their parents' relationships and detailed about how they intended to avoid unhealthy relationships like their parents'. One of the ways they avoided their parents' mistakes was to ensure that they were in a balanced relationship. All of the participants discussed that their mothers carried the majority of the load in the family. P8 said her father was gone at least “three nights a week, my whole life growing up” and P4’s father “would go on guys trips for weeks” at a time. P5’s father “would disappear when I was younger” for long periods and P2 does not “remember my dad being around a lot.” Absent fathers were a common trend among the participants, and the participants observed their mothers take on the responsibility to run the home, provide for the family, and care for the children.

After talking about the dynamics of their childhood homes, the participants discussed the unbalanced relationships that their parents had, and their desire to correct that imbalance in their relationships. P4 stated that there was “definitely an imbalance in

their [her parent's] partnership” and this was reiterated by the majority of other participants. P3 said, “I just remember my mom doing everything”, P2 stated, “it was mostly my mom doing kind of everything,” and P6 said, “my mom did it all or it didn't happen.” Seven participants said their mothers took on the bulk of the family responsibility, and the last participant did not discuss family roles, so it is unknown if her experience reflected the other participants' experience. The participants were determined to not repeat the unbalanced partnership they witnessed. P6 stated that “it's important to have a marriage that is equal” while P4 needed “to be taken care of just as much as I'm doing for him” and that she will not “accommodate and accept” being less than equal. P3 feared “being railroaded or overridden” in her relationship and had to learn not to “overreact” in situations and had a worry of being seen as “insignificant.” P1 asserted herself in situations as a way of “establishing my equal say” and “made sure that things are pretty balanced” in her relationships. The participants recognized the unbalanced relationships in their parents' marriages and did all they could to avoid unbalanced relationships in their lives.

The participants avoided people who shared similar undesired characteristics as their parents. Five of the participants avoided relationships with people like their father. P5 stated that she “never wanted to pursue a relationship like my father” and kept away from all men who held similar characteristics to her father. P6 chose a husband who was “different than my father” and selected a man who is “low-tempered, very easy going,” and did not reflect her father's quick temper. P8 felt it was important to marry a person who didn't travel often and who was “financially secure” unlike what she had

experienced with her father growing up. P1 stated that her mother would point out qualities in her boyfriends that were similar to her father and she “would get really scared of continuing to date that person” and she would end the relationship. P8 avoided relationships with individuals who reminded her of her mother. She felt that her mother was “resentful and not happy” and watched for those personality traits in her partners. P7 found a spouse who shared her similar interests because her parents “didn’t really like sit and enjoy anything together” and her parents had opposite personalities; “she’s social, he’s not social.” She found a partner that had “the same interests” and “same attitudes towards raising kids and education and finances.” The participants were aware of the traits they did not admire in their parents and ensured their partners did not have those same traits.

Family Issues in Childhood

The last theme discovered was that all eight of the participants had issues in their family beginning in childhood. Although this may or may not be tied directly to their views of marriage and divorce, it was a theme shared by all of the participants. Each participant mentioned conflict in their homes as children. These issues included abuse, arguments, financial hardship, unfaithful parents, and parents living separately while married.

Abuse

Four participants discussed abuse in their homes. P3 “observed a lot of fighting, abuse, belittling, so physical, and I would say emotional, verbal abuse.” P4 said that her father was “verbally abusive but became much more physically abusive” as she got older.

P6 mentioned “a lot of verbal” abuse from her father and P1 implied emotional abuse as she discussed her father putting her mother on a “very strict budget” but would then purchase anything he desired. Abuse was not evident or mentioned in every home but was brought up by half of the participants.

Conflict in the Home

Conflict in the home was common among all of the participants. Each participant mentioned some form of conflict within their home from an early age. P4 stated that there was “A lot of discord. They fought a lot,” P6 stated, “there was a lot of arguing, yelling, they didn’t agree on like, how to deal with children.” P4 and P5 said there was “a lot of arguing,” and P2 remembered her parents “would go in their room and close their door and then start yelling.” Conflict within the home was apparent in all of the participant's observations from their childhoods. P8 discussed “major conflict” issues like her father's money issues, but that she may not have paid “too much attention” to the conflict when she was young. P2 stated that financial issues caused conflict and that the conflict “just continually got worse”. P7 and P8 mentioned “tension” among their parents in their home. Conflict within the home from a young age was mentioned by all of the participants.

Financial Struggles

Five participants discussed financial hardship as an issue in their homes. P2 said that her father had “put my mom in some really unfortunate financial situations” which prevented her from divorcing earlier. P3 stated that her mom “made like \$35,000 at her max” and that financially “it would have been very difficult” for her mother to support

the family by herself. P5 “observed a lot of hardship” concerning money as her father “never really had a job or anything” and P8 said her father “had a lot of spending issues” and was a “pathological spender.” P4 discussed her father’s money issues and that he continues to struggle financially even to the point that “he would be homeless” if her mother did house him. Money problems were a cause for conflict in five of the eight participants’ households.

Unfaithful Parents

Half of the participants stated that their fathers were unfaithful in the marriage and another three mentioned or implied an unfaithful parent in their parents’ marriage. P4 said that her father would go out “gallivanting and doing what single men do, but he was married,” and P3’s father “ultimately got a girlfriend” before her mom left him. P2 stated that her father was engaged in “inappropriate” sexual encounters during her parents’ marriage, and P1 implied that her father had an affair when she mentioned her father was “doing all that he was doing while married” and that she did not foresee adultery as a problem in her marriage when she was comparing her marriage to her parent’s marriage. P7 suggested that her father had a relationship while her parents were married and P8 stated that her mother “may have had an affair” when she was in high school. Half of the participants mentioned that unfaithful parents contributed to the issues within their childhood homes.

Living Separately

Another prevalent issue within this case study was that five of the participants said that their parents lived separately within the home or lived separately for a time

while married. P5 remembered that by her 18th birthday her parents were “sleeping in separate rooms” and would “drive separately” to the same destination and even shop and do laundry separately. P7 stated that her “parents started sleeping in separate bedrooms” when she was young and P4 recalled that her parents would “live very separately even when they were in the same place”. P2 said that her parents were “living a separate life” while married even though they were in a shared a home. P8 stated that her father traveled for work and that when she was in high school, her father “trained for a job in another town” and lived separately for “at least five years” while her parents were married. P4’s father also took jobs out of state and would live separately for years at a time. Five of the eight women discussed their parents living apart within the same home or their fathers living in separate homes at least once in their childhood.

Summary

Chapter 4 discussed the setting, demographics, data collection process, analysis phase, and reliability of the study. Chapter 4 disclosed the main themes discovered within this study. Six of the themes were directly related to the research question and the last theme was not directly related to the research question but was relevant to understanding this case study population. The first theme that emerged was that the participants had a desire to marry when they were children, and that the majority of participants maintained a desire to remain married or be married. The second theme was that observing their parents’ marriage and divorce affected their attitude toward marriage and divorce by giving them a realistic perspective of marriage, understanding that hardships that can accompany marriage, and that marriage can end at any time. The third theme was that

divorce is not ideal but sometimes is the best option. The participants stated that their parents' divorce was hard for them to adjust to, that divorce was not desired but understood when it cannot be prevented, and that people should be happy. The fourth theme to emerge was a determination to make their marriages work. They saw marriage as a potential blessing of having a partner and discussed finding good role models, putting effort into their marriages to make them last, and asking for outside help when necessary. The fifth theme discovered was gladness that their parents divorced. The participants felt that divorce later in life was easier to understand and were happy their parents separated, but the majority wished their parents separated earlier in life because their parents were unhappy for so long. The sixth theme stated that the participants were determined to not be like their parents. The participants worked to overcome the modeled behavior they had seen in their childhood, avoided similar relationships and characteristics of their parents, and learned what not to do in their relationships based on what they witnessed in their parents' marriage. The last theme that emerged was conflict in the home. Abuse, arguing, unbalanced parent roles, absent fathers, unhappy parents, and separate living were discussed by the participants when remembering their childhood. Conflict within the home was recognized at early ages and lasted until, and for some, after their parents' divorce.

Overall, witnessing their parents' conflictual marriage and divorce did affect how the participants felt about marriage and divorce. It created a realistic view of marriage that carried caution into their relationships. The participants were more understanding and accepting of divorce when it was seen as necessary. Observing their parents'

marriage and divorce impacted the participants' determination to learn from their parents' mistakes and succeed in their relationships.

Chapter 5 will review the results of this study and compare them to previous findings to determine whether the results confirm, disconfirm, previous research. I will discuss how this study has extended the knowledge of marriage and divorce attitudes in the field of family studies. The results will be addressed according to the topic and theory to ensure that the findings did not exceed the scope of the study. Limitations within this study will be addressed and recommendations for future research will be given. Lastly, Chapter 5 will discuss the opportunity for positive change and field-related advances due to the data found within this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this intrinsic, single case study was to learn and understand the attitudes of marriage and divorce of adult children of gray divorce. An intrinsic, single case study using in-depth interviews with adult children of late-life divorce was designed to ask participants about their attitudes of marriage and divorce prior to and after their parents' divorce.

There were seven themes discovered during the analysis of the data. The themes consisted of maintaining a desire to marry, that divorce is not ideal but sometimes best, observing a parents' marriage and divorce affects attitudes of marriage and divorce, a determination to not be like their parents and to make their relationships work, a gladness that parents divorced, and that conflict was prevalent in the homes at an early age.

Interpretation of the Findings

The results of this study confirmed previous research regarding attitudes of marriage and divorce among adult children of divorce. Although research is limited within the field of gray divorce and the affect it has on adult children, there were three areas in which the findings of this study supported previous findings related to adult children of divorce. These consist of having a higher acceptance of divorce, that events and dysfunction in families affect attitudes of marriage, and children are impacted by divorce at any age.

COD have been determined to have more positive attitudes towards divorce (Boyer-Pennington et al., 2001; Shimkowski et al., 2018). Duran-Aydintug (1997) found that ACOD were more aware of issues related to divorce and feel a hesitancy or caution

toward marriage. These findings align with the findings within this study. The participants were not in favor of divorce but were supportive of divorce when individuals were not happy or in an unhealthy marriage. Caution and an understanding of the realities of marriage were also discussed in this study. Although further research needs to be done with ACOD and adult children of gray divorce, the results show positive attitudes of divorce and caution in relationships.

Vezzetti (2016) and Amato (2000) claimed that dysfunction in a family leading up to a divorce may influence a child's attitudes more than divorce. The participants within this study were all impacted by dysfunction in their childhood homes and claimed that the observations of their parents' conflictual marriages impacted how they felt about marriage and divorce. Although the participants' parents divorced later in life, the participants discussed that their parents' conflictual marriages impacted their attitudes of marriage and divorce. These findings support Vezzetti and Amato's findings that the events leading up to a divorce and dysfunction within the home influence a child's attitudes of marriage and divorce.

Duran-Aydintug (1997) and Mikucki-Enyart et al. (2017) discovered that age is irrelevant to whether a divorce will impact a child. Although the affect may vary according to age, children are impacted by the separation of their parents at any age. This claim was supported by the data collected in this study. The participants mentioned the physical, emotional, and financial struggles brought on by their parents' divorce and the impact that it had on their attitudes of marriage and divorce. The claim that children are affected by divorce at any age was supported by the results of this study.

The results of the study were interpreted through the lens of social learning theory. Social learning theory claims that people learn through observation and are influenced by what they witness and are taught by others (Bandura, 1971; Learning Theories, 2020). The results of the study were based on the participants' observations as children and as adults and their attitudes of marriage and divorce after what they had observed in their parents' marriage and divorce. Social learning theory states that observations can be more influential than verbal instruction (Bandura, 1971). The results of this study support this claim. The participants used the observations from childhood through adulthood to determine which attitudes, characteristics, and actions they would continue in their own lives and which they would strive to eliminate. Within this study, the majority of the participants used their parents as an example of 'what not to do' regarding characteristics and relationship habits, indicating that the observation of their parents was influential in determining their attitudes of marriage and divorce.

Limitations of the Study

This study was an intrinsic, single case study thereby limiting the study to these individuals. Case studies are limited to the participants within the study and are not designed to generalize to the public or specialized populations. This study observed the attitudes of eight adult women affected by gray divorce and was not designed to be generalized to other populations. All of the participants were female and limits the views of the study to a woman's perspective.

The participants in the study ranged from 23-53-years-old, limiting the study to individuals within that age parameter. Those younger than 23 or older than 53 may hold

differing attitudes toward marriage and divorce. All of the participants discussed having a conflictual childhood home thereby limiting the results to those who grow up in contentious homes. Seven out of eight of the participants were White and may suggest a cultural bias. Seven out of eight of the participants were married at the time of their parents' divorce, which limits the study in terms of marital status during the time of a parent's divorce. Further analysis using quantitative analysis, study of individuals who grew up in no conflict homes, from minority groups, and who were single or divorced at the time of their parents' divorce may show differing results than the participants within this case study.

Recommendations

As the number of gray divorces rises, increased numbers of adult children will be affected by the gray divorce phenomenon. Further research is recommended for adult children of gray divorce in terms of gender, marital status, religion, childhood atmosphere, and method design. Further research is warranted to discover attitudes of marriage and divorce among adult male children of gray divorce. Further research is needed for adults who did not witness conflict-filled marriages as children. A variation in race, culture, and religious affiliations would also be of benefit. Children under the age of 18 who have been affected by gray divorce require further research to determine the impact of gray divorce on their attitudes toward marriage and divorce. Further research is recommended for adult children of gray divorce among stepparents, adopted parents, or another custodial or parental role. Quantitative research measuring attitudes of marriage and divorce is recommended to expand the understanding and allow for a statistical

approach to the marital and divorce attitudes among this population. Lastly, further research is recommended for adult children of late-life divorce in situations where parents permanently separate without legal divorce.

Implications

The results of this study may provide validation, understanding, and comfort to adult children who have lived through the gray divorce phenomenon. It can provide awareness to parents considering a gray divorce and an understanding as to how a divorce later in life may affect their children. This study can bring about social change through acknowledging the trials faced by children of late-life divorce and recognizing that adult children, and their families, are impacted by a parents' divorce. Social programs, whether in-person or virtual, would be beneficial in terms of support groups and transitioning assistance for adult children navigating through their parents' gray divorce. Therapists and counselors can benefit from this information when assisting adult children of gray divorce as well as gray divorcees.

This case of individuals was all impacted by conflict in their home as children. Understanding the conflict, trauma, and effects of living in a conflictual home for an extended time, and the desire for parents to separate can be beneficial to counselors, therapists, legal advisors, spiritual advisors, and parents in similar situations. The knowledge that long-term conflict can have on an individual's attitude toward marriage and divorce may be of benefit to those in the family-centered services.

This study indicated that adult children of gray divorce were more accepting of divorce but were willing and determined to make their marriages work. These data can

assist therapists and counselors and offer an understanding to the attitudes, feelings, and thoughts adult children of late-life divorce may have. Although this study was not designed to be generalized to the public or all adult children of late-life divorce, it may relate to individuals in similar circumstances and provide further insight into personal attitudes toward marriage and divorce. This study can assist social workers, human service professionals, educators, therapists, or other individuals within the family studies field with further understanding as to how gray divorce affects the attitudes of marriage and divorce.

Conclusion

The results of this study support previous research that has been done regarding attitudes of divorce and marriage among COD and ACOD. The findings indicate that adult children of gray divorce hold similar attitudes of marriage to ACOD and similar attitudes of divorce to COD. Adult children of gray divorce value marriage but accept divorce as an option to end an unhealthy or unhappy marriage. The participants were determined to not repeat the mistakes of their parents and to maintain healthy relationships through hard work and finding support systems. Although the research supports previous findings, further research needs to be conducted among adult children of gray divorce to allow for increased knowledge among this population.

Adult children of late-life divorce are impacted by the marriage and divorce of their parents. All of the participants were affected by the observation of their parents' conflictual marriage in their childhood and some observed conflict in their families for decades. The participants within the study valued marriage but understood that divorce

was an option. They were not opposed to divorce because of the conflict and unhappiness they had witnessed throughout their lives. They observed hardship, conflict, and learned what characteristics, habits, and actions were unhealthy in a marriage. The participants within this study made conscious efforts to change unhealthy behaviors and improve their lives. Understanding the impact that a parents' relationship and marriage have on adult children is vital to understanding how to assist individuals through the divorce transition as well as within their relationships. This information expands the knowledge of marital and divorce attitudes among a population that is growing. These results and further research of gray divorce can help researchers understand adult children's intentions toward marriage, relational practices, and views of divorce. Marital and divorce attitudes impact individuals and families, and thereby affect society on a small and large scale, concerning the health of individual home lives, social services offered, state and federal funding, and personal well-being.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Purpose

To gain an understanding of how or if a parents' gray divorce has impacted attitudes of marriage and divorce.

Target Population

Adult children of gray divorce who were over the age of 18 when their parents divorced.

Advertisement

I am doing a study! Please help me spread the word. Share this message and tell your friends and family that I am looking for willing participants.

I am exploring attitudes of marriage and divorce of adults (over 18) who had parents divorce late in life (after the age of 50).

If you would like to take part in a study, please contact me at any of the following:

Phone: call or text: 385-219-6648

Facebook: Brittany Freeze

Instagram: Brittanymfreeze

Email: Brittany.freeze@waldenu.edu.

If you know anyone that would qualify, please reach out and inform them of my study to see if they would be willing to participate. I will reach out to those who inquire within 3 days to determine if they qualify and to schedule an interview date and time. Thank you!

Participant Introduction

I will call, text, message, or email each participant who has requested to be in the study. I will use the following script to ensure consistency as well as ensure that they have all of the information they need regarding the parameters of the study.

“Thank you for requesting to be part of this study. This study is exploring the attitudes of marriage and divorce of those whose parents divorced later in life. There are a few questions I need to ask first to determine if you qualify for the study.

1. Are you at least 18 years of age?
2. Were you at least 18 years old at time of our parents’ divorce?
3. Are you and your parents residents of the United States of America?
4. Is this divorce between your two biological parents?
5. Was at least one of your parents over the age of 50 when they divorced?

Please reply back with your answers and I will determine if you qualify for the study. If you qualify, I will be in contact shortly to schedule an interview call. Thank you so much for your participation.”

Once they have returned or verbally answered the questions, I will use the following guide to move them forward in the study or to remove them from the study.

If they do not qualify:

I will inform them that they do not qualify and thank them for their time. I will ask that they tell their friends and family members of the study.

If they qualify:

If they qualify for the study, I will use the following guide to move them forward within the study:

- Inform them that they have qualified to take part in the study.
- Ask whether they would prefer phone or video conferencing for the interview.
- Share that all information will be confidential and anonymous.
- Explain that they can choose to leave the study at any time prior to completion.
- Schedule the interview.
- Inform them that I will send an email with study related information (consent form, process of interview, interview questions) to review. I will ask that they not share these questions with anyone.
- Provide them with my contact information so they can call, text, message, or email me.
- Thank them for their willingness to participate.

Interviews

I will then use the following guide to begin the interview stage of the study:

- Inform the participant that we are on a recorded call.
- Ask for verbal consent to continue the interview.

- Provide an overview of the study.
- Ensure anonymity and confidentiality.
- General and easy questions to help the participant to feel at ease.
- Begin interview questions
- Use probing questions to clarify or gain more understanding.
- Following the interview, I will thank them for their time, ask if they want a copy of the transcript, and then inform them that I will send them a synopsis of the interview within the next 7 days. I will ask that they review the document and correct any areas that were misinterpreted or missed.
- Once I receive corrections or approval, I will thank them for their participation.
- I will send the summary of the study at the final stage of the study.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Observation of Child Years

1. What did you observe in your parents' marriage in your childhood and teenage years?

Attitude of Marriage and Divorce as Child

2. How did you feel about marriage and divorce as a child/teenager?

Observation of Adult Years

3. What did you observe in your parents' marriage in your adult years?

Modeling

4. Do you believe that you hold similar feelings or attitudes about marriage or divorce as one or both of your parents?

Attitude of Marriage and Divorce as Adult Child of Gray Divorce

5. Please describe if and/or how your parents' marriage or divorce has influenced your attitude regarding marriage or divorce.
6. Is there anything else regarding your parents' gray divorce that has impacted how you feel about marriage or divorce?

Appendix C: Ad

I am doing a study and I need your help to find volunteers.

Seeking adults whose parents divorced later in life for an interview in the next 3 weeks.

If you are a child of parents who divorced after one or both parents were over the age of 50, I would love to hear about your experience. Participants must be 18 years or older. The interview will about 30 minutes long via Zoom, Skype, telephone, or other audio or video conferencing technology. The purpose of this study is to explore the attitudes of marriage and divorce among adult children of gray (late-life) divorce.

To volunteer, please reach out to Brittany at Brittany.freeze@waldenu.edu, message her directly, or call or text her at 385-219-6648 and she will determine if you qualify for the study.

Please share this study opportunity on your page and with anyone who may want to share or participate in this study opportunity.

The interview is part of an independent research study for Brittany Freeze, a Ph.D. candidate at Walden University. All interviews will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be shared in the results or reports.

Thank you and have a great day!

Appendix D: Qualifying Questions

1. Are you at least 18 years of age?
2. Were you at least 18 years old at the time of your parents' divorce?
3. Are you and your parents residents of the United States of America?
4. Is this divorce between your two biological parents?
5. Was at least one of your parents over the age of 50 when they divorced?

Appendix E: Updated Interview Questions

1. What did you observe in your parents' marriage in your childhood and teenage years?
2. How did you feel about marriage and divorce as a child/teenager?
3. What did you observe in your parents' marriage in your adult years?
4. How do you feel about marriage and divorce now?
5. Do you believe that you hold similar feelings or attitudes about marriage or divorce as one or both of your parents?
6. Can you describe how or if your attitude of marriage has changed over your lifetime?
7. Can you describe how or if your attitude of divorce has changed over your lifetime?
8. Can you describe if/how your observation of your parents in your childhood and teenage years has shaped who you pursued and how you pursued relationships?
9. Can you describe if or how your parents divorce has impacted your own marriage?
10. Please describe if and/or how your parents' marriage or divorce has influenced your attitude regarding marriage or divorce?
11. Is there anything else regarding your parents' gray divorce that has impacted how you feel about marriage or divorce? Or that you would like to share?