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Parental Alienation as a Predictor of Adult Marital and Romantic Relationship Quality

Leslie Elizabeth Krill-Reiter
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Parental Alienation as a Predictor of Adult Marital and Romantic Relationship Quality

by

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MS, Chestnut Hill College, 2010

BA, Cedar Crest College, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Forensic Psychology

Walden University

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Abstract

Divorce rates have consistently risen over the past several decades along with the subsequent increase in parental alienation occurring after the breakup of the family. Parental alienation has long-term negative effects on children who have experienced it, including mental health issues, increased risk of substance abuse, lower levels of self-sufficiency, and decreased physical health. The purpose of this quantitative, nonexperimental study was to determine whether alienation from a parent during childhood impacts the quality of adult romantic and marital relationships of the children when they become adults. The Bowen family systems theory and theory of attachment were used as the framework for the study. A convenience sample included 170 adult participants over the age of 18 who were either married or involved in a dating relationship who had parents that divorced during their childhood between the individual's birth and the age of 14. The results from multiple regression analyses indicated that alienation from father was a significant predictor of marital or dating relationship quality, and alienation from mother was a significant predictor of relationship happiness, satisfaction, and quality. As alienation from father or mother scores increased, the criterion variable scores decreased. Anxious attachment was also a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction as higher scores on anxious attachment resulted in lower relationship satisfaction scores. These findings have positive social change implications as practitioners may use the results to help individuals better understand their relationships and identify the negative lasting effects of parental alienation in adult relationships.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful husband, David Michael Reiter, who supported me and put up with way more than his fair share of running the household while I balanced the daunting task of balancing success in school, success in the workplace, and success at home. I am forever indebted to you for your unconditional love and endless support throughout these very long three years. I appreciate and love you more than you will ever know. Another special thank you and dedication is to my children, Matthew David Reiter, Savannah Lynn Reiter, and Baby Cameron Cole Reiter, as the experiences of Matthew and Savannah are the inspiration for this study. Your Mommy loves you, will always fight for you, and is sorry for the long nights of homework that prevented us from cuddling and playing as much as I would have liked. Thank you for always supporting and inspiring me. Thank you to my sister, Shelly McCormick, and my brother-in-law, Sean McCormick, for your help with my formatting questions for this document, it means so much to me. Thank you also to my mother, Cindy Krill, and my father, Jeff Krill, for always encouraging me throughout this process and for their support through my entire educational journey. Lastly thank you to Sweetie whose life and passing inspired me complete this step in furthering my education. This dissertation is dedicated to you my loves, "Forever Ever". I love you all eternally!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between experiencing parental alienation in childhood, attachment style, and the quality of romantic relationships in adulthood. Experiencing parental alienation as a child has been correlated with mental health issues, increased risk of substance abuse, lower levels of self-sufficiency, and the potential for decreased physical health (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Moné & Biringen, 2012). The results of this study provided insight into how relationships might be impacted by the experiences of parental alienation in childhood and may create the potential for preventive interventions to be put in place to improve the quality of relationships for these individuals. The purpose of this study was to determine whether alienation from a parent during childhood and attachment style impact the quality of adult romantic or marital relationships.

In Chapter 1, I will provide a review of the background of the study, along with an explanation of the problem statement and a description of the purpose of the study. The research questions and hypotheses are specified, along with the theoretical framework and nature of the study, which are discussed in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3. In Chapter 1, I will also include a discussion of the operational definitions, assumptions, and scope and delimitations. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations and significance of the study.

Background

Scholars have examined the impact of divorce on parent-child relationships, as well as how it affects a child's ability to develop healthy attachments with others. Boss (2015),

Fraley and Heffernan (2013), and Kalmijn (2012) noted that divorce with a family unit can result in children forming insecure attachment patterns that will follow them into adulthood. The postdivorce attachment style applied in the parent and child relationship is often applied to other relationships throughout development, including romantic and marital relationships as the child grows up (Boss, 2014, 2015; Fraley & Heffernan, 2013). However, children who are able to develop a secure attachment to their parents, regardless of whether or not divorce occurred, are more likely to report secure romantic relationships as well (Boss, 2014; Fraley & Heffernan, 2013; Kalmijn, 2012).

Other effects of divorce include the exhibition of poor psychological health as children may be forced into the role of friend or caregiver when parental divorce occurs due to boundary ambiguity of their parent's postseparation (Lacey, Bartley, Pikhart, Stafford, & Cable, 2014; Perrin, Ehrenberg, & Hunter, 2013; Reiter, Hjorleifsson, Bredablik, & Meland, 2013; Ribar, 2015). There is a greater potential for long-term psychological issues to surface within children affected by divorce throughout their lifespan when there is an absence of parental boundaries and those children are expected to address adult issues alongside the parent (Lacey et al., 2013; Perrin et al., 2013; Reiter et al., 2013; Ribar, 2015). Additionally, increased depression and anxiety symptoms, lower levels of self-esteem, fewer social supports, greater risk for substance abuse, and poor physical health in later life are found to be present in children who experienced the divorce of their parents (Larson & Halfon, 2013; Perrin et al., 2013; Verrocchio, Marchetti, & Fulcheri, 2015).

In the divorce literature, researchers have focused on parental alienation following divorce. Gardner who defined parental alienation syndrome after working with several children made the decision to emotionally align with one parent following a divorce, while simultaneously rejecting the other, which often includes resisting visitation and contact with the rejected parent (Bernet, Boch-Galhau, Baker, & Morrison, 2013; Lorandos, Bernet, & Sauber, 2013; O'Donohue, Benuto, & Bennett, 2016). Baker and Eichler (2016) found that parental alienation could occur in families with or without conflict in their interaction dynamics despite their initial theory that it would only occur in families with severe levels of conflict following divorce. Denigration of a parent occurs most frequently in divorced families and is associated with less emotional closeness between the child and both parents, although is most noticeable with the parent being disparaged by the other (Rowen & Emery, 2014). Additionally, if negative implications for the child are perpetuated over an extended period of time, resistance by the child to any interaction with the rejected parent may occur and the alliance with the alienating parent may be strengthened, creating parental alienation symptoms of greater intensity (Clemente & Padilla-Racero, 2016; López, Iglesias, & García, 2014; Rowen & Emery, 2014).

Hands and Warshak (2011) found that individuals who grew up in divorced families were more likely to experience parental alienation than those individuals from intact families. Alienation behaviors occur in mothers and fathers equally (Hands & Warshak, 2011). Baker and Ben-Ami (2011) reported that parental alienation was significantly associated with alcohol abuse in adulthood along with increased reports of

depression and a lack of independence. Additionally, Baker and Ben-Ami noted that the more a child was exposed to alienation strategies, the greater the likelihood that those strategies affected the individual's self-esteem, self-sufficiency, levels of depression, and presence of insecure attachment styles in adulthood. Domestic violence and postseparation promote parental alienation between children and parents (Godbout & Parent, 2012). Behavioral problems, difficulties in school, and problems finding individual identity in adulthood are related to parental alienation in childhood (Godbout & Parent, 2012).

Scholars have examined the long-term effects of divorce on children and other development and effects of parental alienation (Lacey et al., 2014; Larson & Halfon, 2013; Lorandos et al., 2013; Rowen & Emery, 2014). Researchers have compared aspects of attachment styles with their effects on adult relationships (Boss, 2015; Fraley & Heffernan, 2013; Kalmijn, 2012). Despite what is known about the long-term effects of divorce and the way it may affect an individual's attachment to others, the impact of parental alienation on adult romantic relationships has not been examined. Empirical exploration into this gap is necessary as divorce rates continue to rise, with potential consequences occurring to the relationships of the affected individuals.

Problem Statement.

Divorce rates in the United States have risen steadily over the past several decades, which has also increased the frequency of parental alienation (Larson & Halfon, 2013). Parental alienation occurs following the dissolution of a family unit when a child forms an alliance with one parent while simultaneously working as a team to isolate the

other parent and limit their involvement in the child's life (Godbout & Parent, 2012). Parental alienation may derive from the encouragement of the parent the child has aligned with or in instances where a child feels rejection from the parent, lack of a parent's presence in the child's life, emotional abuse, or a negative parenting style (Godbout & Parent, 2012). The phenomenon of children becoming alienated from a parent has lasting effects on the adult behaviors of the individuals experiencing it in a variety of ways including insecure attachment styles; lower levels of self-sufficiency; and reduced self-esteem, which can lead to a heightened dependence on other people (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Larson & Halfon, 2013). Due to the increased difficulty of establishing healthy attachments, insecurity, and greater potential for mental illness to be present, the long-term effects of parental alienation may result in these adults having less satisfying romantic relationships and marriages (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012).

Scholars have identified several long-term personality traits found in adults who have experienced parental alienation in their youth, most noticeably, difficulty connecting with others interpersonally due to difficulties in forming healthy attachments (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Godbout & Parent, 2012; Larson & Halfon, 2013; Moné & Biringen, 2012). However, there had not been any studies on the quality of marital or romantic relationships for adults who have experienced alienation from a parent during childhood. Researching the quality of personal adult relationships for these individuals may provide a more complete understanding of the long-term effects that parental alienation might have on adult interpersonal relationships (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Godbout & Parent, 2012; Moné & Biringen, 2012). Personal relationships in adulthood are vital to the level

of quality of life for the majority of individuals (Godbout & Parent, 2012). The results of this study will provide insight on how relationships might be impacted by the experiences of parental alienation in childhood and may create the potential for preventive interventions to be put into place to improve the quality of relationships for these individuals.

Purpose of the Study.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether alienation from a parent during childhood and attachment style impacted the quality of adult romantic or marital relationships. I conducted a quantitative study using survey methodology to examine the quality of the participants' romantic relationships by assessing levels of happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality. Individuals who have experienced parental alienation are more likely to have difficulty in forming attachments in adulthood (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Godbout & Parent, 2012). The difficulty forming attachments is due to the lasting effects of parental alienation that can weaken the afflicted individual's ability to become self-sufficient in adulthood and also prevent them from forming appropriate attachments to others (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Larson & Halfon, 2013).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study was quantitative in nature and was designed to identify any relationships between parental alienation in childhood, attachment style, and romantic relationship quality among individuals over the age of 18, who have experienced parental divorce in childhood. The research questions and their corresponding hypotheses for this study included the following:

RQ1: To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the level of happiness perceived in their adult romantic relationships, as measured by the Relationship Happiness Measure?

*H*₀1: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁1: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

RQ2: To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the level of trust perceived in their adult romantic relationships, as measured by the Relationship Trust Measure?

*H*₀2: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁2: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ3: To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the level of satisfaction perceived in their adult romantic relationships (satisfaction 6 months prior and present satisfaction), as measured by the Relationship Satisfaction Measure?

*H*₀₃: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₃: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ4 : To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the overall quality of adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Quality Measure?

*H*₀₄: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₄: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

RQ5: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the level of happiness in adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Happiness Measure?

*H*₀₅: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₅: Attachment style is a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

RQ6: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the trust levels in adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Trust Measure?

*H*₀₆: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₆: Attachment style is a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ7: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the level of satisfaction in adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Satisfaction Measure?

*H*₀₇: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₇: Attachment style is a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ8: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the overall quality of adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Quality Measure?

*H*₀₈: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₈: Attachment style is a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

Theoretical Framework

The foundation of this study was based on the Bowen family systems theory (BFST) and the theory of attachment (Colin, 1996; Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). The BFST states that relationships between parents and children,

which are emotionally closer than average, will often involve aspects of control tactics used by the parent involved to manipulate the child's thoughts and maintain the close emotional connection as well as potentially prevent the inclusion of relationships with other individuals in the life of the child (Fauber et al., 1990). Parental control tactics are then used to fortify a coalition between the parent and child, which are also characteristics that define a presence of parental alienation (Fauber et al., 1990; Moné & Biringen, 2012).

Bowlby and Ainsworth's attachment theory states that three attachment styles exist that may be embodied by a given individual including avoidant, anxious, and secure attachment (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995; Colin, 1996; Moné & Biringen, 2012). A secure attachment to an individual's parents or primary caregivers is necessary for the individual to have success in various aspects of life including the formation of adult romantic and social relationships (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991; Colin, 1996; Moné & Biringen, 2012). The inability to form healthy attachments with other people has also been identified as a lasting effect of experiencing alienation from a parent during childhood and is also theorized to hinder the formation of social relationships throughout the individual's life (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013; Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Godbout & Parent, 2012; Larson & Halfon, 2013). The variables used to identify the quality of a romantic relationship include measures of happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Gere & MacDonald, 2013; Moné & Biringen, 2012). In this study, I determined the relationship between alienation from a parent in

childhood, along with identification of avoidant, anxious, or secure attachment styles, and relationship quality.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was quantitative, with a nonexperimental design, using survey methodology. The criterion variables in this study included happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality of the participants' romantic or marital relationships. The five predictor variables were alienation from the participants' mother and alienation from the participants' father during childhood, along with the three attachment styles of avoidant, anxious, or secure. Participants in this study were individuals over the age of 18 who had parents that divorced during their childhood between the individual's birth and the age of 14. The participants were also either married or involved in a dating relationship at the time the survey was conducted. Multiple regression analyses was then used to determine the relative strength of alienation from father, alienation from mother, and each of the three attachment styles (avoidant, anxious, and secure) in predicting the criterion variables of relationship happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality.

Operational Definitions

Anxious attachment style: Identified in individuals who would prefer to be closer to others than their partners would like and will also worry that their romantic partner does not truly love or desire to be with them. This person would like to merge completely with their partner, which has the potential to scare others away. These individuals have more self-doubts and often feel misunderstood by others (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Attachment style: Attachment formation develops from the time individuals are young, and exposure to maltreatment, emotional stress, or psychological abuse from their parents will result in an insecure attachment style for the child (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Elkins, 2016; Goldberg, Muir, & Kerr, 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2015).

Avoidant attachment style: Identified in individuals who are uncomfortable being close to others, find it difficult to trust others, and difficulty depending on others. Nervousness will also occur when other people get close to these individuals, and romantic partners will often be more intimate than what is comfortable for individuals with this attachment style (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Parental alienation: Parental alienation syndrome occurs when a child makes the decision to emotionally align with one parent following a divorce, while simultaneously rejecting the other, which will often include resisting visitation with the rejected parent (Clemente & Padilla-Racero, 2015, 2016; López et al., 2014).

Relationship quality: Romantic quality of relationships includes intimacy levels, ability to trust their partner, reported happiness, satisfaction levels, commitment levels, communication capabilities, conflict frequency, relationship duration, and overall comfort with the partner (Gere & MacDonald, 2013; Murray, Holmes, Griffin, & Derrick, 2015; Poerio, Totterdell, Emerson, & Miles, 2015; Proulx & Snyder-Rivas, 2013; Rodebaugh et al., 2014). As these qualities are subjective in nature and derived largely by self-report and perception, the attitude and belief system of the individual is connected with the levels of quality reported (Lemay & Venaglia, 2016; Meyer et al., 2015; Slotter & Luchies, 2013).

Secure attachment style: Identified in individuals who feel more well-liked by others and have confidence that other people around them have primarily good intentions. They are easily able to get emotionally close to others and are comfortable trusting or depending on other people around them. These individuals do not worry often about abandonment by others or about becoming too close to people around them (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Assumptions

I assumed that the participants completing the survey would answer honestly. Additionally, a statement about the importance of this survey and scientific integrity was assumed to have a positive effect on the honesty of the participants. I also assumed that the participants included in the sample had read and understood the items as they were written and that their answers reflected what the item intended to measure. I assumed that the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, the Adult Attachment Scale, Relationship Happiness Measure, Relationship Trust Measure, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, and Relationship Quality Measure had accurately measured what the constructs intended to measure. All reliability and validity information will be presented in detail in Chapter 3.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I focused on the happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality of romantic relationships, parental alienation, and avoidant, anxious, or secure attachment styles of the individual. I chose to focus on individuals who were over the age of 18, who were married or in a current romantic relationship at the time the study took place, and

who had parents who divorced between the individual's birth and age fourteen. This was because individuals who have experienced parental divorce prior to the age of 14 were still dependent on their parents more so than an older child and also were more likely to have experienced a split visitation schedule with their parents, exposing them to the initial effects of parental divorce and potential parental alienation. With the participation of individuals who fit the criteria listed, internal validity was thought to be stronger. Ideally, participants would come from a range of geographic regions and consist of individuals who were a wide range of ages, so that the study may be generalized to a broad population of individuals who experienced parental divorce in childhood.

Limitations

Potential threats to external validity had to be considered in this study as it was possible that the sample of participants may not represent the population of individuals who have experienced the childhood divorce of their parents. If the sample consisted of individuals from limited ages, genders, or geographical locations, there would be a greater potential for the survey results to be skewed (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2012).

The participants' motivation for volunteering for the study might also have affected responses as individuals whose parents' divorce was particularly difficult or disrupting may have felt more inclined to participate than those who did not associate as many negative feelings with the experience. The opposite might have also been true as individuals who had negative memories related to their parents' divorce might have avoided participation to avoid remembering those issues. Additionally, participants may

have misinterpreted the nature of the study, which also may have skewed data as it would not accurately reflect their behaviors and personal interpretations of the questions. If participants believed that a certain outcome should be present in the results, their responses may have been skewed to fit that notion. Also, the sample participated in the study online, which may have affected validity as the participants who were drawn to the study may have been more familiar with technology, have a higher level of education, or may have increased means to access technology.

Internal validity must be considered for any study to ensure that the study is measuring what it intends to measure (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2012). If the initial demographics questionnaire was not clearly worded, there would have been a potential for participants to assume the purpose or expectations of the study, and participants may have tailored their responses accordingly to fit their assumptions. As the survey was relatively short in nature, there was not a concern in this study for fatigue to occur in participants due to the length of the time needed to complete.

Additional concerns that may threaten internal validity within this study were the participants themselves. Other factors affect romantic and marital relationship quality as well, including stress, finances, and child-rearing, among others. These additional factors were not measured in this study, which may have created further potential limitations.

Significance

The results from this study provided an original contribution to the field of psychology as it identified ways in which attachment styles and exposure to alienation

from a parent in childhood affects adult romantic and marital relationships. The findings have the potential to be implemented by psychotherapists working with individuals on a variety of issues including mental health issues, relationship issues, or court-related problems, as the understanding of the individual's background is often a necessary step to therapeutic progress (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013; Larson & Halfon, 2013). Positive social change may be promoted with increased understanding of the parental alienation phenomenon with its associated long-term effects (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Moné & Biringen, 2012).

Summary

In Chapter 1, I reviewed the purpose of the study, which was to examine the quality of romantic relationships in adulthood when experiencing parental alienation in childhood and the individual's attachment style. The background of the study included a discussion of parental alienation, the effects of divorce, styles of attachment, and relationship quality factors. The BFST and Bowlby and Ainsworth's theory of attachment were discussed as the framework for this quantitative, nonexperimental study design using survey methodology. It was assumed that participants of the study responded honestly and that the assessment tools used accurately measured what they purported to.

I focused on the happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality of romantic relationships, parental alienation, and avoidant, anxious, or secure attachment styles of individuals over the age of 18, who were married or in a current romantic relationship at the time of the study, and who had parents who divorced between the individual's birth and age 14. Additionally, limitations to the study included motivation and external factors

potentially affecting relationships, among others, were noted. This study was significant as it provides an original contribution to the field of psychology as it identified ways in which attachment styles and exposure to alienation from a parent in childhood affects adult romantic and marital relationships.

Chapter 2 includes a detailed discussion of the BFST and theory of attachment. A detailed review of the relevant literature regarding parental alienation, the effects of divorce, issues related to the development of attachment style, and factors involved in determining relationship quality is also included.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Divorce rates in the United States have risen steadily over the past several decades, remaining steady since 2006 with a current divorce rate of 22% of marriages ending in divorce within 5 years and 53% of marriages dissolving within 20 years, which is presumed to have increased the frequency of parental alienation occurring nationwide (Center for Disease Control, 2017; Larson & Halfon, 2013). Parental alienation occurs following the dissolution of a family unit when a child forms an alliance with one parent while the same parent simultaneously provides efforts to isolate the other parent and limit their involvement in the child's life (Godbout & Parent, 2012). Children who have experienced alienation from a parent experience associated long-term effects into adulthood including an increased difficulty in establishing healthy attachments; overall insecurity; and greater potential for mental illness to be present, which may result in the self-report of less satisfying marriages and romantic relationships (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). The purpose of this study was to examine if relationships are impacted by the experiences of parental alienation in childhood.

The phenomenon of children becoming alienated from a parent is an issue that has lasting effects on the adult behaviors of the individuals experiencing it in a variety of ways including insecure attachment styles; lower levels of self-sufficiency; and reduced self-esteem, which can all lead to a heightened dependence on other people (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Larson & Halfon, 2013). In this chapter, I review the overall effects of divorce, parental alienation, relationship quality, and the importance of healthy

attachment formation. The results may assist in creating preventive interventions to be put into place to improve the quality of relationships for these individuals.

Literature Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted by selecting peer-reviewed journals, books, and government documents derived from the databases Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, PsycINFO, PsycTESTS, SAGE Journal, and Thoreau. Key terms that were used in this search were *parental alienation*, *parental alienation syndrome*, *effects of divorce*, *family systems theory*, *theory of attachment*, *alienation*, *attachment*, *parental divorce*, *relationship quality*, *child custody*, and *child alienation*. A date range of 2011 to present was employed to select empirical literature that yielded an array of population parameters, including sample sizes and analysis type, to contribute scientific breadth to the current study. In addition, search parameters prior to 2011 were also used to gather material associated with theoretical perspectives and served to provide a historical timetable to connect the theories with the variables of the study.

Theoretical Foundation

In the following discussion of theoretical framework, the BFST and the theory of attachment will be reviewed. These theories were implemented in the current study to explore the beliefs and perceptions related to dynamics of control between parents and children, as well as the importance of the relationship between children and their caregivers, to form healthy attachments with others as discussed by Bretherton (1992) and Kerr and Bowen (1988).

Bowen Family Systems Theory

The BFST was developed by Bowen and Kerr (1988) after professional study of family observations. The BFST states that relationships between a parent and child, which are emotionally closer than average, will often involve aspects of control tactics used by the parent involved to manipulate the child's thoughts and maintain the close emotional connection as well as potentially preventing the child from having relationships with other individuals (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Parental control tactics are then used to fortify a coalition between the parent and child, which are also characteristics that define parental alienation (Fauber et al., 1990; Malik, 2013; Moné & Biringen, 2012). The experience of the family unit as it interacts during an individual's childhood is theorized by Kerr and Bowen (1988) to have the potential to negatively or positively affect his or her emotional development that will follow him or her into adulthood.

The BFST was formulated through focus on the common patterns developed within families as a means to defuse or control anxiety and was believed by Bowen to be the core of the human emotional system (Brown, 1999; Kerr & Bown, 1988). Scholars suggested that if an individual is exposed to parents displaying negative reactions to stress or conflict in childhood, he or she will also mirror the inappropriate emotional reactions upon reaching adulthood (Haefner, 2014; Johnson & Ray, 2016; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Priest, 2013; Titelman, 2014). This theory has been widely accepted in the practice of family therapy throughout North America; however, Bowen's original writings on the subject have been criticized as difficult to understand (Brown, 1999).

Individuals who have experienced alienation from a parent during childhood have been found to exhibit poor emotional attachment, an increased likelihood of experiencing addictive behaviors, and decreased rates of positive emotional development (Dallam & Silberg, 2016; Moné & Biringen, 2012; Warshak, 2015). The presence of negative behaviors correspond directly with the BFST model as many of them are related to learned behaviors from the parent as a role model (Johnson & Ray, 2016; Malik, 2013; Titelman, 2014). As a child will model what he or she sees his or her parents do, he or she will also be susceptible to his or her parents' beliefs and perceptions about circumstances in life, which may be positive or negative in nature (Haefner, 2014; Malik, 2013). The BFST fits into the explanation of how parental alienation develops, as the love and adoration that the child holds for the parent he or she is closest with will often motivate that individual to align with that parent's beliefs so that the child may gain that parent's acceptance and approval through the child's participation in a coalition against the other parent (Johnson & Ray, 2016; Moné & Biringen, 2012; Warshak, 2015). The variables of happiness, perceived trust, satisfaction, and overall quality of romantic relationships for individuals who experienced parental alienation during childhood were used to measure the participants' quality of romantic relationships in the present study, which are significantly related to BFST. Attachment styles are a primary determinant in relationship quality that are derived from parental influence and found to be negatively affected when alienation from a parent occurs (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Larson & Halfon, 2013; Malik, 2013; Meyer, Jones, Rorer, & Maxwell, 2015; Priest, 2013).

Theory of Attachment

The theory of attachment (TOA) suggests that attachment styles significantly impact an individual's relationships and social interactions (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Ainsworth formulated four primary attachment styles that are applicable to children and were expanded upon by Hazan and Shaver for adults to include secure, anxious-preoccupied, dismissive-avoidant, and fearful-avoidant attachment (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Secure attachment is exhibited by individuals who hold positive views of themselves, their romantic partners, and their romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Individuals who exhibit anxious-preoccupied attachment styles are highly dependent on their partner in romantic relationships, seek constant approval from their partners, and require high levels of intimacy to feel secure (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Dismissive-avoidant attachment styles are recognized when individuals mistrust their partners and are viewed as too independent without needing close relationships, while fearful-avoidant attachment is identified when the individual holds mixed emotions regarding relationships, feels undeserving of close connections with others, and frequently mistrust their romantic partners (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

The TOA states that a secure attachment to an individual's parents or primary caregivers is necessary for the individual to have success in various aspects of life including the formation of adult romantic and social relationships (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995; Colin, 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Moné & Biringen, 2012). Additionally, Lowell, Renk, and Adgate (2014) state that emotional abuse in childhood and attachment

to the parent may significantly predict emotional behavior in adulthood which could significantly affect relationship quality. The inability to form healthy attachments with other people has also been identified as a lasting effect of experiencing alienation from a parent during childhood and is also theorized to hinder the formation of social relationships throughout the individual's life (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013; Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Godbout & Parent, 2012; Larson & Halfon, 2013). If appropriate attachment styles are not adopted due to the emotional maltreatment from parents during their childhood, there is additional likelihood that poor physical health will also result in affected individuals (Goldberg et al., 2013; Pietromonaco, Uchino, & Schetter, 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2015).

The attachment style of an individual is reported to be directly related to emotional and physical wellbeing for that person, and the quality of his or her relationships is also linked to attachment capabilities (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Pietromonaco et al., 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2015). The individual style of attachment is formulated through observations of role models close to the child as his or her cognitive and reasoning skills are not yet developed to the point that he or she will be able to make his or her own conclusions (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995; Goldberg et al., 2013; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Lowell et al., 2014; Moné & Biringen, 2012). The variables of happiness, perceived trust, satisfaction, and overall quality of romantic relationships for individuals who experienced parental alienation during childhood were be used to measure the participants' quality of romantic relationships in the present study; therefore, the TOA is directly related to the research. Attachment styles are a primary

determinant in relationship quality that are derived from parental influence and found to be negatively affected when alienation from a parent occurs as a child and could lead the individual to exhibit a negative attachment style throughout his or her lifespan, potentially affecting his or her levels of romantic relationship quality in adulthood (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Godbout & Parent, 2012; Larson & Halfon, 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2015).

Effects of Parental Divorce

Scholars have examined the effects of divorce on the relationships of the parents and children, as well as how the divorce affects the child's ability to form healthy attachments with others (Fergusson, Mcleod, & Horwood, 2014; Fraley & Heffernan, 2013; Kalmijn, 2012). Fergusson et al. (2014) noted that associations during childhood with parental divorce and interchangeable relationships between parents were correlated to individuals reporting an increase in experienced violence and lower levels of satisfaction in their adult romantic relationships. Fraley and Heffernan (2013) found that divorce occurring earlier in an individual's childhood is more likely to result in an insecure attachment with parents that will often last into adulthood, while the relationships with friends and romantic partners are not necessarily affected. Kalmijn (2012) stated that regardless of how amicable a parental separation may be, divorce will generally cause an inequality between the child's relationship with his or her father and mother. Regardless of circumstances surrounding a divorce, the family stress that this change produces may result in a negative or positive outcome for each family member

involved, and how children cope with that stress will often shape the way they interpret stress during their adult lives as well (Boss, 2014, 2015).

Many individuals who divorce within the family can result in children forming insecure attachment patterns that will follow them into adulthood (Boss, 2015; Fraley & Heffernan, 2013; Kalmijn, 2012). The negative attachment style applied to the parent and child relationship postdivorce can apply to other relationships throughout development including romantic dating relationships and the child's own marital relationship (Boss, 2014, 2015; Fraley & Heffernan, 2013). The attachment formations with fathers were also discovered to be more insecure than the relationships of the child with their mother, although most individual situations of divorce result in the mother obtaining primary custody of the children, which may further explain more secure maternal attachments (Boss, 2014, 2015; Fraley & Heffernan, 2013). Additionally, the individuals who develop a secure attachment to their parents, regardless of whether divorce occurred, were also more likely to report a secure relationship romantically (Boss, 2014; Fraley & Heffernan, 2013; Kalmijn, 2012).

Children who have experienced the divorce of their parents are also more likely to exhibit poor psychological health (Boss, 2014; Perrin et al., 2013). Children may be thrown into the role of friend or even caregiver when divorce occurs within the family unit due to boundary ambiguity in the attitudes of parents' post separation (Lacey et al., 2014; Perrin et al., 2013; Reiter et al., 2013; Ribar, 2015). When there is an absence of parental boundaries and children are expected to address adult issues along with the parent, there is a greater potential that long-term psychological issues will surface within

the affected children beginning in childhood and moving forward throughout the lifespan as their developmental needs may not be nurtured as much as they otherwise would be (Lacey et al., 2014; Perrin et al., 2013; Reiter et al., 2013; Ribar, 2015). Children are more likely to experience depression and anxiety symptoms (Perrin et al., 2013), lower levels of self-esteem (Verrocchio et al., 2015), fewer social supports, greater risk for substance abuse, and poor physical health later in life (Larson & Halfon, 2013) when divorce is experienced.

Divorce within a family unit will not guarantee the presence low self-esteem, mental illness, or poor physical health in the affected children as other factors correspond with these issues and are also prevalent in situations of divorce (Lacey et al., 2014; Orth, 2017; Reiter et al., 2013; Ribar, 2015; Verrocchio et al., 2015; Washington & Hans, 2013). Economic issues are a challenge that are often imposed on one or both parts of a family unit separated by divorce as many times the separating parents will have to transition from a dual income household into a single income household (Orth, 2017; Reiter et al., 2013; Washington & Hans, 2013). One or both of the parents will likely to require a period of adjustment following this financial transition, but others may be unable to recover, which could prevent all of the family members from obtaining the same educational, health care, and social contacts that they otherwise would have with higher socioeconomic status (Boss, 2014, 2015; Lacey et al., 2014; Orth, 2017). Divorce will often lead to a lower socioeconomic status, a higher likelihood of emotional tension, and a greater risk for conflict within the child's immediate familial contacts (Boss, 2014, 2015; Ribar, 2015; Washington & Hans, 2013). Parental alienation could lead to the

issues of lower self-esteem, increased risk for mental illness, or poor physical health that are also associated with parental divorce alone and without any external factors included (Boss, 2014, 2015; Lacey et al., 2014; Orth, 2017; Perrin et al., 2013; Reiter et al., 2013; Ribar, 2015; Verrocchio et al., 2015; Washington & Hans, 2013).

Parental Alienation

The concept of parental alienation was introduced during the mid-1980s when Gardner, was first given credit for coining the term of parental alienation syndrome (Bernet et al., 2013; Lorandos et al., 2013; O'Donohue et al., 2016). Gardner developed the concept of parental alienation after working with children who had exhibited similar behavior traits following the divorce of their parents (Bernet et al., 2013; Lorandos et al., 2013; O'Donohue et al., 2016). Parental alienation syndrome occurs when a child makes the decision to emotionally align with one parent following a divorce while simultaneously rejecting the other, which will often include resisting visitation with the rejected parent (Clemente & Padilla-Racero, 2015, 2016; López et al., 2014). Baker and Eichler (2016) theorized that these behaviors would only arise in familial situations that consisted of increased and severe levels of conflict between parents following the divorce; however, these behaviors were not resigned solely to one family situation.

Consistent behaviors began to be identified in children who had experienced parental divorce, which led to the study of how those behaviors develop and originate (Baker & Verrocchio, 2016; Hands & Warshak, 2011; Whitcombe, 2013). Cases of parental alienation can be mild, moderate, or severe in nature, and their severity is often determined by the amount of encouragement that the allied parent gives to the child

supporting the rejection of the other parent (Gomide, Camargo, & Fernandes, 2016; Hands & Warshak, 2011; Harman, Leder-Elder, & Biringen, 2016). Rowen and Emery (2014) found that denigration of a parent occurs most frequently in divorced families; is most likely to be practiced by both parents; and is associated with less emotional closeness between the child and both parents, although is most noticeable with one parent being disparaged by the other. Parents who are more likely to argue over custody allocations may also be prepared to portray the other parent in a negative manner to the children at which time an alliance is encouraged and the child's trust in the other parent is questioned (López et al., 2014; Polak & Saini, 2015; Rowen & Emery, 2014). If negative implications continue to be perpetuated to the child over an extended period of time, resistance by the child for any interaction with the rejected parent may occur, and the alliance with the alienating parent may be strengthened creating parental alienation symptoms of greater intensity (Clemente & Padilla-Racero, 2016; López et al., 2014; Rowen & Emery, 2014). I stopped reviewing here due to time constraints. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 3.

Additional studies regarding parental alienation have sought to provide a universal definition of the phenomenon; however, because parental alienation syndrome is not yet accepted as a clinical diagnosis, a single definition has not been reached among practitioners and scholars (Baker & Eichler, 2016; Bernet et al., 2013; Clemente & Padilla-Racero, 2016; Gomide et al., 2016; López et al., 2014; O'Donohue et al., 2016). The majority of research has concluded that despite the absence of a universal definition,

the criterion that is necessary to identify parental alienation in a child would be a disproportionate level of inconsistency between what the child alleges or believes about the rejected parent, and the parent's actual behavior patterns (Baker & Eichler, 2016; Harman et al., 2016; Polak & Saini, 2016; O'Donohue et al., 2016; Rowen & Emery, 2014). This conclusion is obtained through study of the rejected parent's background and relationship history with the child (Baker & Eichler, 2016; Harman et al., 2016; O'Donohue et al., 2016). However, as reported information is subjective in nature when there is an absence of past criminal charges or police incident reports, individuals assessing the situation may have difficulty determining whether the child's statements are legitimate or not (Baker & Eichler, 2016; Harman et al., 2016; O'Donohue et al., 2016). As objective assessments to determine the presence of parental alienation being present have not yet been developed, the definition and presence of the condition in any given family will need to be determined on an individual basis (Clemente & Padilla-Racero, 2016; Gomide et al., 2016; Polak & Saini, 2016; Whitcombe 2013).

Long-Term Effects of Parental Alienation

A consistent conclusion noted through various studies on parental alienation is that when it occurs, there is a significant risk for long-term emotional effects to be present (Baker & Ben-Ami, 2011; Baker & Verrocchio, 2015; Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Raudino, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2013; Zhai, Kirisci, Tarter, & Ridenour, 2013). Baker and Ben-Ami (2011) found that parental alienation was significantly associated with alcohol abuse in adulthood along with increased reports of depression and a lack of independence. Ben-Ami and Baker (2012) expanded on their initial findings by

confirming that individuals exposed to parental alienation as children are also more vulnerable to experience poor self-esteem, higher rates of major depression, a greater likelihood of developing insecure attachment styles, and lower levels of overall self-sufficiency. The quality of the relationship between children and their parents during childhood is directly related to emotional functionality in adulthood (Raudino et al., 2013) while additional data show that the parent and child relationship quality is a significant predictor of the child developing substance abuse issues as they get older (Zhai et al., 2013).

Parental alienation behaviors implemented and modeled to children are considered by many mental health professionals to be a form of psychological maltreatment (Baker & Ben-Ami, 2011; Baker & Verrocchio, 2016; Raudino et al., 2013). Similar issues that are traditionally associated with multiple forms of childhood abuse have also been linked to alienation from a parent including increased risk of experiencing substance abuse, anxiety, depression, lower self-esteem, and the formation of insecure attachment styles (Baker & Ben-Ami, 2011; Raudino et al., 2013; Zhai et al., 2013). Additionally, reduced levels of self-efficacy, poorer emotional well-being, and performance difficulties in educational and social environments have also been noted, issues associated with experiencing parental alienation during youth (Baker & Ben-Ami, 2011; Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Carr, Holman, Abetz, Kellas, & Vagnoni, 2015; Sher, 2015; Weisskirch, 2013).

The effects of parental alienation may begin initially after the behaviors first originate including sadness, poor impulse control, frustration, poor self-confidence, guilt,

psychosomatic complaints, and separation anxiety (Huff, Anderson, Adamsons, & Tambling, 2017; Moné & Biringen, 2012; Sher, 2015). Enuresis, encopresis, educational difficulties, hypochondria, and distrust for other people are also issues that may be exhibited relatively quickly after divorce when alienating behaviors commence (Austin, Pruett, Kirkpatrick, Flens, & Gould, 2013; Bernet, Baker, & Verrocchio, 2015; Huff et al., 2017; Sher, 2015). In a study by Sher (2015), it was noted that once children who experienced parental alienation in their youth grew into adults, they may avoid contact with their own children or even avoid having children to prevent rejection occurring as it did with their own rejected parent. This study was performed with only male participants, but additional data collected indicated low achievement levels in children who have experienced alienation and that the rejected parents will often be susceptible to increased levels of depression and suicidal ideation as well (Sher, 2015).

Children of divorced parents are not the only individuals who experience parental alienation as this practice does occur in some families that remain intact. However, it remains more common in individuals who come from families with divorced parents (Baker & Eichler, 2014; Bernet et al., 2015; Carr et al., 2015; Larson & Halfon, 2013). However, in both familial situations, children who experienced alienation from a parent reported having the alienating parent encourage them to engage in the denigrating actions directed toward the other parent who was the target of the rejection (Austin et al., 2013; Huff et al., 2017; Larson & Halfon, 2013; Moné & Biringen, 2012). Long-term behaviors that are commonly associated with children who have experienced alienation from a parent are also believed to occur as a result of the child's forced participation in the

denigrating behaviors of the rejected parent and not solely as a result of separation and the loss of the parental relationship (Austin et al., 2013; Baker & Eichler, 2014; Larson & Halfon, 2013; Moné & Biringen, 2012). Additionally, being prone to mistrust of other people, susceptible to insecure attachment formation styles, and being at an increased risk for mental illness or development of substance abuse issues may result from experiencing parental alienation during childhood and all have the potential to remain present within the individual for the duration of their lifetime (Baker & Verrocchio, 2015; Carr et al., 2015; Moné & Biringen, 2012; Sher, 2015; Weisskirch, 2013).

Attachment Formation

The formation of healthy attachment styles is extremely important for individuals as their adult relationships will be largely defined by the attachment formations developed in childhood and as a young adult (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Colin, 1996; Goldberg et al., 2013; Overall, Fletcher, Simpson, & Fillo, 2015; Pietromonaco et al., 2013). Fraley and Heffernan (2013) expanded on past studies by demonstrating that attachment in adulthood is connected to the attachment style developed in childhood between children and their parents, and that insecure parenting styles also affected the development of attachment. They also found that parents who have experienced divorce were also more likely to feel insecure about their role when raising their minor children (Fraley & Heffernan, 2013). Attachment is an important factor in achieving a satisfactory marital or otherwise romantic relationship and if it is inappropriate in nature, will have a negative fact on the relationship and on the individual's emotional well-being

(Chung, 2014; Hadden et al., 2014; Meyer, Jones, Rorer, & Maxwell, 2015; Overall et al., 2015; Pietromonaco et al., 2013).

Meyer et al. (2013) presented findings that support a relationship between positive affect states and health attachment styles along with negative affect being directly related to anxious and insecure attachment in romantic relationships. Hadden et al. (2014) expanded upon those findings by noting that not only are attachment styles and romantic satisfaction connected, but they also indicate that relationship duration is a predictor of relationship satisfaction as the longer a relationship lasts, the lower the levels of satisfaction reported by the individuals measured. Lowell, Renk, and Atgate (2014) found that attachment styles and emotional maltreatment experiences in childhood are strong predictors of behavioral functioning later in life. Secure attachment styles were noted to serve as significant protection from maladaptive emotional behaviors being utilized in individuals upon reaching adulthood and that even individuals experiencing emotional abuse as children will be less likely to behave in a negative emotional fashion if secure attachment styles are in place for their relationships (Lowell et al., 2014).

Additionally, insecure attachment formation styles prevent individuals from interacting appropriately in professional and therapeutic settings as interactions with others will be based upon communication styles related to attachment (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Elkins, 2016; Lowell et al., 2014). The outcomes of all relationships that the individual engages in and the perceived quality of those relationships will be largely dependent on that person's ability to form healthy attachments with other people (Fraley & Heffernan, 2013; Pietromonaco et al., 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2015).

Language styles and personal values, which an individual is exposed to in their youth, are what significantly affect attachment patterns later in life (Elkins, 2016). Regardless of what attachment style has formed in a given individual though, there remains a potential for the romantic attachment style to change over time as a comfort level develops with their chosen partner and therefore, even negative attachment styles may be modified over time (Hadden et al., 2014).

Attachment formation develops from the time individuals are very young and exposure to maltreatment, emotional stress, or psychological abuse from their parents will result in an insecure attachment style for the child (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Elkins, 2016; Goldberg et al., 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2015). Insecure attachment styles will often be identified by avoidance or anxious reactions to relationship stressors (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Elkins, 2016; Goldberg et al., 2013; Meyer et al., 2015; Simpson & Rholes, 2015). As individuals with insecure attachment styles react poorly to conflict interactions, their relationship quality will be negatively affected as well (Chung, 2014; Fraley & Heffernan, 2013; Lowell et al., 2014; Overall et al., 2015). Numerous studies have indicated that individuals with insecure attachment behaviors are also more likely to report reduced relationship quality levels and as parents who engage in alienation tactics are also more likely to reinforce insecure attachments, divorce will also be likely to result in difficulties forming healthy attachment formation to others (Fraley & Heffernan, 2013; Goldberg et al., 2013; Meyer et al., 2015; Overall et al., 2015).

Inappropriate attachment formation styles help individuals to form beliefs and perceptions about the intentions of other people while simultaneously interpreting

interactions with others, including their closest relationships (Goldberg et al., 2013; Meyer et al., 2015; Overall et al., 2015; Simpson & Rholes, 2015). Perceptions during communication with others is essential in maintaining amicable interactions so those who have formed insecure attachment behaviors in their youth may also have an increased difficulty getting along with other individuals (Chung, 2014; Overall et al., 2015; Simpson & Rholes, 2015). Individuals who do form insecure attachments may also be more susceptible to interpreting their partner's tone and language to be aggressive or threatening to the sustainability of the relationship, regardless of what is actually being said (Goldberg et al., 2013; Meyer et al., 2015; Overall et al., 2015). These perceptions may lead insecurely attached individual to react defensively in a preemptive action to protect themselves from emotional pain related to the relational interaction (Hadden et al., 2014; Meyer et al., 2015; Overall et al., 2015).

Relationship Quality

The quality of romantic and marital relationships is largely connected to the well-being and emotional health of the individuals involved in them (Gere & MacDonald, 2013; Johnson & Galambos, 2014; Pietromonaco et al., 2013; Washington & Hans, 2013). However, despite the subjective nature of relationship quality depending on the individuals involved, the positive or negative opinion of any given romantic relationship has a great impact on the individual's overall emotional and physical well-being (Lemay & Venaglia, 2016; Overall, Girme, Lemay, & Hammond, 2014; Pietromonaco, 2013). Lemay and Venaglia (2016) noted that positive expectations about a relationship may lead the participating partners to work less on the quality of the relationship in the present

due to their belief that the relationship will have a satisfying quality in the future despite any behaviors they may be displaying in the present. Optimism that is unrealistic in nature may lead an individual to believe that they may behave in a harmful or high-risk fashion without any long-term repercussions to the relationship occurring (Lemay & Venaglia, 2016; Overall et al., 2014).

As with attachment formation, relationship quality levels have also been linked to experiences individuals have had regarding familial relationships through the initial development and personality formation years of the lifespan (Gere & MacDonald, 2013; Johnson & Galambos, 2014; Overall et al., 2015; Slotter & Luchies, 2013). Individuals who have been nurtured appropriately during childhood and have developed healthy levels of self-esteem are also more likely to report higher levels of quality satisfaction in their romantic and marital relationships through adulthood (Johnson & Galambos, 2014; Slotter & Luchies, 2013; Washington & Hans, 2013). Gere and MacDonald (2013) indicated that cultural differences have been found between American participants and others worldwide regarding their report of relationship satisfaction and overall quality; however, they have not been able to specify exactly what may be causing those differences or even if they would be present in greater sample sizes. Washington and Hans (2013) suggested that experiencing divorce in childhood is not enough to predict an individual having relationship problems later in life but may cause a fear of trusting other people along with hesitation to engage in romantic commitment practices. Additionally, they noted that children who are more sheltered from the differences of divorced parents will be less likely to struggle in their own adult relationships later in life (Washington &

Hans, 2013). Overall et al. (2014) indicated that individuals who attempt to alienate their children from the other parent are more likely to share details about the conflicts with the other parent, which would not shield the child and serves as a reason the present study is necessary regarding the effects of parental alienation in youth on romantic relationships in adulthood.

Romantic quality of relationships includes intimacy levels, ability to trust their partner, reported happiness, satisfaction levels, commitment levels, communication capabilities, conflict frequency, relationship duration, and overall comfort with the partner (Gere & MacDonald, 2013; Murray et al., 2015; Poerio et al., 2015; Proulx & Snyder-Rivas, 2013; Rodebaugh et al., 2014). As these qualities are subjective in nature and derived largely by self-report and perception, the attitude and belief system of the individual is largely connected with the levels of quality reported (Lemay & Venaglia, 2016; Meyer et al., 2015; Slotter & Luchies, 2013). As the individual's mindset and attitude remain crucial components for their opinion of the relationship's quality, it is possible that they can sabotage their own emotional well-being when they maintain a negative outlook toward their partner and relationship (Lemay & Venaglia, 2016; Overall et al., 2015; Overall et al., 2014). Individuals with an anxious or mistrusting mindset are often most susceptible to reporting a negative level of relationship quality when compared to their counterparts as their difficulty in interpreting communication and emotions of others will cause additional difficulties in overall relationship quality (Lemay & Venaglia, 2016; Overall et al., 2015; Overall et al., 2014; Slotter & Luchies, 2013).

Children who experience parental divorce also have greater difficulty in maintaining positive quality romantic relationships during adulthood (Hadden et al., 2014; Johnson & Galambos, 2014; Pietromonaco et al., 2013; Slotter & Luchies, 2013). The experience of divorce for children during their formative years may leave a lasting impression on the ways in which they interact with others due to the combination of a variety of factors (Overall et al., 2014; Washington & Hans, 2013). Overall et al (2015) found that individuals who develop avoidant attachment styles have an equal ability to perceive their romantic partner's emotions. However, they were also more likely to act defensively or respond with additional negative response techniques despite their ability to understand. Slotter and Luchies (2013) noted that individuals with avoidant attachment styles will not always avoid emotional intimacy due to their fears of appearing vulnerable to others but will instead seek greater levels of physical and emotional closeness with their partner if they already have a perception of their relationship being high-quality in nature.

A resistance to developing meaningful relationships with others may derive from exposure in childhood to conflict between parents, residential instability, time spent with the nonresidential parent, and potential exposure to stepparent figures, and may affect the ability of the child to form positive quality relationships in adulthood (Johnson & Galambos, 2014; Overall et al., 2015; Washington & Hans, 2013). The exposure to conflict between parents, residential instability, exposure to stepparent figures, and other effects of familial break-up does not guarantee a negative effect on later relationship formation if a good amount of time is spent with nonresidential parents following a

divorce in childhood (Hadden et al., 2014; Slotter & Luchies, 2013). The quality of an individual's relationships with their parents is positively related to the quality of their adult romantic relationships which is believed to improve the individual's emotional and physical well-being overall (Larson & Halfon, 2013; Meyer et al., 2015; Pietromonaco et al., 2013). It is recommended that children who experience divorce and parental alienation be exposed to increased educational resources on overall physical and emotional maintenance to prevent the breakdown of their health prematurely in adulthood (Larson & Halfon, 2013).

Summary and Conclusions

As the BFST and TOA are both dependent on interactions with caregivers and the family unit during childhood to develop adult interaction and attachment patterns, it is reasonable to find these theories applicable to individuals' reported relationship quality after experiencing parental alienation in their youth (Colin, 1996; Haefner, 2014; Kerr & Bowen, 1988; Moné & Biringen, 2012; Titelman, 2014). Additionally, the effects of parental divorce and the effects of experiencing parental alienation in childhood are also necessary to explore as many issues related to attachment development and the relationship an individual has with their parents are directly related to the quality of their romantic relationships later in life (Baker & Eichler, 2016; Baker & Verrocchio, 2015; Godbout & Parent, 2012; Warshak, 2015). Exposure to parental alienation has also been found to have lasting effects on the overall emotional and physical well-being of the affected individuals for their lifetime, which are also positively related to the quality of their romantic relationships in adulthood (Chung, 2014; Hadden et al., 2014; Orth, 2017;

Pietromonaco et al., 2013). Despite what is known about the long-term effects of divorce and the way it may affect an individual's attachment to others, the impact of parental alienation on adult romantic relationships has not been examined.

In chapter 3, the methodological design for the present study will be discussed along with the description of the population, the sampling procedures proposed, along with recruitment procedures, participation, and data collection techniques. Additionally, the psychometric instruments that will be utilized will be explained. Threats to validity that may arise will also be examined. Lastly, the ethical considerations for this study will be discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to determine whether alienation from a parent during childhood and attachment style of the individual impacts the quality of adult romantic or marital relationships. To assess the quality of the participants' relationships, several factors were measured via survey including levels happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality. In this chapter, I will discuss the process that was used to conduct the study and will also provide a detailed explanation of how the sample was recruited and what characteristics were required of participants for inclusion in the study. The instrumentation section provides a description and rationale of the measurement tools used to collect data. Lastly, the process of how the data were collected and analyzed will also be discussed.

Research Design and Rationale

The nature of this study was quantitative, with a nonexperimental design, using survey methodology. The participants were individuals over the age of 18 who have parents that divorced during their childhood between the individual's birth and the age of 14. The participants were also either married or involved in a dating relationship at the time the survey was conducted. Recruitment was done through e-mails inviting individuals to participate in the study through the service of SurveyMonkey.com. The predictor variables consisted of the participants' parental alienation from their mother, parental alienation from their father, and their attachment style (avoidant, anxious, secure). The criterion variables included participants' self-reports of happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality in their relationship.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study was quantitative in nature and had been designed to identify any relationships between parental alienation in childhood, attachment style, and romantic relationship quality among individuals over the age of 18, who have experienced parental divorce in childhood. The research questions and their corresponding hypotheses for this study included the following:

RQ1: To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the level of happiness perceived in their adult romantic relationships, as measured by the Relationship Happiness Measure?

H₀1: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

H₁1: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

RQ2: To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the level of trust perceived in their adult romantic relationships, as measured by the Relationship Trust Measure?

H₀2: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

H₁2: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ3: To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the level of satisfaction perceived in their adult romantic relationships (satisfaction 6 months prior and present satisfaction), as measured by the Relationship Satisfaction Measure?

H₀₃: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

H₁₃: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ4 : To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the overall quality of adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Quality Measure?

H₀₄: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

H₁₄: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

RQ5: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the level of happiness in adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Happiness Measure?

H₀₅: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₅: Attachment style is a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

RQ6: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the trust levels in adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Trust Measure?

*H*₀₆: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₆: Attachment style is a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ7: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the level of satisfaction in adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Satisfaction Measure?

*H*₀₇: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₇: Attachment style is a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ8: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the overall quality of adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Quality Measure?

*H*₀₈: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₈: Attachment style is a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

Methodology

Population

The target population consisted of individuals who were over the age of 18 and who had experienced the divorce of their parents during childhood prior to the age of 14. These individuals were also involved in a romantic dating or marital relationship at the time the survey was implemented. The participants were from the United States and would ideally represent equal numbers of men and women.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

A nonprobability, convenience sampling was used to obtain the participants who met the criteria necessary for the study to be successful. The participants were sampled through the convenience of individuals fitting the criteria of experiencing divorce as a child and being involved in a romantic relationship at the time of survey completion. The participants were invited to participate through the SurveyMonkey website and through social media invitation. Diversity is not guaranteed through convenience sampling, but participants residing in the same demographic area, the same race, or the same sex was unlikely due to the number of participants necessary.

A power analysis was conducted to determine the study's sample size using G*Power 3.0.10 software (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). The variables of alpha level, number of predictors, desired statistical power, and the anticipated effect size are all required to determine the statistical power for the research (Faul et al., 2009). The

variables of this study were five predictor variables (alienation by father; alienation by mother; and avoidant, anxious, or secure attachment styles), the alpha level of 0.05, statistical power 0.95, and the anticipated effect size for medium size of 0.15 (Miles & Sheylin, 2007). Prior studies conducted for alienation and attachment used the assessment tools in the present research and reported medium effect sizes (Colin, 1996; Gere & MacDonald, 2013; Johnson & Galambos, 2014; Haefner, 2014; Moné & Biringen, 2012; Overall et al., 2015; Slotter & Luchies, 2013). A recommended sample size of 138 participants resulted from the power analysis.

As multiple regression was used in this study, it was recommended that 20 times more participants than variables are necessary to employ and is supported through the sample size of 138 participants (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Additionally, 5 times the amount of cases than variables were also needed for a minimum requirement in multiple regression analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment for this study was performed with e-mail invitations explaining general information about the study including a summary of the informed consent, the purpose of the study for graduate research, general information about the topic, and a link to complete the surveys through the survey host site SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>) and through social media. The participants were provided an informed consent before demographic questions began, and an additional copy was e-mailed to them for their own records in case they wish to refer to the document at another time. In the informed consent, I explained the background

information with justification for the study, statements explaining voluntary participation rights, declaration of anonymity of participants, ethical concerns and considerations related to the study, as well as risks and benefits of participation. The participants were also given my contact e-mail and name to request a summary of the results of the study.

A demographical survey (Appendix A) was the survey completed first to ensure that potential participants met necessary criteria for inclusion in the sample. I used the demographic survey to identify the participants' age, race, geographic region, and highest level of education obtained. Additional demographic information pertaining directly to the topic of this study included the age at which the participant was when his or her parents divorced, as well as his or her marital status. Only participants who fit the necessary criteria were permitted to participate, and if participants did not meet the demographical criteria, they were excluded from the study following the demographic survey.

Participants who met the criteria necessary to serve within the sample were directed to the assessment surveys following successful completion of the demographic survey. The surveys were completed in the following order: the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, the Adult Attachment Scale, Relationship Happiness Measure, and the Relationship Trust Measure. These were then followed by the Relationship Satisfaction Scale and the Relationship Quality Measure.

Upon exiting the study, the participants were debriefed in a simple manner consisting of one slide which reiterated the purpose of the study. Additionally, my contact address was again provided so that the participant may request a summary of the

results of the study upon its completion. All participants were also instructed at the beginning and end of the study that they have the right to withdraw at any time if they changed their mind.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale

Parental alienation was measured using the Remembered Relationship with Parents scale consisting of 20 questions with Likert-type possible responses of *false*, *mostly false*, *neutral*, *mostly true*, and *true* (Denollet et al., 2007). Half of the questions measured the participants' relationship with their mother, and the other half measured the relationship with their father (Denollet et al., 2007). All questions required self-report regarding feelings about the relationship and experiences with each parent, as well as perceived feelings of parents toward their child from the adult child's perspective (Denollet et al., 2007). This survey provided two scores for parental alienation with five questions pertaining to the relationship with the father and five questions pertaining to the participant's relationship with their mother (Denollet et al., 2007).

The complete measurement tool consists of 10 questions for mother and 10 questions pertaining toward the relationship with the father as half of the questions measure generalized alienation and the other half are a measure of parental control (Denollet et al., 2007). The control subscale was not used. Instead, only the parental alienation subscales were used. Example questions pertaining to alienation included "*I kept my troubles to myself*," "*My mother/father made me feel guilty*," and "*I was very close towards my mother/father*" (Denollet et al., 2007). A total alienation score of 20

may be obtained for questions pertaining to the mother and again for questions pertaining to the father. The higher the participants scored, the more likely it was that alienation was present in the participants' remembered childhood relationship with their parents (Denollet et al., 2007).

The Remembered Relationship with Parents scale was appropriate for use in the general population as the original participants represented a variety of ages as well as nearly equal representation of both males and females (Denollet et al., 2007). Despite the relatively healthy population that participated, significant correlations, including poor emotional health and the threat of drug abuse issues later in life, were found with the Remembered Relationship with Parents scale as the negative effects or symptoms related to alienation were measured (Denollet et al., 2007). No gender differences were reported for scoring on the alienation subscale, and no differences were observed between questions of mothers or fathers between genders (Denollet et al., 2007). Cronbach's alpha was 0.86 for the father questions and 0.83 for the mother questions. The mean inter item correlations for the alienation father and alienation mother were 0.52 each (Denollet et al., 2007). These results provide strong support for the reliability of the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale alienation subscale (Denollet et al., 2007).

Construct validity was accounted for in the development of this scale as logistic regression analyses were performed to predict whether parental alienation was associated with depression symptoms later in life (Denollet et al., 2007). Parental alienation scores for the father and mother were independently correlated with depressive symptoms using the Beck Depression Inventory (Denollet et al., 2007). Convergent validity was

demonstrated with significant correlations between the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale and the Parental Bonding Inventory, an established measurement tool to measure the strength of the emotional bond between parent and child (Denollet et al., 2007). Significant correlations were also found between the parental alienation scores of the Remembered Relationship with Parents scale and the care scale of the Parental Bonding Inventory, which measures parental care of the child and overprotection tendencies, with $r = -.73$ for the father and $r = -.68$ for the mother that represented shared variance of 50% between the two scales (Denollet et al., 2007). This scale serves as a brief measurement tool and is appropriate for use in nonpsychiatric populations as well as for clinical purposes (Denollet et al., 2007). The Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale was obtained through the public domain and permission requests from the authors were not necessary as the scale is not being used for commercial purposes (Denollet et al., 2007).

Adult Attachment Scale

The Adult Attachment Scale was used to measure the style of attachment that the participants display. Three distinct adult attachment styles were assessed and included: close, depend, and anxiety attachment, which are based on an earlier study by Hazan and Shaver (1987) that measured attachment in infants using the definitions of secure, anxious, and avoidant styles. A total of 18 questions embodied the assessment with six questions for each attachment style. Items were answered using a 5-point scale with answers ranging from *not at all characteristic* to *very characteristic* (Collins & Read, 1990). Three factors were established to represent the three attachment styles with Factor

1 defined as *depend*, Factor 2 as *anxiety*, and Factor 3 *close* (Collins & Read, 1990). The depend factor measures the extent to which participants trust and depend on others, the anxiety factor measures anxiety in relationships and insecurity levels, and the close factor measures how comfortable participants are with closeness and intimacy (Collins & Read, 1990). I stopped reviewing here. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 4.

Example questions pertaining to the “depend” factor for each attachment style included “*people are never there when you need them*”, “*I am comfortable depending on others*”, and “*I am not sure that I can always depend on others to be there when I need them*” (Collins & Read, 1990). Example questions pertaining to the “anxiety” factor for each attachment style included “*I do not often worry about being abandoned*”, “*I often worry that my partner does not really love me*”, and “*I often worry my partner will not want to stay with me*” (Collins & Read, 1990). Lastly, example questions pertaining to the “close” factor for each attachment style included “*I find it relatively easy to get close to others*”, “*I am somewhat uncomfortable being close to others*”, and “*I am nervous when anyone gets too close*” (Collins & Read, 1990). The survey was developed with equal numbers of males and females and no differences were observed between gender responses (Collins & Read, 1990). Secure attachment was defined by higher scores on the close and depend subscales with low scores on anxiety subscales. Anxious attachment was defined with high scores on anxiety subscales and moderate scores on the close and depend subscales (Collins & Read, 1990). Avoidant attachment was defined with low scores on all three subscales (Collins & Read, 1990).

An acceptable level of internal consistency was achieved for the three subscales by utilizing Cronbach's alpha which indicated .69 for the close subscale, .72 for the anxiety subscale, and .75 for the depend subscale (Collins & Read, 1990). A test-retest correlation was performed after two months indicated consistent scores with $r = .71$ for depend subscale, $r = .52$ for anxiety subscale, and $r = .68$ for close subscale (Collins & Read, 1990). These scores suggest a reasonable level of reliability for this measurement tool (Collins & Read, 1990). Validity has been established by Collins and Read (1990) as significant statistical correlations were found between close, depend, and anxiety attachment style scores and the scores derived from the secure, anxious, and avoidant definitions of attachment utilized by Hazan and Shaver's (1987) assessment tool for attachment. Participants of the initial assessment by Collins and Read (1990) were also asked to complete the assessment designed by Hazan and Shaver (1987) two weeks after the initial participation. Hazan and Shaver (1987) used a single question in which participants would choose one term out of three listed that best described them from terms that were translated from known infant attachment style terms, to those that were appropriate for adult relationships. The terms consisted of secure, anxious, or avoidant, and were chosen to describe adult romantic relationships (Collins & Read, 1990). Collins and Read (1990) reported that scores on Adult Attachment Scale correlated with the terms depend, close, and anxious, as they were positively associated with close attachment style ($r = .34, p < .01$), but did not have significant correlations with dependent attachment style ($r = .19, p < .10$) or anxious attachment style ($r = .04, p < .01$). The Adult Attachment Scale was obtained through the public domain and expressed permission was

not necessary to obtain from the authors as the scale will not be utilized for commercial purposes (Collins & Read, 1990).

Relationship Happiness Measure

The level of happiness in the romantic relationships of the participants was measured with the Relationship Happiness Measure (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). Participants answered a series of questions regarding various aspects of the romantic relationship including affection and love, how the partners agree on things, and understanding within the relationship (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). The survey consisted of six statements for the participants to rate their relationship with examples that included: *“the amount of love they receive from their partners”*, *“their partners’ faithfulness”*, and *“the overall quality of the relationship”* (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). Responses to items are recorded using a three-point Likert-type scale with “not very happy” or “not as good as most” with a score of 1 point, to “very happy” or “better than most” with a score of 3 points (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). This survey produced one total score for the overall perception of happiness that the participant reports in their relationship and was derived from the mean of the items’ scores (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). The higher the score, the greater rating of happiness they reported in their relationship (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005).

Kamp Dush and Amato (2005) performed their research as a follow-up to a study conducted by Booth, Amato, and Johnson (1998) which consisted of 2033 married participants in 1980. The participants of the Kamp Dush and Amato (2005) study using the Relationship Happiness Measure, were all adult offspring of the original participants

in the Booth, Amato, and Johnson (1998) study, who were contacted in either 1992 or 1997 depending on when they would be over the age of nineteen. Of the offspring available from the Booth, Amato, and Johnson (1998) study, 80% responded to the surveys when contacted, resulting in a sample size of 691 participants (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). The purpose of Kamp Dush and Amato's (2005) study was to identify benefits between marital relationships, along with cohabitating, and steady dating relationships, through utilization of the Relationship Happiness Measure. Cronbach's alpha was .82 for reliability indicating excellent internal consistency (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). Validity was established as significant statistical correlations were found between relationship happiness and self-esteem, life satisfaction, and general life happiness along with a negative correlation with distress (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). Positive correlations were reported between relationship happiness and self-esteem ($r = .24, p < .05$), life satisfaction ($r = .31, p < .05$), and general life happiness ($r = .42, p < .05$). A negative correlation was found between relationship happiness and distress, with $r = -.32, p < .05$ (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005).

Limitations were present though as the participant population was noted to consist of a small subgroup of cohabitating individuals while the married group was much larger in size (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). Additionally, the sample consisted of relatively young adults with the median age of participants being 23 years old without knowledge of whether the results could be made to older adults as well (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). Concrete definitions of the levels of commitment in relationships were also not established for this study to determine if any differences were present between

commitment levels of marriage, cohabitation, and steady dating relationships (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005). The Relationship Happiness Measure was obtained through the public domain and permission was not necessary to obtain permission from the authors as the scale will not be utilized for commercial purposes (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005).

Relationship Trust Measure

The Relationship Trust Measure was used to measure the level of trust reported in the relationships of the participants (Murray et al., 2015). This instrument consists of ten questions with responses chosen from a nine-point Likert-type scale with ratings of “not at all” to “completely true” (Murray et al., 2015). The questions rate partner dependability, emotional stability, thoughtfulness, and consideration for others (Murray et al., 2015). Examples of questions include “*My partner is a thoroughly dependable person*”, “*Though times may change and the future is uncertain*”, and “*I feel that I can trust my partner completely*” (Murray et al., 2015). This survey resulted in one total score ranging from 0 to 80 to measure the perception of trust that the participant has within their romantic relationship, with higher scores indicating higher levels of trust being present and low scores indicating less trust in the relationship (Murray et al., 2015). Trust levels within a relationship are believed to have an effect on the overall well-being of the relationship and threat mitigation based on perceptions of the partners involved and how valuable they may perceive the relationship when compared with the alternatives (Murray et al., 2015).

Cronbach’s alpha reliability was .85 indicating good internal consistency values, however a limitation within the study was the demographics of participants (Murray et

al., 2015). All participants in the initial study were childless couples who were in their first marriages and so more diverse samples may produce more accurate results (Murray et al., 2015). Murray et al. (2015) demonstrated good concurrent validity as scores on the Relationship Trust Measure were significantly correlated with relationship well-being ($r = .59, p < .001$), threat mitigation within the relationship ($r = .28, p < .001$), and partner risk behaviors ($r = -.22, p < .05$). The Relationship Trust Measure was obtained through the public domain and formal permission was not necessary to obtain as the scale will not be utilized for commercial purposes (Murray et al., 2015).

Relationship Satisfaction Scale

The Relationship Satisfaction Scale was used to measure overall satisfaction of the participants' relationship and consisted of four questions that are measured on a nine-point Likert-type scale (Rodebaugh et al., 2014). Questions in the survey measure the individual's perceptions of emotional closeness, happiness, feelings about the partner, and present feelings about the relationship compared to their feelings six months prior to survey (Rodebaugh et al., 2014). The four assessment questions consisted of the following: "*Over the past 6 months, have you become closer or less close with your friend*", "*Right now (today) how happy are you with your relationship with your friend*", "*Over the past 6 months, how happy have you been with your relationship with your friend?*", and "*Think of your friend for a moment. How do you feel?*" (Rodebaugh et al., 2014). Two separate scores were obtained in this measurement tool. Two questions measured the participant's satisfaction in their relationship currently and two questions measured the participant's satisfaction in their relationship six months prior to the survey.

Scores ranged from 4 to 36, with higher scores indicating greater levels of relationship satisfaction (Rodebaugh et al., 2014).

Internal consistency was present in both groups of participants consisting of individuals diagnosed with social anxiety disorder in one group, and a control group from the same community, with Cronbach alpha scores of .85 and .81 respectively. Rodebaugh et al. (2014) found that the Relationship Satisfaction Scale demonstrated good concurrent validity. They found that scores on the Relationship Satisfaction Scale were significantly correlated with relationship intimacy using the Sternberg Intimacy Scale ($r = .58, p < .01$), level of liking their partner using a Liking Scale ($r = .52, p < .01$), and with depression symptoms using the Beck Depression Inventory-2 ($r = -.21, p < .05$). The Sternberg Intimacy Scale (Sternberg, 1997), measures intimacy in a relationship while the Liking Scale (Rubin, 1970), measures how much one partner likes the other, and the Beck Depression Inventory-2 (Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996), measures levels of depression within an individual (Rodebaugh et al., 2014). Despite the Relationship Satisfaction Scale being used with individuals in platonic friendship relationships, it is also reported as being appropriate for use on individuals in romantic relationships (Rodebaugh et al., 2014). The Relationship Satisfaction Scale was obtained through the public domain and formal permission was not necessary to obtain as the scale will not be utilized for commercial purposes (Rodebaugh et al., 2014).

Relationship Quality Measure

The Relationship Quality Measure was used to measure the perceived quality of the participants' relationship and consisted of three questions that uses seven-point

Likert-type scale with responses of “not at all” to “extremely” (Poerio et al., 2015). Questions included in the survey measured the individual’s perceptions of emotional closeness, trust, and how much they like their partner overall (Poerio et al., 2015). The questions included: “*In general, how close do you feel to them?*”, “*In general, how much do you like them?*”, and “*In general, how much do you trust them?*” (Poerio et al., 2015). A total score was obtained ranging from 3 to 21 to determine the participant’s opinion regarding the overall quality of their romantic relationship and higher scores indicated higher levels of relationship quality while lower scores suggested low levels of overall relationship quality (Poerio et al., 2015).

Internal consistency was high for this assessment tool as Cronbach’s alpha was .92 which indicates a strong reliability (Poerio et al., 2015). Poerio et al. (2015) found that the Relationship Quality Measure demonstrated good concurrent validity. Scores on the Relationship Quality Measure positively correlated low-quality relationships with happiness ($B = .12, p < .001$), and negative correlations with lovingness ($B = -.09, p < .001$), and connection with partner ($B = -.19, p < .001$) (Poerio et al., 2015). High quality relationships reported negative correlations with happiness as ($B = -.68, p < .001$), loving feelings as ($B = -.82, p < .001$), and connection with partner ($B = -.75, p < .001$) (Poerio et al., 2015). The Relationship Quality Measure was obtained through the public domain and formal permission was not necessary to obtain as the scale will not be utilized for commercial purposes (Poerio et al., 2015).

Data Analysis Plan

The data were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 18.0 software package. Multiple regression analysis was used to determine if parental alienation in childhood and the attachment style of the individual in adulthood predicted the quality of romantic relationships. The purpose of this analysis was to determine the relative strength of the predictor variables of parental alienation from mother, parental alienation from father, and individual attachment style, on the criterion variables of relationship satisfaction, relationship happiness levels, relationship trust, and the overall quality of marital and dating relationships.

Statistical tests were included in the statistical analyses to validate the assumptions of the multiple regression. Analyses were performed to test the linear relationship between variables, normality, multicollinearity, no auto-correlation, and homoscedasticity. Linearity was tested through use of a scatterplot. Multicollinearity was performed to ensure that independent variables are independent from each other and Durbin-Watson's *d* test showed no auto-correlation. Normality was conducted using Q-Q plots and a standardized residual plot determined homoscedasticity prior to the analysis to ensure that data met necessary assumptions for multiple regressions. Multiple regression analysis was then utilized to determine the relative strength of each predictor variable (alienation from father, alienation from mother, and each of the three attachment styles, avoidant, anxious, and secure) in predicting the criterion variables of relationship happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality.

Threats to Validity

Potential threats to external validity were considered in this study as it was possible that the sample of participants did not represent the entire population. To generalize the data results and protect the integrity of the study, external validity was considered to apply the results of the study to the greater population (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2012). If the sample consisted of individuals from limited ages, genders, or geographical locations, there would be a greater potential for the survey results to be skewed (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2012).

The motivation for volunteering for the study may have also affected responses as individuals who felt that their parents' divorce was particularly difficult or disrupting may have felt more inclined to participate than those who do not associate as many negative feelings with the experience. Additionally, misinterpretations from participants about the nature of the study may have also skewed data to the point that it does not reflect actual behaviors and personal interpretations. If participants felt that a certain outcome should be present in the results, they may have skewed their responses to fit that notion which would also be an inaccurate interpretation of the population as a whole. Also, the fact that the sample was participating in the study online may have also provided risks to validity as the participants who were drawn to the study may have been younger, more familiar with technology, have a higher level of education, or may have been more motivated in general which might have resulted in one-sided responses without reflecting the general population.

Internal validity must be considered for any given study to ensure that the study is truly measuring what it intends to measure (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2012). Numerous factors can affect the internal validity of a study and factors that may have affected this specific research including the structure of the preliminary questionnaire and survey. If the initial questionnaire was not properly worded, there would be a potential for participants to assume the purpose or expectations of the study and tailor their responses accordingly to fit their assumptions. As the survey was relatively short in nature, there was not a concern in this study for fatigue to occur in participants due to the length of the time and minimal commitment needed to finish. It was also anticipated that the short length of the survey would be a greater motivation for individuals to volunteer as participants of this study did not require any follow-up time commitments or a lengthy time investment for the individuals to participate.

Additional concerns that may have threatened internal validity within this study were the participants themselves. It is possible that there were other factors motivating their responses instead of issues related to attachment and alienation experiences in childhood that were responsible for the corresponding data results. If this was the case, it is possible that false or inaccurate responses were recorded and that the data became skewed as the assessment tools utilized in this research may not have collected the thought and response discrepancies if this issue arose. Broader social factors may have also affected the survey responses if a particular issue arose socially related to divorce, parental alienation, or relationship quality, around the same time that the survey was administered to participants.

Construct validity sets to measure the degree to which the survey assessments measured what they claim to measure (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2012). I was not aware prior to participation in the study regardless of whether participants had experienced alienation from a parent during their lifetime so that premature judgments would not be made in speculation. Factors that have not been considered may have also been responsible for the relationship quality, but were not measured through the survey employed. Due to this possibility, the presence of parental alienation cannot be determined as the sole reason for the relationship quality.

Ethical Procedures

All participants were advised during the initial informed consent portion of the survey that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time throughout the entire experience. It was also emphasized that there would not be any negative repercussions toward the participants if they chose to withdraw at any point throughout the study. Additionally, any questions from participants may be vocalized to the researcher throughout their participation to ensure an appropriate and ethical resolution.

Participant anonymity is of the utmost importance and so a weblink was employed for connection to the survey which does not register the IP address of the participants, nor did it require participants to create any identifying usernames or passwords that would be unique to the individual (SurveyMonkey, 2017). With these safeguards in place, it has been assured that participants' identities remain anonymous and only non-identifiable data was collected. Participant responses were recorded through the SurveyMonkey weblink and are displayed in the analysis section of the survey

account (SurveyMonkey, 2017). The raw data was then saved to Excel spreadsheet (Microsoft, 2013) and lastly, transferred to SPSS for statistical analysis. Raw and statistical data have been securely stored on a dedicated external flash drive and access has been restricted with an administrator lock that is protected via password encryption. All electronic storage media will be updated regularly to ensure electronic integrity at all times and protect from viral threats. All data will be retained in this location for a minimum duration of five years.

There are several ethical considerations that still needed to be addressed despite the use of this study's survey methodology which was non-invasive in nature. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research which was explained throughout the initial informed consent portion of the survey (APA, 2010). The participants were also invited to question the researcher with any concerns or clarity that was lacking from the research intent at any given time. The last slide consisted of a simple debriefing statement as well as that conclusion of the survey with additional opportunities for the participants to obtain the researcher's email address to ask questions or clarify any misunderstandings within the survey. This information could also be utilized to obtain the results of the research upon completion of the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 discussed the quantitative, with a non-experimental design, using survey methodology. A web-based survey was utilized to obtain data due to the ease and convenience that the method provided participants and the researcher alike. The survey was comprised of the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, the Attachment Style

Scales, Marital Happiness Scale, Relationship Trust Measure, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, and the Relationship Quality Measure (Collins & Read, 1990; Denollet et al., 2007; Murray et al., 2015; Poerio et al., 2015; Proulx & Snyder-Rivas, 2013; Rodebaugh et al., 2014). Following data collection, statistical analysis was completed utilizing SPSS to complete multiple regression analysis. Appropriate ethical regulations were adhered to as the welfare and safety of the participants has been the primary concern of the researcher. This was secured through maintaining the anonymity of the participants, ensuring the lines of communication are open between participants and the researcher, as well as providing a comprehensive informed consent at the beginning of the survey and a debriefing (APA, 2010). In chapter 4, I will summarize the details regarding the data collection, data screening and test of statistical assumptions, statistical analyses, and results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the study was to investigate whether alienation from mother or father in childhood and attachment style are predictors of marital or dating relationship quality as an adult. This quantitative, nonexperimental, study was performed to assess the predictive relationships between these variables. In this chapter, I present the research questions, a description of the data collection, an evaluation of the statistical assumptions, and the results from the standard multiple regression analyses. The following research questions have guided this study:

RQ1: To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the level of happiness perceived in their adult romantic relationships, as measured by the Relationship Happiness Measure?

*H*₀1: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁1: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

RQ2: To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the level of trust perceived in their adult romantic relationships, as measured by the Relationship Trust Measure?

*H*₀2: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₂: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ3: To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the level of satisfaction perceived in their adult romantic relationships (satisfaction 6 months prior and present satisfaction), as measured by the Relationship Satisfaction Measure?

*H*₀₃: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₃: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ4 : To what extent does experiencing parental alienation (alienation by father and alienation by mother) in childhood, as measured by the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale, relate to the overall quality of adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Quality Measure?

*H*₀₄: Parental alienation is not a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

*H*₁₄: Parental alienation is a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

RQ5: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the level of happiness in adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Happiness Measure?

H₀₅: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

H₁₅: Attachment style is a significant predictor of happiness in adult romantic relationships.

RQ6: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the trust levels in adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Trust Measure?

H₀₆: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

H₁₆: Attachment style is a significant predictor of trust levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ7: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the level of satisfaction in adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Satisfaction Measure?

H₀₇: Attachment style is not a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

H₁₇: Attachment style is a significant predictor of satisfaction levels in adult romantic relationships.

RQ8: To what extent does attachment style (anxious, avoidant, and secure), as measured by the Adult Attachment Scale, relate to the overall quality of adult romantic relationships as measured by the Relationship Quality Measure?

H_08 : Attachment style is not a significant predictor of overall quality in adult romantic relationships.

The participants completed a survey that included a demographic questionnaire, the Remembered Relationship with Parents Scale (Denollet et al., 2007), the Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990), the Relationship Happiness Measure (Kamp Dush & Amato, 2005), the Relationship Trust Measure (Murray et al., 2015), the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (Rodebaugh et al., 2014), and the Relationship Quality Measure (Poerio et al., 2015). A convenience sample of 170 participants who had parents who divorced prior to them reaching age 14 and who were in a marital or dating relationship participated in the study. Data were analyzed using SPSS 23.0 for Windows.

Data Collection

Survey data were collected from May 7, 2018 to May 13, 2018. Surveys were administered electronically via a one-time use survey link that was provided to individuals who fit the participation criteria and were interested in completing the survey. The survey was administered via Survey Monkey and was promoted by two community partners via social media. No incentives were offered for participation; the surveys were completed on a strictly volunteer basis. A total of 322 surveys were collected and after the removal of incomplete responses, a final sample size of 170 respondents was included in the final analyses.

Results

The descriptive statistics for the sample and results of the regression analyses are presented in this section. I calculated means and standard deviations and frequencies and

percentages for the categorical variables. I conducted a standard multiple linear regression with alienation from father, alienation from mother, and attachment style (avoidant, anxious, secure) as potential predictors of the quality of the marital or dating relationship. Criterion variables consisted of participants' self-reports of happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality in their marital or dating relationship.

Descriptive Statistics

Participants responded to screening questions prior to accessing the measures that comprised the survey. All participants reported that they had parents who had divorced ($n = 170$, 81.7%). Ages at which their parents divorced were birth to age 5 ($n = 79$, 46.5%), age 6 to age 10 ($n = 50$, 29.4%), and age 11 to 14 ($n = 41$, 24.1%). Participants also reported their present relationship status of dating ($n = 45$, 26.5%) and married ($n = 125$, 73.5%). This indicated that all the respondents met the inclusionary criteria for the study. Participants were asked to report their age, highest education level achieved, and geographic location. The participants indicated that they were 18 to 25 years of age ($n = 21$, 12.4%), 26–35 years ($n = 88$, 51.8%), 36–50 years ($n = 54$, 31.8%), and over 50-years-old ($n = 7$, 4.1%). Participants reported their highest level of education achieved and indicated high school diploma ($n = 12$, 7.1%), some college ($n = 53$, 31.2%), college degree ($n = 72$, 42.4%), and postgraduate degree ($n = 33$, 19.4%). Participant locations were indicated as Northeast ($n = 71$, 41.8%), Southeast ($n = 24$, 14.1%), Midwest ($n = 40$, 23.5%), Central South ($n = 4$, 2.4%), Northwest ($n = 19$, 11.2%), and Southwest ($n = 12$, 7.1%). Demographic characteristics for participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency Table for Participant Demographic Characteristics

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Parents Divorced		
Yes	170	100.0
Age at Divorce		
Birth to Age 5	79	46.5
6 to Age 10	50	29.4
Age 11 to 14	41	24.1
Relationship Status		
Dating	45	26.5
Married	125	73.5
Participant Age		
Age 18 – 25	21	12.4
Age 26 – 35	88	51.8
Age 36 – 50	54	31.8
Over Age 50	7	4.1
Highest level of education		
High School Diploma	12	7.1
Some College	53	31.2
College Degree	72	42.4
Post-Graduate Degree	33	19.4
Geographic Location		
Northeast	71	41.8
Southeast	24	14.1
Midwest	40	23.5
Central South	4	2.4
Northwest	19	11.2
Southwest	12	7.1

Note. Due to rounding errors, percentages may not equal 100

The mean parental alienation from father score was 11.42 ($SD = 5.58$). The mean parental alienation from mother score was 10.18 ($SD = 5.87$). The means and standard deviations for parental alienation from mother, parental alienation from father, attachment style (avoidant, anxious, secure) and the associated subscales are shown in Table 2. Of the three attachment styles reported on the Adult Attachment Scale (avoidant, anxious, secure), participants had the highest mean score on the avoidant style option. Avoidant scores ranged from 5.00 to 30.00, with an average of 19.50 ($SD = 4.92$). Anxious scores ranged from 6.00 to 30.00, with an average of 17.89 ($SD = 4.79$), while Secure scores ranged from 6.00 to 30.00, with an average of 18.81 ($SD = 4.80$).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Alienation from Father, Alienation from Mother, and Attachment Style (Avoidant, Anxious, Secure)

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	Min.	Max.
Alienation from Father	11.42	5.58	170	0.00	20.00
Alienation from Mother	10.18	5.87	170	0.00	20.00
Avoidant Attachment Style	19.50	4.92	170	5.00	30.00
Anxious Attachment Style	17.89	4.79	170	6.00	30.00
Secure Attachment Style	18.81	4.80	170	6.00	30.00

Evaluation of Statistical Assumptions

Prior to conducting the multiple linear regression analyses, I assessed the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity. I compared the calculated values for skewness and kurtosis to the guidelines established to indicate that the data distribution differs from a normal distribution. The critical values were ± 1 for skewness and ± 2 for kurtosis (Westfall & Henning, 2013). If the skewness value is

greater than or equal to 1 or less than or equal to -1, then the variable is considered to be asymmetrical about its mean. If the kurtosis value is greater than or equal to 2, then the variable's distribution is significantly different than a normal distribution in its tendency to produce outliers (Westfall & Henning, 2013). The scores for relationship quality exceeded the guidelines of skewness with value of -1.49. The Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted to test for normality. The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the data distribution did not differ from a normal data distribution as the p values were .000; therefore, the assumption of normality was met. Despite these values, Stevens (2009) argued that with a sufficiently large sample, the regression analysis can be considered robust to a violation of the assumption. Table 3 presents the results of the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality.

Table 3

Results of Normality Testing for Relationship Happiness, Relationship Trust, Relationship Satisfaction, and Relationship Quality

	Statistic	df	p	Skewness	Kurtosis
Relationship Happiness	.826	170	.000	-0.854	-0.359
Relationship Trust	.897	170	.000	-0.817	0.032
Relationship Satisfaction	.885	170	.000	-0.969	0.056
Relationship Quality	.769	170	.000	-1.493	1.538

To assess homoscedasticity, I examined a residual scatterplot for the predicted versus standardized data. The points appeared to be distributed about a mean value of 0,

and there was no curvature in the plot. Therefore, the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. Figure 1 presents the residual scatterplots for homoscedasticity.

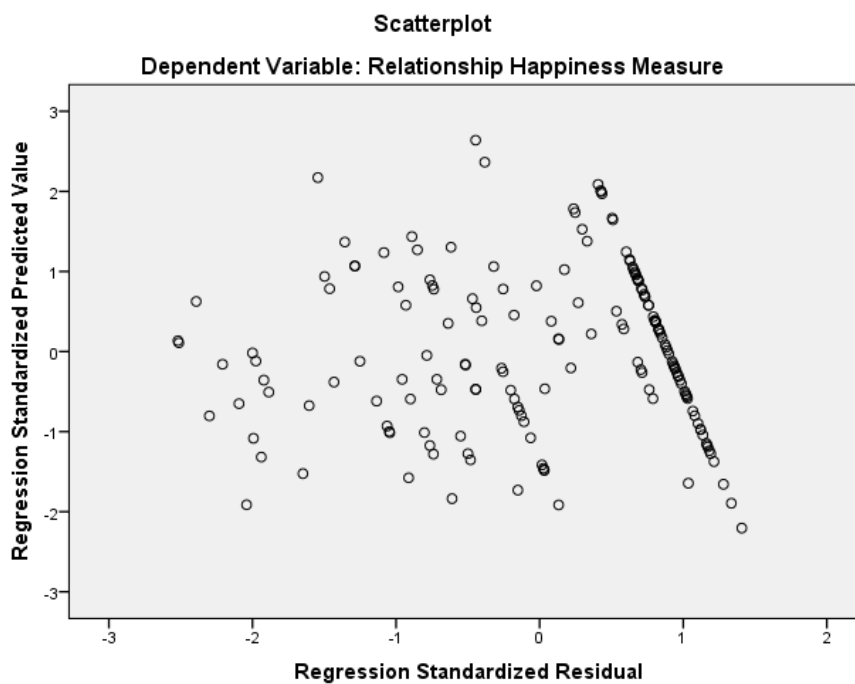


Figure 1. Relationship happiness scatterplot for homoscedasticity.

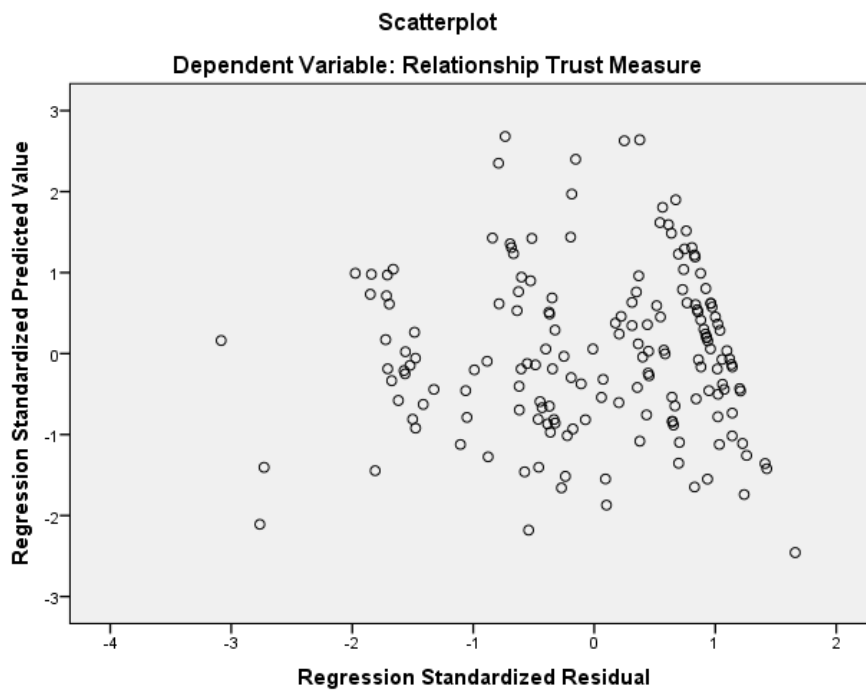


Figure 2. Relationship trust scatterplot for homoscedasticity.

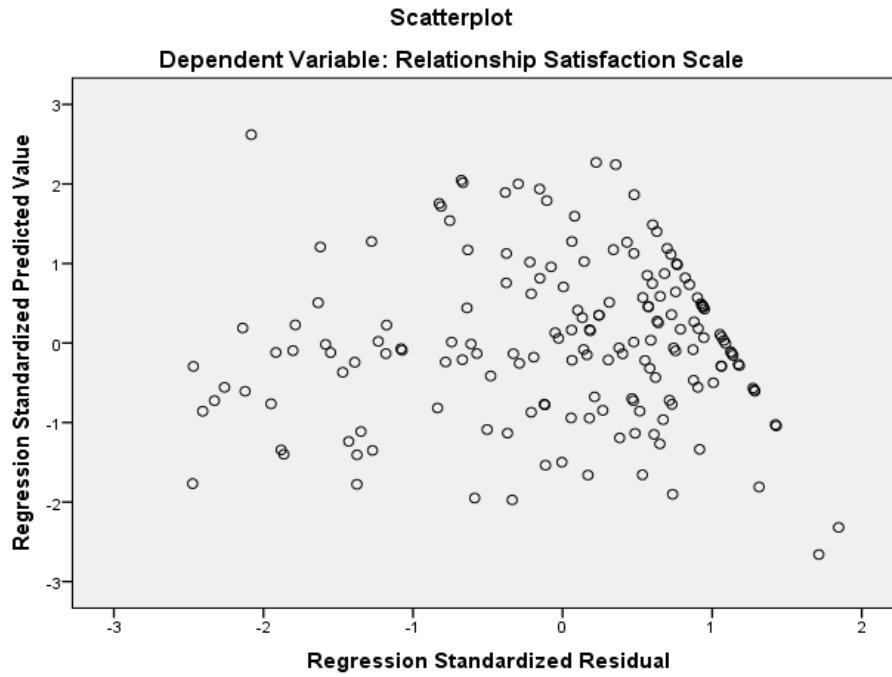


Figure 3. Relationship satisfaction scatterplot for homoscedasticity.

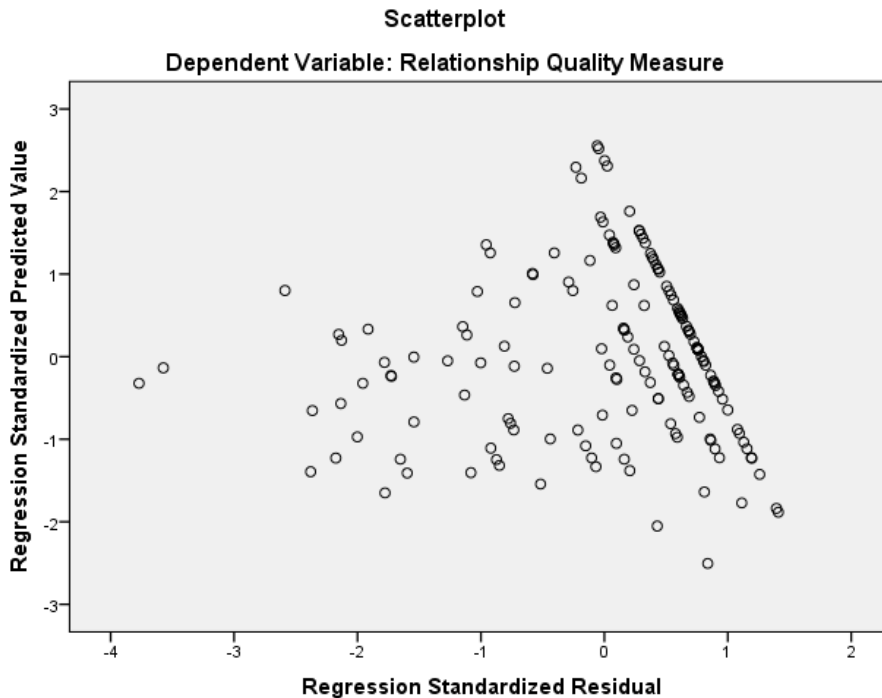


Figure 4. Relationship quality scatterplot for homoscedasticity.

Additionally, the variance inflation factors (VIFs) were calculated for the predictor variables. VIFs reflected the amount of correlation among the predictor variables included in the analysis (Stevens, 2009). The VIFs were evaluated using the benchmarks developed by Menard (2009), where values greater than 5 may indicate issues while values greater than 10 are considered evidence of multicollinearity. The VIF values for all predictor variables were low and well under benchmark values indicating no evidence of multicollinearity. Table 4 presents the VIF values for the predictor variables. I stopped reviewing here. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 5.

Table 4

VIF Values for the Predictor Variables

Variable	VIF
Alienation from Father	1.02
Alienation from Mother	1.04
Avoidant Attachment Style	1.07
Anxious Attachment Style	1.05
Secure Attachment Style	1.04

Multiple Regression Analyses

To address the research questions guiding this study I conducted multiple linear regression analyses using the standard entry method. In the standard multiple linear regression method, all predictor variables enter the regression equation at once and each one is assessed as if it had entered the equation after all other predictor variables had entered the regression model. The predictor variables from the research questions were alienation from father, alienation from mother, and attachment style (avoidant, anxious, secure). The criterion variables were the participants' self-reports of happiness, trust, satisfaction, and overall quality in their marital or dating relationship. I conducted a total of four standard multiple linear regression analyses, one for each criterion variable.

Multiple Regression: Predicting Relationship Happiness

I conducted a multiple linear regression analysis to assess the relationship between the predictor variables and relationship happiness levels. The predictor variables for the multiple linear regression were alienation from father, alienation from mother, and

attachment style (avoidant, anxious, secure). The criterion variable was relationship happiness level.

The result of the multiple linear regression was statistically significant, $F(5,164) = 1.84, p < .05, R^2 = 0.024$. This finding indicated that the model provided a statistically significant contribution to the variance in relationship happiness scores. Specifically, the model contributed to 2% of the variation in marital or dating relationship happiness scores.

Alienation from mother was a statistically significant predictor of relationship happiness levels, $B = -0.130, p = .021$. The results indicated that as alienation from mother scores increased, happiness in marital or dating relationship scores decreased. On average, for every one-unit increase in alienation from mother scores, there was a -0.130-unit decrease in marital or dating relationship happiness scores. The remaining predictor variables (alienation from father and attachment style (avoidant, anxious, secure)) were not statistically significant predictors of relationship happiness scores. Table 5 presents the results for the individual predictors.

Table 5

Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Relationship Happiness

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Alienation from Father	-	0.058	-.043	-.567	0.571
	0.033				
Alienation from Mother	-	0.056	-.182	-2.33	0.021
	0.130				
Avoidant Attachment Style	-	0.067	-.054	-.689	0.492
	0.046				
Anxious Attachment Style	-	0.068	-.021	-.264	0.792
	0.018				
Secure Attachment Style	0.067	0.068	0.076	0.982	0.327

Note. $F(5,164) = 1.84, p < .05, R^2 = 0.024$.

Multiple Regression: Predicting Relationship Trust

I conducted a multiple linear regression analysis to assess the relationship between the predictor variables and trust levels in marital and dating relationships. The predictor variables for the multiple linear regression were alienation from father, alienation from mother, and attachment style (avoidant, anxious, secure). The result of the multiple linear regression was not statistically significant, $F(5,164) = 1.74, p < .05, R^2 = 0.021$. This finding indicated that the model did not provide a statistically significant contribution to the variance in relationship trust scores. None of the predictor variables statistically significant predictors of marital or dating relationship trust scores. Table 6 presents the results for the individual predictor variables.

Table 6

Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Relationship Trust

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Alienation from Father	-	0.214	-.114	-1.49	0.138
	0.319				
Alienation from Mother	-	0.208	-.120	-1.54	0.126
	0.319				
Avoidant Attachment Style	0.044	0.250	0.014	0.178	0.859
Anxious Attachment Style	-	0.255	-.036	-.459	0.647
	0.117				
Secure Attachment Style	0.395	0.253	0.122	1.56	0.120

Note. $F(5,164) = 1.74, p < .05, R^2 = 0.021$.

Multiple Regression: Predicting Relationship Satisfaction

I conducted a multiple linear regression analysis to assess the relationship between the predictor variables and relationship satisfaction. The predictor variables for the multiple linear regression were alienation from father, alienation from mother, and attachment styles (avoidant, anxious, secure). The result of the multiple linear regression was statistically significant, $F(5,164) = 3.61, p < .05, R^2 = 0.072$. This finding indicated that the model provided a statistically significant contribution to the variance in relationship satisfaction scores. Specifically, the model contributed to 7% of the variation in marital or dating relationship satisfaction scores.

Alienation from mother was a statistically significant predictor of relationship satisfaction levels, $B = -0.267, p = .017$. The results indicated that as alienation from mother scores increased, satisfaction in marital or dating relationship scores decreased. On average, for every one-unit increase in alienation from mother scores, there was a -0.267-unit decrease in marital or dating relationship satisfaction scores. Anxious

attachment style was also a statistically significant predictor of relationship satisfaction levels, $B = -0.274$, $p = .046$. The results indicated that as anxious attachment style scores increased, satisfaction in marital or dating relationship scores decreased. On average, for every one-unit increase in anxious attachment style scores, there was a -0.274-unit decrease in marital or dating relationship satisfaction scores. The remaining predictor variables (alienation from father, avoidant attachment style, and secure attachment style) were not statistically significant predictors of relationship satisfaction scores. Table 7 presents the results for the individual predictors.

Table 7

Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Relationship Satisfaction

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Alienation from Father	-0.178	0.114	-.117	-1.56	0.120
Alienation from Mother	-0.267	0.111	-.184	-2.42	0.017
Avoidant Attachment Style	-0.191	0.133	-.110	-1.44	0.153
Anxious Attachment Style	-0.274	0.136	-.154	-2.02	0.046
Secure Attachment Style	0.161	0.135	0.090	1.194	0.234

Note. $F(5,164) = 3.61$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = 0.072$.

Multiple Regression: Predicting Relationship Quality

I conducted a multiple linear regression analysis to assess the relationship between the predictor variables and relationship quality. The predictor variables for the multiple linear regression were alienation from father, alienation from mother, and attachment style (avoidant, anxious, secure). The result of the multiple linear regression was statistically significant, $F(5,164) = 3.86$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = 0.074$. This finding indicated

that the model provided a statistically significant contribution to the variance in relationship quality scores. Specifically, the model contributed to 7% of the variation in marital or dating relationship quality scores.

Alienation from father was a statistically significant predictor of marital or dating relationship quality levels, $B = -0.112$, $p = .039$. The results indicated that as alienation from father scores increased, relationship quality scores decreased. On average, for every one-unit increase in alienation from father scores, there was a -0.112-unit decrease in marital or dating relationship quality scores. Alienation from mother was also a statistically significant predictor of relationship quality levels, $B = -0.142$, $p = .052$. The results indicated that as alienation from mother scores increased, quality in marital or dating relationship scores decreased. On average, for every one-unit increase in alienation from mother scores, there was a -0.142-unit decrease in marital or dating relationship quality scores. The remaining predictor variables (avoidant attachment style, anxious attachment style, and secure attachment style) were not statistically significant predictors of relationship quality scores. Table 8 presents the results for the individual predictors.

Table 8

Results of the Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Relationship Quality

Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Alienation from Father	-0.112	0.054	-0.156	-2.084	0.039
Alienation from Mother	-0.142	0.052	-0.208	-2.735	0.007
Avoidant Attachment Style	-0.012	0.062	-0.015	-0.197	0.844
Anxious Attachment Style	-0.089	0.064	-0.106	-1.394	0.165
Secure Attachment Style	0.093	0.063	0.112	1.473	0.143

Note. $F(5,164) = 3.69$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = 0.074$.

Summary

I investigated the predictive relationship of alienation from father, alienation from mother, and attachment style (avoidant, anxious, secure). I conducted standard multiple linear regression analyses to determine if there were any statistically significant relationships between the predictor variables and criterion variables. A regression analysis was conducted for each of the four criterion variables relationship happiness, relationship trust, relationship satisfaction, and relationship quality levels.

Alienation from father was a significant predictor for relationship quality levels. Alienation from mother was a significant predictor for relationship happiness, satisfaction, and quality level. Anxious attachment style was a statistically significant predictor of relationship satisfaction levels. Finally, avoidant attachment style and secure attachment style were not statistically significant predictors for any of the criterion variables for the quality of marital or dating relationships. In Chapter 5, an interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research will be detailed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if parental alienation during childhood and attachment style (avoidant, anxious, secure) were related to the quality of marital and dating relationships in adulthood. Parental alienation can weaken the afflicted individual's ability to become self-sufficient in adulthood and will also prevent him or her from forming appropriate attachments to others (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Larson & Halfon, 2013). Individuals who grow up in divorced families are more likely to experience parental alienation than those individuals from intact families (Hands & Warshak, 2011). With increased difficulty establishing healthy attachments, insecurity, and greater potential for mental illness to be present, the long-term effects of parental alienation may result in the affected children growing into adults who experience less satisfying romantic relationships and marriages (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012). Prior researchers have primarily focused on the effects of divorce, exposure to alienation, and behaviors associated with attachment style. The present study was conducted to examine possible long-term effects of parental alienation and attachment style on marital and dating relationships in adulthood.

The results of this study identified alienation from father, alienation from mother, and anxious attachment style as significant predictors of several aspects of relationship quality, suggesting they directly impact adult relationship quality. Avoidant and secure attachment style were not found to be significant predictors of any subscales of marital or dating relationship quality, which indicates that they do not impact the levels of happiness, trust, satisfaction, or overall quality in adult marital or dating relationships. In

this chapter, I will discuss the findings of this study in the interpretation of findings section. I will also discuss the limitations of this study, followed by recommendations for future research, and implications for social change. The chapter will end with conclusions for this study.

Interpretation of the Findings

Parental Alienation as a Predictor of Relationship Quality

In this research, I found that alienation from mother was a significant predictor of relationship happiness levels, relationship satisfaction levels, and relationship quality. As alienation from mother scores increased, relationship happiness, satisfaction, and overall quality scores decreased. I found that individuals who experienced parental alienation from their mother in childhood were more likely to have lower levels of happiness, satisfaction, and quality in their marital or dating relationship as adults. The emotional effects of experiencing parental alienation from the mother in childhood may also affect the ability to experience happiness, satisfaction, and overall quality within the marital or dating relationship in adulthood.

Alienation from father was found to be a significant predictor of relationship quality levels. As alienation from father scores increased, overall quality in marital or dating relationship scores decreased. The emotional effects of experiencing parental alienation from the father in childhood may also affect the overall quality of an individual's marital or dating relationship in adulthood. Alienation from father was not a significant predictor of relationship happiness, trust, or satisfaction levels in this study.

Prior scholars have indicated that reduced levels of self-efficacy, poorer emotional wellbeing, and performance difficulties in social environments have been associated with experiencing parental alienation during youth (Baker & Ben-Ami, 2011; Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Carr et al., 2015; Sher, 2015; Weisskirch, 2013). All of those effects have the potential to remain present in the individual for the duration of his or her lifetime and may significantly affect relationships in adulthood (Baker & Verrocchio, 2015; Carr et al., 2015; Moné & Biringen, 2012; Sher, 2015; Weisskirch, 2013). I found that alienation from mother was a significant predictor of marital or dating relationship happiness, satisfaction, and quality levels. As alienation from mother scores increased, relationship happiness, satisfaction, and overall quality scores decreased, suggesting difficulty in the adult relationships of the participants may be related to experiencing alienation from their mothers in childhood. Alienation from father in childhood was also a significant predictor of overall quality in adult marital or dating relationships. As alienation from father scores increased, overall relationship quality scores decreased.

These results were expected to be present in every aspect of relationship quality measurement; however, this was not the case. Alienation from father only served as a significant predictor of overall relationship quality and was not a significant predictor of relationship happiness or satisfaction levels. Parental alienation from mother may produce a greater level of lasting, negative results in an individual's adult romantic relationships. Parental alienation from the mother may be more traumatic due to the child's emotional and physical bonding that occurs prior to birth, in infancy, and childhood (Haefner, 2014; Johnson & Ray, 2016). There is also a societal focus on the

important role of the mother as the primary caregiver of children (Warshak, 2015).

Additionally, parental alienation from either parent was not a significant predictor of trust levels in marital or dating relationships, which may indicate that trust levels are based more on the behaviors of the participants' partners rather than the participants' childhood experiences with their parents.

Attachment Style as a Predictor of Relationship Quality

I found that the anxious attachment style was a significant predictor of marital or dating relationship satisfaction levels. Higher scores on anxious attachment style resulted in lower scores of satisfaction in the participants' marital or dating relationship. The presence of anxious attachment style in an individual may also affect the level of satisfaction in an individual's marital or dating relationship in adulthood. Anxious attachment style was not a significant predictor of relationship happiness, trust, or overall quality. Avoidant and secure attachment styles were not significant predictors of any aspects related to marital or dating relationship quality.

Previous researchers have found that the attachment style of an individual is directly related to the emotional and physical wellbeing of that person along with the quality of his or her relationships and his or her attachment capabilities (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Pietromonaco et al., 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2015). The attachment style of an individual is also directly related to emotional and physical wellbeing of an individual and contributes to the quality of his or her relationships (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Pietromonaco et al., 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2015). Individuals who exhibit an anxious attachment style are highly dependent on their partner in romantic relationships,

seek constant approval from their partners, and require high levels of intimacy to feel secure (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The results of this study align with previous research as anxious attachment style was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction levels. As scores increased for anxious attachment style, relationship satisfaction scores decreased.

Anxious attachment style of the individual was not a predictor of happiness, trust, or overall quality in adulthood romantic relationships. Avoidant and secure attachment styles were not significant predictors of adult marital or dating relationship happiness, trust, satisfaction, or quality scores. The participants with secure or avoidant attachment styles may have a partner with the ideal secure attachment style who would not require constant contact in the relationship. Partners who are both anxious or avoidant in their attachment style often have a more tumultuous relationship due to their tendency to be insecure or avoid closeness to others (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). If this is the case, the avoidant individuals may not be aware of the negative aspects in their attachment style (Pietromonaco et al., 2013). Additionally, the individuals with secure attachment style are less likely to need too much or too little contact with their partner (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

I found that if individuals who have an anxious attachment style do not experience reassurance from their partners, the level of satisfaction within the relationship could be negatively affected and decrease as a result. However, these results were expected to be present in every aspect of relationship quality measurement; this was not the case. Anxious attachment style only served as a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction scores. However, anxious attachment was not related to

relationship happiness, trust, or overall quality levels. Individuals with anxious attachment desire closeness in their relationships and will often obtain their self-value from their relationship with their significant other (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Pietromonaco et al., 2013). They may have considered the relationship itself to be a success and a source of happiness, trust, and quality in their life, despite any imperfections that may exist in the relationship with their partner (Simpson & Rholes, 2015).

Additionally, avoidant and secure attachment styles were not significant predictors of happiness, satisfaction, trust, or overall quality levels in marital or dating relationships. Individuals identifying with an avoidant attachment style will often inherently mistrust others or feel undeserving of love and affection (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These results did not align with prior research and suggested that the presence of an avoidant attachment style may not affect the levels of happiness, trust, satisfaction, or overall quality in their adult romantic relationships. This was surprising as individuals with an avoidant attachment style are more likely to reject closeness with others and suggest their partner may have a complementary attachment style to their own (Pietromonaco et al., 2013). Secure attachment was expected to have a positive relationship with the aspects of relationship quality and increase as those scores increased as those individuals characteristically have a positive sense of self and of their romantic partners (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). This result did not occur, which suggested that the presence of a secure attachment style may not affect happiness, trust, satisfaction, or overall quality levels. This may be due to the partners of the participants with secure attachment styles who may identify as anxious or avoidant attachment styles. Anxious or

avoidant attachment styles typically present more tumultuous characteristics such as insecurity or difficulty becoming emotionally close to others (Pietromonaco et al., 2013).

Theoretical Framework and Research Findings

The theoretical framework for this study was Bowen and Kerr's BFST and Hazan and Shaver's theory of attachment (Kerr & Bowen 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The BFST asserts that relationships between a parent and child, which are emotionally closer than average, will often involve aspects of control tactics used by the parent involved to manipulate the child's thoughts and maintain the close emotional connection as well as potentially preventing the child from having relationships with other individuals (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Kerr and Bowen (1988) also stated that parental control tactics may be used to build a coalition between the parent and child, which are also characteristics that define parental alienation. Children will often model what they see their parents do, and they are susceptible to imprint their parents' beliefs and perceptions about circumstances in life, regardless if they are positive or negative (Haefner, 2014; Malik, 2013). The BFST fits directly into the explanation of how parental alienation develops as the love and adoration the child holds for the parent they are closest with will often motivate that individual to align with that parent's beliefs (Johnson & Ray, 2016). The child may then gain that parent's acceptance and approval by participating in a coalition against the other parent (Johnson & Ray, 2016; Moné & Biringen, 2012; Warshak, 2015).

The BFST served as a basis for this study with the assumption that the presence of parental alienation in an individual's childhood could influence or predict the quality of his or her adult marital or dating relationship. The results of this study partially aligned

with Kerr and Bowen's theory as well as the assumption that adult relationships would be negatively affected by the childhood experience of parental alienation. Alienation from mother was a significant predictor of relationship happiness, satisfaction, and quality levels and had a negative relationship with each affected variable. Alienation from father was a significant predictor of overall relationship quality levels with lower levels of relationship quality levels associated with higher levels of alienation from father.

Unexpectedly, neither of the predictors were significant predictors of relationship trust levels. Trust is more dependent on the behavior of the individual's partner rather than childhood experiences involving his or her parents (Johnson & Ray, 2016). Additionally, alienation from father did not significantly predict nearly as many variables as alienation from mother did, suggesting that the presence of alienation from the mother had a greater lasting effect on adult romantic relationships. There is a potential that this occurred because of the physical and emotional bond expected to exist between mothers and their children from birth, and alienation would have a more significant impact if it occurs between someone with a closer bond (Warshak, 2015). I stopped reviewing here. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at your references.

The theory of attachment states that the attachment style of an individual will significantly impact their relationships and social interactions (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). The inability to form healthy attachments with other people is also believed to be a potential lasting effect of experiencing alienation from a parent during childhood as it is thought to hinder the formation of social relationships throughout the individual's life

(Baker & Verrocchio, 2013; Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Godbout & Parent, 2012; Larson & Halfon, 2013). If appropriate attachment styles are not adopted due to the emotional maltreatment from parents during their childhood, it is also likely that affected individuals will experience poor emotional health (Goldberg et al., 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2015). As attachment style is reported to be directly related to emotional and physical well-being of an individual, the quality of their relationships is also linked to attachment capabilities (Belsky & Nezworski, 2015; Pietromonaco et al., 2013; Simpson & Rholes, 2015).

The theory of attachment served as another basis of this study with the assumption that the attachment style of an individual could influence or predict the quality of their adult marital or dating relationship. The results of this study partially aligned with the theory, as well as the assumption that adult relationships would be affected by the individual's attachment style. Anxious attachment style was a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction levels with lower levels of relationship satisfaction associated with higher levels of anxious attachment. However, anxious attachment style was not a significant predictor of any other relationship quality variables, suggesting its presence may not affect the happiness, trust, or overall quality of adult romantic relationships. This may be due to the intense desire for closeness that individuals with anxious attachment disorder experience and may result in perceived happiness, trust in a partner, and good relationship quality simply because they are in a relationship (Hazan & Shaver, 1987).

Another unexpected result was that avoidant and secure attachment styles were not significant predictors of any relationship qualities. Avoidant attachment style was assumed to negatively affect romantic relationships prior to the study and secure attachment style was believed to positively affect relationship happiness, trust, satisfaction and quality. This result was expected because a secure attachment style is thought to be necessary for the individual to have success in the formation of adult romantic and social relationships (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1995; Colin, 1996; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). These results may not have occurred in this study because of the participants' partners attachment style which may be anxious or avoidant in nature and not the ideal secure attachment style (Colin, 1996). The partners of the participants were not measured in this research.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations to this study. The first limitation was generalizability of the results. Participants for this study were self-selected based upon convenience sampling from online participant pools. Convenience sampling lacks the generalizability of a random sample of participants. Though some demographic diversity did exist within the study sample, there were several areas that lacked variability including demographic regions of participants with 41.8% located in the Northeast and individuals in marital relationships made up nearly three quarters of the total sample (73.5%). This makes generalizability to individuals throughout the nation and those in dating relationships limited.

Response bias may also be a limitation of this study. The methodology used for this research was survey design, which allows self-report from participants. Participants were asked to respond truthfully in the instructions for completion. However, there is no way to determine if participants responded honestly or responded in a manner that would be viewed favorably by others. To avoid demand characteristics bias where the participant could anticipate what the study was investigating, additional questions were asked that were unrelated to the nature of the study including questions related to demographic information.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of ability to infer causality. Multiple regression is used to identify predictive relationships between independent variables and one dependent variable. This analytical model determines which independent variables predict the criterion or dependent variable. Since this was not an experimental design, causation could not be determined. Though the independent variable alienation from father did predict variability in overall relationship quality, alienation from mother in relationship happiness, satisfaction, overall quality, and anxious attachment style in relationship satisfaction levels, could not be said to have caused the resulting increase or decrease in marital or dating relationship scores.

Potential confounds could also be a limitation of this study. Individual factors such as engagement in community support, therapeutic services, family support systems, or income level could have impacted the results of this study. In addition, researcher bias may be a limitation. Question-order bias, a form of researcher bias, results in respondents basing their answers to subsequent questions on how they responded to previous

questions. Since the surveys used for this study were developed by other authors, there was no way to reduce the possible occurrence of this bias. However, all surveys used were checked for appropriate validity, reliability, and use in previous research measuring similar variables.

Recommendations

The surveys were completed in seven days with no incentives offered to participants. The survey length, comprised of multiple assessments combined to measure alienation from parents, attachment style, and the varying qualities that make up relationships, appears to have been appropriate to generate participation and may be useful in future studies.

One recommendation is to approach the topic from a qualitative perspective to obtain data on the lived experiences of these individuals. The experience of parental alienation in childhood may drastically vary between individuals and it may be helpful to understand specific details of that experience. The understanding of the individual's personal parental alienation life experience could provide insight into their behaviors, thought processes, and identify ways to better support them and their adult marital and dating relationships.

A longitudinal study may be appropriate for future research as couples may have future difficulty later in their relationships when parental alienation is experienced early in life that has not yet surfaced. The length of time that participants were involved in their relationship was also not a variable considered in this study; there is, therefore, potential

for this to be a factor in determining when parental alienation has an impact on marital or dating relationships.

Additionally, it may be useful to assess whether both individuals within the couple experienced parental alienation. If both partners experienced parental alienation in their youth, it may have a greater negative impact on the relationship than if only one partner experienced it. At the same time, if both partners had a shared experience of parental alienation in childhood, there would also be a potential for the partners to bond over the experience despite its negative nature. A shared experience could result in empathy and a greater understanding during conflict or in relational interactions.

Implications

The findings from this research provide several positive implications for social change at the family, organizational, and societal levels. This research has provided additional foundation to the limited body of knowledge on parental alienation and its long-term effects on adult relationships. While previous research has addressed behavioral problems, difficulties in school, and problems forming individual adult identities in relation to parental alienation in childhood, limited research has looked at the impact of parental alienation on relationship quality in adulthood (Godbout & Parent, 2012).

Results from this study could provide insight into training and education for practitioners and improve service delivery for clients with these unique personal history factors. Practitioners may also consider the unique challenges and lasting effects of experiencing parental alienation when administering therapy to affected individuals. In

addition, new theoretical models may need to be developed to adequately consider the long-term impact of parental alienation on interpersonal relationships. Research has not adequately identified therapy models that fit these individuals or that provide the most effective therapeutic strategies for treatment.

Modification of service models and interventions for these individuals could help to improve marital and dating relationships along with providing additional psychoeducation to potentially increase healthy and positive social interaction behaviors. Educating individuals about the impact alienation and attachment style could have on their marital or dating relationship may provide them with increased insight useful for improving interactions with their spouse or partner. The findings have the potential to be implemented by psychotherapists working with individuals on a variety of issues including mental health issues, relationship issues, or court-related problems, as the understanding of the individual's background is often a necessary step to therapeutic progress (Baker & Verrocchio, 2013; Larson & Halfon, 2013). Improved therapy models could increase the quality of the marital or dating relationships for individuals who have experienced parental alienation and may potentially prevent future divorces and additional cases of parental alienation in the next generation. This would improve the overall quality of life for the individual, their spouse or partner, and the family.

An additional social change implication would be toward policy development. Though there are policies to identify and reduce incidents of abuse against children, parental alienation is not yet universally considered to be a form of child abuse. However, the long-term emotional effects of the experience, including the negative

impact on emotional attachment development, may change the way it is viewed by society (Fergusson et al., 2014; Fraley & Heffernan, 2013; Kalmijn, 2012). This research may also be used to increase general awareness of the challenges that arise in the presence of parental alienation, not just on the parent experiencing it, but in the long-term emotional effects on the child. It may also increase awareness of the implications of those challenges to the individual's marital or dating relationship quality and the need for continuity of care and continued support for these individuals and their families.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to fill the gap in the literature related to parental alienation in childhood and how that experience may affect marital or dating relationships in adulthood. Divorce rates in America have risen steadily over the past several decades which has also increased the frequency of parental alienation (Larson & Halfon, 2013). Individuals who have experienced parental alienation in childhood experience challenges that other individuals do not face. The phenomenon of children becoming alienated from a parent has lasting effects on the adult behaviors of the individuals experiencing it in a variety of ways including insecure attachment styles, lower levels of self-sufficiency, and reduced self-esteem, which may result in a heightened dependence on other people (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012; Larson & Halfon, 2013). As the long-term effects of parental alienation have been found to include an increased difficulty in establishing health attachments, insecurity, and greater potential for mental illness to be present, it is possible that it may prevent individuals from having emotionally satisfying romantic relationships and marriages (Ben-Ami & Baker, 2012).

The current study examined the relationship that parental alienations and attachment formation had on the quality of marital and dating relationships in adulthood (Godbout & Parent, 2012). Findings indicate that alienation from father was a significant predictor of overall relationship quality while alienation from mother was a significant predictor of happiness, satisfaction, and overall quality of adult marital or dating relationships. This supported the assumption that the effects of parental alienation in childhood would negatively affect romantic relationships in adulthood. However, unexpectedly, alienation from mother affected more aspects of relationship quality, potentially due to the emotional and physical bonds shared between mother and child at birth (Warshak, 2015). Neither alienation from father nor alienation from mother affected any aspects of relationship quality owing, possibly, to the participants' partners behavior within the relationship. Anxious attachment style was also identified as a significant predictor of relationship satisfaction levels but did not significantly predict any other relationship aspects. Avoidant and secure attachment styles were not significant predictors of any relationship quality variable. These results were also unexpected as avoidant and anxious attachment styles were predicted to negatively affect all aspects of relationship quality while secure attachment style was assumed to positively affect adult marital or dating relationships. These findings suggest that there may be other mediating factors, such as family support or coping skills that allow positive marital or dating relationship quality in adulthood despite the presence of parental alienation occurring in childhood.

This study advances what is already known about the experience of parental alienation in childhood and potential long-term effects on adult marital or dating relationships. This study aimed to increase awareness of the unique challenges that parental alienation can create as well as provide foundational information to aid in therapeutic intervention and psychoeducation for affected individuals and families. Findings from this study may enable future researchers to identify coping strategies and therapeutic interventions that would increase the quality of marital or dating relationships for individuals with a history of parental alienation experienced in childhood.

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Appendix A: Demographics Questionnaire

1. Are your parents divorced?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. They were never married

2. At what age were you when your parents divorced?
 - a. My parents were never married and never together in my lifetime
 - b. Between birth and age 5
 - c. Between age 6 and age 10
 - d. Between age 11 and age 14
 - e. After the age of 14

3. Are you currently:
 - a. Single
 - b. Dating
 - c. Married

4. What age are you?
 - a. 18 – 25
 - b. 26 – 35

- c. 36 – 50
 - d. Over age 50
5. What is your highest level of education?
- a. Completion of high school
 - b. Some college
 - c. College degree
 - d. Post-graduate degree
6. What region of the United States do you reside in?
- a. Northeast
 - b. Southeast
 - c. Midwest
 - d. Central South
 - e. Northwest
 - f. Southwest