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THE INFLUENCE OF EXPERIENCING FAMILY CONFLICT ON ACADEMIC AND  
RELATIONSHIP SUCCESS

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## **ABSTRACT**

I examine the relationship between the level of parental marital conflict experienced by a respondent and its effect on academic success, intimate relationship success, and the success of the relationships developed with their parents. Data came from a convenience sample of 447 undergraduates at a large Northeastern University. Findings showed that parental marital conflict did not significantly influence academic achievement or intimate relationship success. I found that experiencing parental marital conflict did significantly influence the relationship developed with parents. Those who experienced parental marital conflict reported less relationship success with their parents than their counterparts.

Keywords: parental marital conflict, parental divorce, relationship success, academic success

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

In the United States, forty percent of children have witnessed their parents' divorce. (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003) This statistic highlights the large amount of children who have experienced a breakup of their parents' marriages and experienced this negative life stressor while growing up. The experience of divorce can have devastating effects for children (Amato, 2000). Divorce can bring about not only change in family structure, but significant conflict between the two parents. A large research literature focuses on the effects of divorce on children. However, far fewer research literatures focus on families where children witness conflict when the parents remain together. My research contributed to the larger body of research literature by examining how parental conflict experienced while growing up influences an individual's successes as a young adult. Data for the study was collected using convenience sampling (N=447) from the student body of a large Northeastern University in the spring of 2016. Students reported on their relationships with their parents as well as on conflict between their parents. Factors examined in my research include amount of parental conflict witnessed by the respondent, relationship of respondent and parents, background information, communication patterns with parents, academic success in college, and social successes with friends and romantic partners.

### **Social Exchange Theory**

In order to examine the relationship between parents and children, I applied Social Exchange/Rational Choice Theory. Social Exchange Theory states that societal exchanges are based upon estimates of rewards and punishments. Individuals evaluate social encounters on a series of exchange expectations in order to minimize risk and maximize benefits. This process of risk benefit analysis is crucial to understanding all social relationships. Cropanzano (2005) explained that the process of completing this analysis required the individual to evaluate relationships based upon the benefit gained from the interaction despite the cost exerted. These benefits and punishments can take form in both tangible and subtle ways. In terms of tangible reward, one might deem recognition from another person, gifts, or money as enough to make an interaction positive. However, benefits can also include simple signs of endearment such as a smile, a hug, or a pat on the back. Punishments can also take form across a similar spectrum. Tangible punishments may take form in ways such as public humiliation or scolding. In terms of subtle punishments, a simple frown or eyebrow raise can act as hints that an interaction may not be worth the risk.

Donovan (1990) provided an explanation for how social interactions are ranked. Central to Social Exchange Theory is the concept of satisfaction. Relationships are compared and ranked based on the level of satisfaction that is achieved from each relationship. Satisfaction is evaluated in terms of the outcomes that are possible within the relationship. These outcomes are determined through the benefits that arise from the relationship despite the associated risk or

consequences. Both the experiences of the outcomes within the relationship and the expectation the individual brings into the relationship are necessary to determining satisfaction (Sabatelli, 1984). More importance was given to relationships that result in more benefits. Relationships that pose more of a risk to an individual's social well-being will warrant less importance, and therefore less time and attention.

Donovan (1990) also attributed the importance of comparison levels for understanding dependence. Comparison levels were used to determine how an individual's previous experiences influenced the satisfaction within a current relationship (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The social norms and standards that society inherently develops as well as individual experiences determine what the individual deems to be realistically obtainable within the relationship. These norms and expectations become important factors in the relationship. This concept is central to the evaluation of dependence. Dependence is measured by how reliant an individual believes they are on the other party in their relationship. Individuals therefore evaluate the benefits of the current relationship in terms of what the costs and risks are of alternative opportunities. In a highly satisfying relationship, the rewards perceived by alternative relationships will be less than in relationships where one is not well satisfied. Dependence is therefore tolerated more in relationships that are highly rewarding.

This theory was pertinent to my research because it focused on the relational choices made throughout the life course. Starting as young children, subtle benefits and punishments can highly affect the relationship children build with their parents. As these individuals developed into young adults, it is important to understand how they ranked their relationships, including those with their parents. Despite the familial connection, experiences of conflict or other barriers may result in more perceived risk than benefit. This risk may lead the young adult to place less

importance, and therefore invest less time, effort, or communication with their parents. Based on Social Exchange Theory, I expected that if while growing up, respondents have relationships with their parents that, because of parental relationship conflict, pose more risk, they would develop weaker relationships with their parents. I further expect that these relationships, which children experience more parental conflict, and therefore, exhibit more social risk, would also result in less academic and social success.

### **Marital Conflict and Its Impact on Parent-Child Relationships**

The relationship between parent and child is crucial to child development, both personally and in relation to others, with many parent-child interactions placing stress on this relationship. While troubling times may arise in every household, witnessing conflict between parents can have serious effects on children (Yu, 2010). What constitutes marital conflict will differ for each household and hold different meanings for different individuals. These conflicts may range in severity, starting from yelling at each other to assaulting one another with an object or weapon. Despite the severity of the conflict, Yu (2010) suggests that any type of conflict witnessed by the child results in poorer quality in the relationship experienced between parent and child. In addition to the type of conflict, the frequency of conflict also influences the relationship developed between parent and child.

According to the family stress theory, a multitude of stressful events experienced will create more problems for a child (Amato, 1993). The stress that develops from experiencing conflict between parents creates a barrier in the child's ability to fully bond with their parents. One of these problems is the pressure placed on children who witness marital conflict. Numerous

problems arise when children are forced to handle their parents' conflicts. First, the child often feels like they are caught in the middle between their parents. This can lead to additional pressure felt by the child to take sides in order to resolve conflict. In addition, this pressure may lead to the child struggling with loyalty with their parents, as well as issues regarding communication. The influence of stress is crucial to understanding not only the relationship of those children whose parents divorce, but also to understand the influence of stress on those children who continue to witness conflict in their parent's marriage even when the marriage remains intact. I hypothesize the experience of more conflict, and subsequently more stress, will cause worse relationships to develop between parent and child, as well as less academic and social successes for the child as a young adult.

### **Relationship Between Marital Conflict and Divorce**

Divorce, the dissolution of a marriage, can occur for many reasons. It is important to understand the influence marital conflict has on the likelihood of divorce. Divorce may arise from high levels of marital conflict. Whether this conflict is about financial burdens, family obligations, infidelities or other relational problems, conflict and the inability to resolve conflict may result in divorce. The divorce literature provides two different perspectives on how marital conflict is influenced by divorce. The first outlines how divorce affects the visibility of marital conflict for children (Kurdek, 1998). Kurdek (1998) argues that the separation of parents due to divorce will increase the visibility of conflict around children. When living in the same household, parents have more opportunities to discuss conflict or argue away from their children, such as when children are at school or after they have gone to bed. However, after divorce, the

amount of time parents will spend together will center on times when they are together only in front of the children. The limited amount of contact, Kurdek (1998) argues, will increase the animosity or conflict that is exchanged between parents at times such as drop-offs and pick-ups of the children.

Other researchers argued that divorce would decrease conflict visibility. With the separation of the parents following divorce, conflict may be handled through means that were not previously available. Divorce provides the opportunity to mitigate aggravating factors that previously caused conflict. The concerns from which conflict arose during the marriage may dissipate once a divorce is finalized. With two separate households, there is more time afforded to calming down before addressing the issues. In addition, more venues may be created for parents to settle conflict after a divorce that do not involve the children. Communication through email, phone calls, or time set up while the children are in the care of others, gives parents the opportunity to settle issues without placing the children in unnecessary or uncomfortable positions. For children who experienced high levels of conflict prior to divorce, a separation and cease of this conflict may be welcomed as a relief and the beginning of a less stressful environment (Wheaton, 1990). In this research, I examined the effects of divorce on relationships with parents and on child success both academically and socially. Based on the two perspectives explaining the results of marital conflict and divorce on children, I expected that respondents, who experience a high level of visible parental conflict, will be more likely to have more issues with their parents and less academic and social success. Both perspectives focused on the amount of conflict observed by children as not only the divorce variable. I have examined both of these in my research.

## Communication Following Divorce

It is important to understand how changes in the family structure including relatively high rates of divorce effect family communication. Yarosh, Chew, and Abowd (2008) examined the avenues of communication between two separate households. The researchers found that telephone communication was the primary method of communication between the child and the nonresidential parent. While telephone communication was a useful tool, the participants of the study highlighted the difficulty with keeping conversation engaging through a medium of audio-only communication. This study helps to show the importance of studying telephone communication within the family, due the high demand and use of this particular technology. In addition, researchers found that strong relationships with one's parents cannot solely be developed over the phone, and that physical interaction is important to relationship maintenance. Yarosh et. al. (2008) found that phone communication is only one way to maintain relationships and consequently, it is important to focus on other means of communication.

In addition to examining types of communication, researchers have also focused on the role that the frequency of contact contributes to the relationship established with parents, and subsequently, the happiness children derive from the affection they experience. Lawton, Silverstein, and Bentson (1994), examined whether or not there is a reciprocal relationship between contact with parents and the amount of affection expressed between the parent and child. Findings showed a reciprocal relationship between affection and contact, but there was a significant difference in the relationships experienced between mother and father. Contact and affection were significantly related for mothers, but not for fathers. The results found from this study signify the importance of understanding the frequency of communication in addition to the methods by which one communicates. In addition, these findings highlight an important

distinction that must be explored by focusing on mothers and fathers individually and not simply as parents. The relationships developed between parents can expose different needs or benefits when separated by mother and father. Overall, the findings point to the importance of communication with parents and generally support my hypothesis that increased communication will lead to increased levels of happiness for respondents.

Interesting, research by Amato (1994) found a different sex of parent effect at the adolescent state of development. Amato (1994) found that interaction with parents, particularly with fathers, has a direct effect on offspring happiness. Although this research focused on interaction during adolescence, it is likely that interaction with parents during adulthood could also affect overall levels of happiness. I also examined the effects of father and mother interaction and expect that, because respondents are reporting retrospectively and currently about parental interaction, mother interaction might be more important to happiness and success than father interaction.

### **Adult Well-Being Following Experience with Conflict**

The frequency of contact one has with their parents can be determined by events outside of their control. Numerous factors can contribute to how a relationship is built between parents and children, and how this can influence child happiness. Amato (1991) examined the effect of divorce on the well-being of their adult children. Divorce can drastically change how and when an individual sees their parents. It is important to understand how the frequency of contact can be altered through outside circumstances, and the results that come from changes in the traditional

communication pattern. Amato (1991) found that for respondents who had experienced the divorce of their parents, lower levels of well-being were present as compared to respondents whose parents remained married. This result highlights the importance of understanding the quality of experience with one's parents in conjunction with amount of contact. Social Exchange Theory can be used to explain how communication experienced comes as a result of the risk-benefit analysis. Those who have experienced more conflict with their parents, in addition to the frequency of conflict, may deem communication with their parents as a greater potential risk than reward. This perceived risk might require the individual to put forth less effort to communicate with parents, thus influencing the quality of their interactions. Therefore, I expected that respondents experiencing more parental conflict when growing up, will put forth less energy into communication with their parents, and therefore will have less positive relationships with their parents as young adults.

### **Life Experiences and the Influence on Romantic Relationships**

Similar to its effect on individual happiness, the frequency of contact, and the type of relationship built between a child and their parents can also affect the child's romantic relationships. Roisman (2001) found that adults carry their experiences from childhood into their adult lives. These internalized experiences can significantly affect one's romantic relationships. The relationship with parents can have significant influences in all aspects of adult lives. Whether through their own happiness or through the ability to formulate healthy romantic relationships, this is a significant factor in the development of social interactions and well-being

in adulthood. These findings support the hypothesized relationship examined in this research that interaction with parents will be related to both the respondents' academic success and their relationship happiness.

### **Life Experiences and the Influence on Academic Achievements**

While parental marital conflict is an important indicator of success in children's romantic relationships, other life experiences can also be influenced by parent's marital conflict. Amato (2001) found that students who experienced divorced were less successful academically than those who came from intact families. Potter (2010) suggested not only the experience of divorce influences children's academic achievement, but that divorce is also associated with lower levels of psychological well-being. This decrease in well-being is in turn responsible for the lower levels of academic success, in terms of lower self-esteem and self-agency to put forth the necessary effort to achieve success. With the previous literature predicting divorce to have a significant impact on success in school, it is important for this research to examine whether it is just the experience of divorce, or if the experience of conflict is predictive as well.

**Hypotheses:**

H1: Individuals who experience less parental marital conflict will develop better relationships with their parents than their counterparts.

H2: Individuals who experience less parental marital conflict will achieve better academic success than their counterparts.

H3: Individuals who experience less parental conflict will achieve more successful romantic relationships than those who experience more parental conflict.

H4: Individuals who have better relationships with their parents will achieve better academic success than those who have worse relationships with their parents.

H5: Individuals who have better relationships with their parents will achieve more successful romantic relationships than their counterparts.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Methods**

#### **Sample**

I conducted an exploratory survey research study in order to examine predictors of student-parent interaction and student happiness and success. The University's Internal Review Board (IRB) at the University where the data were gathered approved my study. The data were collected through an on-line survey. Students were recruited through classes and given extra credit for participation in the survey. A recruitment script was read by students prior to responding to the survey, which included information about risks and contact information for the investigator. If the student was under 18 years of age, they could not participate in the survey without parental consent and had the option of completing an alternative extra credit assignment. The study was made available to participants through an online website. Responding to the survey was an indication of consent.

#### **Justification of Sample**

Given the specific area of research this study was interested in, college-aged students were of particular interest. This was because college aged individuals provide a unique perspective given their place in the life course. Much of the research literature exploring divorce

focused upon the effects of marital conflict upon young children. This research literature focused on how conflict and instability affects the child's life during childhood. However, there was limited information on how the experience of parental marital conflict affected children after they left their parent's home and became adults. In addition, there was even less research into the development of children's relationship with their parents after experiencing some level of parental marital conflict once they left home and became independent. The lack of research in these given areas was the reason why I chose to focus upon undergraduate college age students in my study. College students exhibited the ability to provide for and make decisions for themselves, such as the choice of whom they speak to or allow in their lives. Yet, despite this independence, there are many areas of life where they continued to rely upon their parents. In addition, their removal from their home environment removed specific pressures that are forced upon children, such as custody agreements or living arrangements.

### **Survey Procedure**

The Marital Conflict Survey was developed by me to test my research questions (See Appendix A for the full survey.). The survey began with questions that asked about background variables such as race, gender, and structure of family, including specifying members of the family. The respondents also answered questions about specific experience with their parent's marital conflict. This group of questions asked specifically about what conflict the student witnessed of their parents including whether or not their parents were divorced.

Next, I focused on questions that examined the relationship the respondent had with parents before college. Questions included time spent with parents, and levels of comfort they felt towards each parent. All questions examined the specific relationship the respondent had with both parents, if applicable. Next, I asked about different modes of communication in which students engage with their parents. Such behaviors included talking on the phone, communication through the computer, including the use of email, and returning home on breaks. In addition, this section developed the levels of trust one feels towards their parents. This is developed through a series of questions in which a participant was asked to determine their level of comfort in disclosing certain information to their parents. Such information included disclosing a bad grade, sharing experiences with drugs or alcohol, and discussing romantic or sexual encounters. Participants were also asked whom they list as their emergency contact, exploring whom the participant is reliant upon even while away at school.

### **Control Variables**

In order to fully explore the relationships between experienced marital conflict and social and academic successes, I included a number of control variables in my analysis. I included the influence of background variables including the sex of the respondent, their age, and the education of the parents. Sex was measured in two categories (0=male, 1=female). About 39% of the respondents were male and 61.1% were female. The respondent's education was measured in terms of the years spent in college. This variable included five categories (1 thru 5) with one representing a first year student and five representing a fifth year student or beyond. Out of the

respondents of my survey, 38.6% were first year students, 19.4% were second year students, 20.1% were third year students, 18.6% were fourth year students, and 3.3% were fifth year students or beyond. Next, the study controlled for the importance of religion. This variable included five categories (1=extremely unimportant, 5= extremely important). About 26% of respondents felt that religion was extremely unimportant, 21.2% of respondents found that religion was somewhat unimportant, 28.4% of respondents found religion to be neither unimportant nor important, 16.4% of respondents found religion to be somewhat important, and 7.9% of respondents found religion to be extremely important. Mother's and Father's education was measured in eight categories (1= less than high school, 8= medical degree, JD, or professional degree). About 0.7% of respondents' mothers had obtained less than a high school education. 17.2% of respondents' mothers had obtained a high school diploma or GED. 14.4% of respondents' mothers had obtained some college, 9.8% of respondents' mothers had obtained two years of college or an associate's degree, 36.5% of respondents' mothers had four years of college (BA/BS). About 13.5% of respondents' mothers had obtained a master's degree, 2% of respondents' mothers had obtained a doctoral degree, and 3.7% of respondents' mothers had obtained a medical degree, JD, or professional degree.

About 2.2% of respondents' fathers had obtained less than a high school education, 17.7% of respondents' fathers obtained a high school diploma or GED, 13.5% of respondents' fathers had attended some college. About 7% of respondents' fathers had obtained two years of college or an associate's degree, 33.8% of respondents' fathers had four years of college (BA/BS), 14.4% of respondents' fathers had obtained a master's degree, 3.1% of respondents' fathers had obtained a doctoral degree, and 5.5% of respondents' fathers had obtained a medical degree, JD, or professional degree.

Respondents also answered questions regarding their parents' marital status (0=married, 1=divorced/separated, 2=other). About 70% of respondents' parents are married, 22.7% of respondents' parents are divorced or separated, and 7.4% of respondents' parents are in another form of family structure.

### **Independent Variables**

The research completed for my study focused upon three groups of independent variables. First, I focused on the respondent's family structure including whether or not the family experienced a divorce. The next independent variables included in the analysis were the evaluation of the individual's exposure to parental conflict. Individuals were asked to identify components of their parent's arguments that they witnessed while growing up. These experiences increased in severity from parent's yelling at one another to threatening one another with a weapon. These variables were combined to form the parental conflict scale. The parental conflict scale was based on nine behaviors (yelling, throwing something at the other parent, pushed, grabbed or shoved, slapped, kick, bit, or hit with fist, choked or strangled, beat up, or threaten with a weapon). These actions were coded as 1 if yes they did them or 0 if no they did not. A simple additive scale was created in order to add up how many of the conflict behaviors a respondent's parents engaged in. Responses range from 0, which meant that their parents engaged in no conflict (24.9%) to 8 which was the highest level of conflict (1.1%). The mean score on the scale was 1.25. The Cronbach alpha for parental marital conflict scale was 0.791 for an eight-item scale.

The final independent variable explored the relationship a respondent developed with each parent. Respondents were asked to identify factors such as which parents they lived with growing up, whom they spent time with, the quality of the time spent together when they were children and how and when they argued with their parents. Two scales, one for relationship with mother and one for relationship with father, were developed. The items in the scale were asked for both mother and father. The scale consisted of nine items, which asked the respondent to reflect on their relationship with their mother/father and to report on their current relationship with their mother and father. Two items in the scale had responses on a 5-point scale, where a higher value indicates more enjoyment and less conflict. The items were (1) I enjoyed spending time with mother/father (2) I fought or argued with my mother/father frequently. The next set of items asked about activities participated in with mother/father. These items were (1) talk about everyday events, (2) talk about important life decisions, (3) talk about news/politics/world events, (4) talk about personal issues such as relationships, and (5) talk about stressful events such as a poor performance on a test. For each item, a response of 1 indicated they never do these things with their mother/father and a response of 5 means they do it all of the time. The next set of questions included how often they talk with their mother/father and how often they see their mother/father in person (1=less than once a month 7=multiple times a day). These items were added together to form the relationship with mother and the relationship with father scales. The higher the score on the scales, the better the relationship the respondent has with their father/mother. The Cronbach alpha for the relationship with father's scale was 0.805 for a nine-item scale. The Cronbach alpha for the relationship with mother's scale was 0.794 for a nine-item scale.

### **Dependent Variables**

The study focused on how the experiences one has as a child impacted the experiences one has as a young adult. This took form in three primary dependent variables. The first variable evaluated the relationship respondents had with their parents at the time of the survey. This variable served as both an independent and dependent variable, depending upon the analysis. The scale was described in the independent variable section.

The study also focused on educational success in college as a dependent variable. Respondents were asked about their study habits as well as the grade point average they had earned since attending college. In order to measure academic success, a two-item scale was created. The academic success scale was a simple, additive scale. The first item in the scale was GPA ranging from 1.0 to 4.0 with 4.0 being an “A” average. Being on the Dean’s List was the second variable in the scale with 0 meaning the respondent was never on the Dean’s List and 1 meaning they were on the Dean’s List. About 46 % of respondents reported being on the Dean’s List at some point throughout their educational career, while 47.2% of respondents reported never having been on Dean’s List. A higher number on the scale indicated higher academic success. The Cronbach alpha for the academic success scale was 0.528 for a two-item scale. A small number of the respondents (n= 32) were new students and had not had an opportunity to make the Dean’s List. In order to retain these respondents in the analysis, they were assigned a “yes” (1) on the Dean’s List variable if their high school GPA was 3.5 or higher.

Lastly, respondents were asked to identify their experiences with social relationships as young adults. These experiences included experiences and influences by peers, as well as experiences and views on romantic relationships to help develop this dependent variable. The relationship success scale, created to measure these variables, consisted of four items. The

relationship success scale was a simple, additive scale. The first item was whether the respondent was in an exclusive relationship (0=no) (1=yes). The next item in the scale consisted of six categories with 0 meaning not in an exclusive relationship and 5 meaning being in an exclusive relationship for 3 or more years. The third item was whether the respondent thought their relationship would result in marriage (0=no, not in an exclusive relationship 5=married). The final item was whether the respondent's partner had met his/her parents. Zero indicated the respondent was not in an exclusive relationship, 1 meant the person was in an exclusive relationship but had not introduced their partner to his/her parents and 2 meant that the respondent had introduced his/her partner to the parents. The Cronbach alpha for the relationship success scale was 0.917. The descriptive statistics for all of the variables included in the analysis are shown in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here]

### **Analysis Method**

In addition to descriptive statistics, I used multiple regression to examine my hypotheses. Multiple regression was an appropriate technique for my analysis because my dependent variables were ordinal and interval. This method was appropriate given that my dependent variables had multiple response categories and I needed to control for a number of different independent variables.

## Chapter 3

### Findings

The relationship between the independent, control variables, and the dependent variable of relationship with a respondent's mother are found in Table 2. As hypothesized, children from households where parents had more conflict had a poorer relationship with their mother than their counterparts ( $p < .000$ ). Marital status of parents also had a significant effect on the relationship a respondent had with their mother. Children from divorced families, as compared to children from married families, had worse relationships with their mother ( $p < .001$ ). This pattern was the same for children whose parents had other marital statuses as compared to married parents ( $p < .000$ ). After the control variables were entered into the model, parental conflict and parental marital status remained significant. None of the control variables were statistically significant.

[Table 2 about here]

I also examined the relationship between the independent and control variables on the relationship respondents had with their fathers. The findings from the examination of this hypothesis are shown in Table 3. The findings for this relationship were the same as those for the respondent's relationship with their mother, and supported my hypothesis. Those respondents from households where parents had more conflict exhibited a worse relationship with their father

as compared to those who came from households with less conflict ( $p < .000$ ). The marital status of a respondent's parents had a significant effect on the relationship a respondent formed with their father. Children from divorced families had worse relationships with their fathers as compared to children with married parents ( $p < .001$ ). Other marital statuses also had a significant effect, in which respondents who came from parents with other marital statuses had poorer relationships with their fathers than those whose parents were married ( $p < .000$ ). Parental conflict and parental marital status remained significant after the control variables were introduced into the model. Again, none of the control variables was statistically significant.

[Table 3 here]

A linear regression of the independent and control variables and the dependent variable of academic success is presented in Table 4. Findings show that the hypothesis was not supported as parental conflict was not significantly related to academic success. However, students with divorced parents were more likely than students with married parents to have lower levels of academic success ( $p < .05$ ). This relationship remained significant even after the inclusion of the control variables. Students' relationship with their mothers was positively related to academic success ( $p < .05$ ). Finally, students with fathers having higher levels of education were more likely to be academically successful than those whose fathers had lower levels of education ( $p < .05$ ).

[Table 4 here]

Table 5 presents the relationship between the independent and control variables on the dependent variable of respondent relationship success. This linear regression only evaluated those respondents who were in an exclusive relationship, which resulted in a smaller total

number of respondents in the analysis (N=155). The findings did not support my hypothesis as parental conflict and parental marital status did not have a significant effect on relationship success. With introduction of the control variables, academic year was significantly related to relationship success. Respondents further on in their academic careers achieved more relationship success than their younger counterparts ( $p < .001$ ).

[Table 5 here]

In order to further examine the relationship between parental conflict and relationship success, I examined the relationship between the independent and control variables using the dependent variable of the importance of having a relationship with a partner while in college. These results are presented in Table 6. Parental conflict was almost significantly related to respondent's view of the importance of being in a relationship ( $p = .069$ ). Upon inclusion of the control variables, this relationship became significant. For respondents whose parents had more conflict, these respondents placed less importance on being in a relationship than their counterparts ( $p < .05$ ). Additionally, mother's education also had a significant effect on respondent's belief of the importance of being in a relationship in college. Respondents whose mothers obtained higher levels of education believed being in a relationship was more important than respondents whose mothers obtained lower levels of education ( $p < .05$ ). Finally, respondent's relationship status had a significant effect on their views of importance of having a relationship while in college. Those who were in an exclusive relationship placed more importance on being in a relationship in college than their counterparts who were not in exclusive relationships ( $p < .05$ ).

[Table 6 here]

The analysis of the respondent's relationships with their parents and their academic success is shown in Table 7. These findings partially supported my hypothesis, in that the relationship a respondent had with their mother was statistically significant related to academic success. Respondents who had better relationships with their mothers achieved more academic success than those who had worse relationships with their mothers ( $p < .05$ ). However, the same was not shown for relationships with fathers. The relationship between academic success and the relationship a respondent had with their father was not statistically significant. Additionally, those who came from divorced households achieved less academic success than their counterparts did ( $p < .05$ ). With inclusion of the control variables, respondent's relationship with their mothers was no longer statistically significant. The relationship with a respondent's father also remained non-statistically significant. Marital status, specifically those whose parents were divorced as compared to married, remained significant ( $p < .05$ ). In addition, with the introduction of the control variables, father's education was statistically significant. Respondents whose fathers received higher levels of education achieved more academic success than those respondents whose fathers received lower levels of education ( $p < .05$ ).

[Table 7 here]

Table 8 presents the relationship between respondent's relationship with their parents and relationship success. Again, this regression only evaluated respondents who reported being in an exclusive relationship, resulting in a smaller total number of respondents ( $N=155$ ). Findings from this regression did not support my hypothesis. A respondent's relationship with their mother or with their father did not have a significant influence on a respondent's relationship success. These relationships did not change with the introduction of the control variables.

Respondent's year in college did significantly influence a respondent's relationship success. Respondents who were older achieved more relationship success than their counterparts did ( $p < .001$ ).

[Table 8 here]

I further examined the respondent's relationship success. In order to do so, I introduced the additional variable in which respondents reflected upon how important it was to them to be in a relationship in college. The linear regression for this relationship is presented in Table 9. Despite the introduction of this variable, the findings still did not support my hypothesis. The respondent's relationship with their mother and their father did not significantly influence their views on the importance of being in a relationship in college. The inclusion of the control variables did highlight the significance of mother's education. Respondents whose mothers obtained higher levels of education placed more importance on being in a relationship than those whose mothers obtained lower levels of education. ( $p < .05$ ). In addition, being in a relationship had a significant effect on respondent's view of being in a relationship. Those who reported being in a relationship were more likely to place more importance on being in a relationship in college than those who were not in a relationship ( $p < .05$ ).

[Table 9 here]

## **Chapter 4**

### **Discussion**

In this research, I examined the influence parental marital conflict had on a respondent's academic success, relationship success, and success within their relationship with their parents. In addition, I examined the influence a respondent's relationship with their parents had on their academic and relationship success. The data for this research came from a convenience sample of students at a large Northeastern University. Overall, I expected that parent's marital conflict would have a significant effect upon the success of college students as researchers have found that parent's continue to influence their children when they go off to college (Kenny, 1987). Social Exchange Theory also informed these expectations as the cost of interaction with parents including time, energy, and risk of emotional hurt are less than the rewards achieved from interaction with parents (Edwards, 1969). These rewards include a sense of belonging, and receiving emotional and economic support.

In my first hypothesis, I explored the relationship between parental conflict and the relationship a respondent developed with their parents. I expected to find that lower levels of parental conflict would result in better relationships developed between the respondent and their parents. The relationship between parental conflict and the relationship developed with parents was found to be significant. As explained by Social Exchange Theory, risk benefit analysis proved to be highly influential in the relationship developed with parents. Relationships are evaluated and ranked based on how much satisfaction is experienced, or the amount of rewards

obtained, from the given relationships (Donovan, 1990). This theory described the rankings based on costs and rewards that children placed on their relationships with their parents following divorce. Amato suggested that the experience of divorce presented serious consequences for children. Experiencing parental can put strain on the parent-child relationship (Amato, 2000). As respondents were removed from situations in which they experience their parents' conflict on a regular basis, they may have evaluated their relationship with their parents in a different light. Being present for such conflict, or the subsequent consequences resulting from such behavior, may prove to be too stressful for the child. Therefore, the respondent may view the costs of the relationship with their parent to outweigh the benefits. This experience may lead them to place less importance on or put less effort in developing a strong relationship with their mother and father, and placing their cost in another interaction because the probability of reward is higher.

In the exploration of this relationship, I found that parental marital status also had a significant effect on a respondent's relationship with their parents. Interestingly, marital status was significant for the relationships respondents developed with their fathers, but not for the relationships they developed with their mothers. This finding can be explained by prior divorce literature. Previous studies have found that children develop problematic relationships with their fathers after divorce (Cooney, 1994). Given that custody agreements typically place primary custody of children with their mothers, the result is less interaction for children with their fathers. This leads to a decrease in opportunities for interaction between children and fathers (Stevenson, 2014). While the use of technology can help to maintain this relationship, the state of the relationship inevitably changes, and most often, the quality of the relationship decreases (Kalmijn, 2013). Given that more children live with their mothers after divorce as compared to

their fathers, this relationship is influenced less by parental marital status and more by opportunity for interaction. Living with one's mother provides more opportunities for constant communication and relationship building. Marital status influences access to one's children and the opportunities to develop a positive relationship.

In my second hypothesis, I explored the relationship between parental marital conflict on respondent's college academic success. The findings showed that this relationship was not significant, in that less conflict witnessed by the respondent did not predict more academic success achieved. While I initially thought that conflict would have been the important predictor of academic success, it appeared as though parental marital status, and therefore, family structure, may have been more important. I found that parental marital status of divorced had a significant influence on academic success. This relationship suggested that instead of conflict effecting academic success, academic achievements are influenced by the stability of the home. Coming from a home with two parents, both of whom provide an income to support the family and household, results in more resources available for the child. The financial stability afforded in this situation allows the child to work less, or focus less attention on financial burdens. Therefore, there is more time and attention allotted for academic endeavors. In addition, financial stability, to some extent, may reduce the effects of parental conflict and this may explain why it was not found to have a significant effect upon academic success.

The relationship between parental marital conflict and relationship success was examined in my third hypothesis. I expected that experiencing less parental conflict when growing up would result in increased success within respondent's relationships. This hypothesis was not supported by the data. This relationship highlighted shortcomings within the scale measuring dating relationship success. Since the scale was based on questions such as length of dating,

only respondents who were currently in a relationship were included in the analysis. The scale operated on the notion that success results just from being in a relationship. However, these individuals not in a relationship may have chosen not to be in a relationship after careful consideration. That careful consideration may exemplify their understanding of their own needs within a relationship, which may show more relationship success than just being in a relationship. The relationship success scale was also limited given that I was unable to ask questions regarding respondents' experienced conflict within their own relationships. Given the restrictions regarding mandatory reporting requirements, I was unable to ask any questions that may have required a respondent to disclose a conflict encounter that must be reported to the police. I was unable to learn about conflict exhibited between respondents and their partners, or if they utilized healthy conflict resolution patterns. Those variables would have been better identifiers for successful relationships than length of relationship.

I did find that as a respondent's class rank increased (moved from first year in college to fifth year in college) it did have a significant influence on relationship success. This finding may be attributed to the increased maturity that occurs due to aging. As one becomes older, more opportunities to be in relationships are present including a larger mating pool at college. The increase of these experiences affords the individual more opportunities to learn about how they act in relation to others, as well as what components make up a healthy relationship. Older students simply had more time to be in relationships.

I further examined the relationship success component of my hypothesis by examining the variable of importance given to being in a relationship while in college. This analysis included all students and overcame the weakness of focusing only on students currently in relationships. My findings showed that parental conflict did affect importance placed by

respondent on being in a relationship while in college. Respondents growing up in households with more parental conflict were more likely to desire to be in a relationship while in college than their counterparts were. This finding suggested that respondents evaluated their own relationships based on the same risk benefit considerations that were applied to establishing strong relationships with their parents. (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) Given that witnessing more conflict results in less importance placed on being in a relationship, the research suggests respondents use their parent's relationship as an example or template for their own relationships. If a respondent experienced a great deal of conflict growing up, then they may have more negative views of being in a relationship, and therefore place less importance on being in one in college.

In addition to this important finding between conflict and the importance of being in a relationship, the highest level of education obtained by the respondent's mother also had a significant influence on the importance a respondent placed on being in a relationship in college. Mothers who obtain higher levels of education may be more independent in terms of financial stability, self-esteem, and social status than mothers who obtain lower levels of education. These women may raise daughters who are less likely to conform to traditional gender roles. (Kiecolt & Acock, 1988) Without strict adherence to the traditional gender roles, these women may make better partners in today's society, and therefore, achieve greater relationship success.

Respondent's relationship status was also found to influence the level of importance a respondent placed on being in a relationship. If a respondent has chosen to engage in an exclusive relationship, they have selected their relationship as a connection with another that they want to spend time with and commit to over the life course. It is logically consistent that relationship status would influence the importance placed upon relationships. Those who see

relationships as valuable, and as an addition to their own life, will indeed view being in a relationship in college as important.

In order to fully examine the influence of family experience on academic success, my fourth hypothesis examined the relationship respondents developed with their parents and academic success. This relationship was partially supported in the analysis. While respondent's relationship with their father was not found to be significant, the relationship with a respondent's mother was significant until the control variables were introduced. This result showed that this relationship is dependent upon other factors. There were other variables that could better explain the academic success achieved by a respondent. Although not significant, age and gender may be strong predictors for academic success. Future research should evaluate each control variable independently to examine its influence on its own and to reduce the possible bias of having highly correlated independent variables. For instance, acclimation to the rigorous college academic expectations may increase as one gets older and as one has more experience with college courses.

Although the relationship between respondent's relationship with their mother and academic success was reduced to non-significance with the inclusion of the control variables, it was an interesting finding because the relationship did not operate the same as with father's relationship with the respondent. As explained by previous literature regarding divorce, findings showed that children spend less time with their fathers after a divorce occurs (Cooney, 1994). The decrease in time spent with fathers may also result in less support, and less time focused on schoolwork on the part of fathers. However, given that mothers are the primary care givers, with the most access to the child, the relationship developed between a respondent and their mother is more influential on the academic success that a respondent achieves.

However, this relationship, or the lack thereof given the control variables, may be the result of respondents with newfound independence outside of their families' homes. College is often an experience of developing independence for many as they leave home. Individuals' worldviews are expanded, and students' lives take place beyond the confines of their homes. Therefore, respondents may frame their world in terms of their own experiences and successes as a young adult and depend less on the context provided to them by their families.

Father's education was also found to have a significant effect on the amount of importance respondents placed on being in a relationship. Yet, mother's education did not have the same influence. This could be related to a difference in the influence each parent has on their children based on their gender. Further research should examine this relationship more extensively. An analysis separated by gender should be conducted to understand the role father's education has on male and female respondents separately.

My final hypothesis examined the relationship between a respondent's relationship with their parents and their own relationship success. I expected that those respondents who had developed relationships that were more positive with their parents would exhibit more relationship success than respondents with poorer relationships with their parents. I did not support this hypothesis. As discussed earlier, the scope of the relationship success scale was limited. Due to this limitation, given mandatory reporting requirements, I could not ask about the conflict experienced in their current relationships. However, it would be important to draw upon these factors in future research, to determine whether respondent's relationships are modelled after the conflict level exhibited by their parents. In order to determine if there was a gender effect, I ran the analysis for men and women separately. For men, those who had a better relationship with their mom were significantly more likely to have more relationship success

than those who did not have a good relationship with their mom ( $p < .05$ ). There was no significant effect for men and their relationship with their father. There was not significant effect for women. The analysis showed that it did not matter what type of relationship women had with their fathers, it did not influence their relationship success. An explanation based in Social Exchange Theory would suggest that a more positive relationship for male respondents with their mothers represents a positive experience the respondent has had with a woman throughout their life. Therefore, this rewarding relationship will increase the likelihood of a male being in a successful romantic relationship.

This relationship may not exist in the manner in which I hypothesized given the additional support respondents find throughout their own college experience. As respondents come to college, the experience of leaving home and beginning in a new environment forces students to become more independent. This change also requires individuals to develop support systems outside of their previously established channels. Whether that support is established through friendships or intimate relationships, the relationship developed with their parents becomes less prominent. This decrease in relationship may result from time constraints or other structural components rather than from conflict that would decrease the quality of the relationship between the parent and child. Individuals in college may simply rank their relationships in a different order of importance than they would if they were living at home and this could lead to the relationship with parents having less of an impact on the individual's own relationship success.

Class rank also remained significant, as in the previous regression regarding relationship success. Class rank, and subsequent age of the respondent, allotted more time for the respondent to experience being in a relationship. In addition to increased experiences, maturity may also

increase with age. Older respondents have more time to experience both positive and negative relationships, and develop healthier relationship patterns.

Given the size limitations of the relationship success scale, I analyzed a variable that could be applicable to all respondents in the sample. The introduction of the variable evaluating the importance placed on being in a relationship in college provided a better explanation of the samples' views on relationships. The hypothesis focusing on the relationship between parental relationships with the respondent and desire to be in a relationship while in college was not supported by the data. In order to determine if there was a gender effect, I ran the analysis for men and women separately. Although relationship with mother and father was not significant for men, the relationship with father was nearly significant for women. Women who had a better relationship with their fathers placed more importance on being in a relationship while in college as compared to those women who did not have a good relationship with their fathers. A Social Exchange explanation for this is that women, who are close to their fathers, have had a rewarding experience with a man. Consequently, it increases the likelihood that a woman will think it is more important to be in a relationship while in college since she has experienced a rewarding relationship with her father. Another interesting finding was that the highest level of education obtained by the respondent's mother had a significant influence on relationship views. Mothers who obtain higher level of education obtain higher levels of financial and social stability than those who obtain lower levels of education. Therefore, they may instill similar lessons for their daughters, who may not conform to traditional gender roles. This break from traditional roles may allow these women to be better partners, and achieve more relationship success.

Surprisingly, mother's education influenced the amount of importance respondents placed on being in a relationship but father's education did not. While fathers have consistently

achieved higher levels of education, the recent increase of higher levels of education obtained by mothers could explain this. In addition, perhaps educated mothers are more concerned about their children being in relationships because concern for children is more characteristic of female traditional gender role behavior.

Relationship status was also an important predictor of the importance respondents placed on being in a relationship. Given the choice to engage in an exclusive relationship, this relationship is explanatory of the respondent's life choices. Those who have prioritized being in a relationship as an important component in their lives will therefore place more importance on being in a relationship, given the fulfillment it provides them.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

#### Limitations

The first limitation of my research was that data came from students at one university. This limited sample decreased the ability to generalize the results to a larger population since students in a large public university in the northeast may be different from those at smaller universities and in different areas in the country. In addition, recruitment for this research occurred from only a few classes offered at this university. If more students were offered the opportunity to participate in the survey, results may have shown more variability. Data gathered at only one university also limited the applicability of academic success measures since the measure is based on GPA and studying. GPA is measured in different ways and varies by institution. These findings may not be representative of the entire population, given that academic achievement may be an artifact of the specific university rather than familial impact.

Limitations also arose with the creation and approval of my survey questionnaire. The topics reviewed in this research are those that can be very sensitive for many people. In addition, in order to gain approval to distribute the survey, the questionnaire was restricted to areas that did not force respondents to disclose any type of abuse they may have experienced or are currently experiencing in their home lives or with their partner. These restrictions severely limited the kinds of data that could be gathered. Without evaluation of the conflict respondents experienced with their parents including spanking and other forms of discipline, it is difficult to understand to the fullest extent the relationship that was established between respondents and their parents. In addition, without being able to compare similarities between parental marital

conflict and conflict exhibited in respondent's current relationships, the full extent of the impact conflict had on the individual respondent cannot be determined.

### **Suggestions for future research**

In order to examine the relationship between parental marital conflict and academic and social successes for young adults more fully, future research should establish a protocol that can be approved by the Human Subjects Review Board, so questions about child discipline and interpersonal relationship conflict can be included in a survey. Exploring how conflict is interpreted and integrated into respondents' relationships, allows researchers to access a more accurate depiction of the influence parents have on their children. Future research should also evaluate relationship success more broadly. Questions included on the survey should include not only relationship status, but also relationship views. The broadening of this topic will allow data to include those who are not currently in a relationship, as well as evaluate respondents reasoning for choosing not to be in a relationship, if applicable.

In addition, research should examine each control variable used in this study individually. These controls were all highly associated with one another, and separating them will present a better understanding of nuances amongst the sample population. By examining differences based on gender, for example, research can establish whether academic success patterns differ by sex rather than just by class.

Future research should expand the sample population to include more than just one university. By including multiple universities, the results will be more applicable to the general population. Using multiple universities will also diminish the relationship between one specific school and indicators of academic success.

**Contributions to the field**

My research contributed to the greater understanding of how conflict within the home affected well-being later among emerging adults. This research helped to expand the exploration into divorce, by exploring parental conflict experienced by for all students in addition to the marital status of their parents. While previous research established that divorce can be traumatic for children, little is known of the impact caused by the witnessing of parental conflict, regardless of whether the family remained intact. While a number of my hypotheses were not supported, one key hypothesis of my research was supported. I found that respondents who experience parental conflict developed relationships that were more problematic with their parents. This finding helped to show the influence of one's experiences within their families. As college students navigate this unique phase of life containing budding independence, this research helped to establish the influence witnessed conflict has on relationships with others. While building their own independence, it is important to understand how these individuals analyze their relationships, and the impact their childhood has had on successes as college students.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Items in the Model.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender of Respondent	458	0.00	1.00	0.6114	0.48798
Class Rank of Respondent	458	1.00	5.00	2.28	1.244
Religiosity	457	1.00	5.00	2.5886	1.25183
Mother's Highest Level of Education	448	1.00	8.00	4.34	1.586
Father's Education	444	1.00	8.00	4.39	1.747
Parent's Marital Status: Married (omitted)	458	0.00	1.00	0.6987	0.45933
Parent's Marital Status: Divorced	458	0.00	1.00	0.2271	0.41940
Parent's Marital Status: Other	458	0.00	1.00	0.0742	0.26244
Relationship with Mother Scale	447	9.00	48.00	33.6443	6.92439
Relationship with Father Scale	443	9.00	46.00	29.4063	7.90396
Relationship Success Scale	454	0.00	13.00	2.6035	3.82585
Academic Success Scale	454	1.30	5.00	3.8066	0.81911
Parent's Marital Conflict	449	0.00	8.00	1.2428	1.43345
Importance Placed on Being in a Relationship	452	1.00	5.00	2.8031	1.13743
Valid N (listwise)	414				

**Table 2. Regression of the Independent and Control Variables on Relationship with Respondent's Mother.**

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	Beta		B	Beta	
Parent's Marital Conflict	-0.542	-0.114	*	-0.529	-0.112	*
Parent's Marital Status: Divorced	-1.026	-0.063		-1.003	-0.062	
Parent's Marital Status: Other	-0.659	-0.023		-0.921	-0.032	
Gender of Respondent				2.880	0.207	***
Class Rank of Respondent				0.198	0.036	
Mother's Highest Level of Education				0.534	0.125	
Father's Highest Level of Education				-0.148	-0.038	
Religiosity of Respondent				0.545	0.100	*
Constant	34.99			29.215		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.022			0.091		
Total N	422					

\* Significant at the .05 Level

\*\* Significant at the .01 Level

\*\*\* Significant at the .001 Level

**Table 3. Regression of the Independent and Control Variables on Relationship with Respondent's Father.**

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	Beta		B	Beta	
Parent's Marital Conflict	-1.382	-0.253	***	-1.375	-0.252	***
Parent's Marital Status: Divorced	-2.830	-0.154	***	-2.660	-0.145	**
Parent's Marital Status: Other	-5.916	-0.171	***	-6.147	-0.178	***
Gender of Respondent				0.322	0.020	
Class Rank of Respondent				-0.244	-0.039	
Mother's Highest Level of Education				-0.191	-0.039	
Father's Highest Level of Education				0.132	0.030	
Religiosity of Respondent				0.287	0.047	
Constant	32.342			32.154		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.136			0.141		
Total N	418					

\* Significant at the .05 level

\*\* Significant at the .01 level

\*\*\* Significant at the .001 level

Table 4. Regression of the Independent and Control Variables on Academic Success.

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3		
	B	Beta		B	Beta		B	Beta	
Parent's Marital Conflict	0.006	0.010		0.009	0.016		0.017	0.029	
Parent's Marital Status: Divorced	-0.226	-0.116	*	-0.220	-0.113	*	-0.202	-0.104	*
Parent's Marital Status: Other	-0.202	-0.056		-0.213	-0.059		-0.208	-0.057	
Respondent's Relationship with Father				-0.003	-0.028		-0.003	-0.029	
Respondent's Relationship with				0.014	0.113	*	0.011	0.091	
Gender of Respondent							0.146	0.088	
Class Rank of Respondent							-0.024	-0.036	
Mother's Highest Level of Education							-0.017	-0.034	
Father's Highest Level of Education							0.061	0.130	*
Religiosity of Respondent							0.043	0.065	
Constant	3.883			3.506			3.244		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.014			0.026			0.050		
Total N	413								

\* Significant at the .05 level

\*\* Significant at the .01 level

\*\*\* Significant at the .001 level

Table 5. Regression of the Independent and Control Variables on Relationship Success.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		
	B	Beta	B	Beta	B	Beta	
Parent's Marital Conflict	-0.038	-0.033	-0.009	-0.008	0.00008	0.000	
Parent's Marital Status: Divorced	0.518	0.108	0.658	0.138	0.410	0.086	
Parent's Marital Status: Other	0.278	0.033	0.475	0.057	0.535	0.064	
Respondent's Relationship with Father			0.025	0.097	0.019	0.074	
Respondent's Relationship with Mother			0.012	0.042	0.004	0.014	
Gender of Respondent					-0.524	-0.131	
Class Rank of Respondent					0.455	0.279	**
Mother's Highest Level of Education					0.054	0.040	
Father's Highest Level of Education					0.059	0.047	
Religiosity of Respondent					0.073	0.042	
Constant	7.584		6.348		5.467		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.010		0.021		0.019		
Total N	142						

\* Significant at the .05 level

\*\* Significant at the .01 level

\*\*\* Significant at the .001 level

**Table 6. Regression of the Independent and Control Variables on Importance of Being in a Relationship while in College.**

	Model 1		Model 2		
	B	Beta	B	Beta	
Parent's Marital Conflict	-0.075	-0.096	-0.085	-0.108	+
Parent's Marital Status: Divorced	-0.212	-0.080	-0.202	-0.076	
Parent's Marital Status: Other	-0.184	-0.037	-0.122	-0.025	
Respondent's Relationship with Father	0.008	0.054	0.009	0.065	
Respondent's Relationship with Mother	0.005	0.031	0.000	0.002	
Gender of Respondent			0.049	0.022	
Class Rank of Respondent			-0.012	-0.013	
Mother's Highest Level of Education			0.091	0.130	*
Father's Highest Level of Education			-0.053	-0.083	
Religiosity of Respondent			0.014	0.016	
Respondent's Relationship Status			0.261	0.111	*
Constant	2.534		2.365		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.033		0.057		
Total N	414				

\* Significant at the .05 level

\*\* Significant at the .01 level

\*\*\* Significant at the .001 level

**Table 7. Regression of Respondent's Relationship with Parents and Control Variables on Academic Success.**

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	Beta		B	Beta	
Respondent's Relationship with Mother	0.014	0.006	*	0.011	0.091	
Respondent's Relationship with Father	-0.003	-0.028		-0.003	-0.029	
Gender of Respondent				0.146	0.088	
Class Rank of Respondent				-0.024	-0.036	
Mother's Highest Level of Education				-0.017	-0.034	
Father's Highest Level of Education				0.061	0.130	*
Religiosity of Respondent				0.043	0.065	
Constant	3.506			3.244		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.026			0.050		
Total N	417					

\* Significant at the .05 level

\*\* Significant at the .01 level

\*\*\* Significant at the .001 level

**Table 8. Regression of Respondent's Relationship with Parents and Control Variables on Respondent's Relationship Success.**

	Model 1		Model 2		
	B	Beta	B	Beta	
Respondent's Relationship with Mother	0.012	0.026	0.004	0.014	
Respondent's Relationship with Father	0.025	0.097	0.019	0.074	
Gender of Respondent			-0.564	-0.131	
Class Rank of Respondent			0.455	0.279	**
Mother's Highest Level of Education			0.054	0.040	
Father's Highest Level of Education			0.059	0.047	
Constant	6.348		5.467		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.021		0.119		
Total N	143				

\* Significant at the .05 level

\*\* Significant at the .01 level

\*\*\* Significant at the .001 level

**Table 9. Regression of Respondent's Relationship with Parents and Control Variables on Importance of Being in a Relationship during College.**

	Model 1		Model 2		
	B	Beta	B	Beta	
Respondent's Relationship with Mother	0.005	0.031	0.000	0.002	
Respondent's Relationship with Father	0.008	0.054	0.009	0.065	
Gender of Respondent			0.049	0.022	
Class Rank of Respondent			-0.012	-0.013	
Mother's Highest Level of Education			0.091	0.130	*
Father's Highest Level of Education			-0.053	-0.083	
Religiosity of Respondent			0.014	0.016	
Respondent's Relationship Status			0.261	0.111	*
Constant	2.534		2.365		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.033		0.057		
Total N	418				

\* Significant at the .05 level

\*\* Significant at the .01 level

\*\*\* Significant at the .001 level

## Appendix A

### Internal Review Board Approval

#### EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

**Date:** February 16, 2016

**From:** Julie James, IRB Analyst

**To:** Jenna Schwack

Type of Submission:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Influence of experiencing family conflict on academic and relationship success
Principal Investigator:	Jenna Schwack
Study ID:	STUDY00003687
Submission ID:	STUDY00003687
Funding:	Not Applicable
Documents Approved:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRP-591 (3), Category: IRB Protocol</li> <li>• Jenna_Schwack Research Instrument (2), Category: Data Collection Instrument</li> </ul>

The Office for Research Protections determined that the proposed activity, as described in the above-referenced submission, does not require formal IRB review because the research met the criteria for exempt research according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations.

Continuing Progress Reports are **not** required for exempt research. Record of this research determined to be exempt will be maintained for five years from the date of this notification. If your research will continue beyond five years, please contact the Office for Research Protections closer to the determination end date.

Changes to exempt research only need to be submitted to the Office for Research Protections in limited circumstances described in the below-referenced Investigator Manual. If changes are being considered and there are questions about whether IRB review is needed, please contact the Office for Research Protections.

Penn State researchers are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual ([HRP-103](#)), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (<http://irb.psu.edu>).

## Appendix B

### Recruitment Script

Title of Project: Influence of experiencing family conflict on academic and relationship success

Principal Investigator: Jenna Schwack ([jos5706@psu.edu](mailto:jos5706@psu.edu))

IRB Study Number: STUDY00003687

Advisor: Dr. Laurie K. Scheuble  
Department of Sociology and Criminology  
The Pennsylvania State University  
814-865-6949  
lks12@psu.edu

The purpose of this study, "Influence of experiencing family conflict on academic and relationship success," is to examine how your relationships with your parent(s) or guardian(s) affect your academic progress and your relationships with other people. As a Penn State student, your feedback on these issues is critical.

#### **DEADLINE TO COMPLETE SURVEY: March 3, 2016**

Before you decide to take part in the study, there are several things you should know:

1. You must be 18 or older to participate in this research. If you are 17 years of age or younger, you may complete the alternate assignment in order to earn the extra credit provided by your instructor. The description of the assignment is in #11 below.
2. Your participation is completely voluntary. You will not be penalized if you do not complete the survey.
3. The study consists of about 70 short questions and should take you about 20 minutes to complete. It is a standard web-based survey in that you answer a series of questions and click to continue to go to the next page until you reach the end.
4. You are allowed to skip questions if you don't want to provide a response.
5. You may decline participation by closing the survey at any time, and understand that your data will not be saved unless you click "submit" at the very end of the survey.
6. Your responses are confidential and all attempts will be made to protect your information.
7. The risk of harm in this study is minimal, but if you experience distress you can contact the University's Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) office at [814-863-0395](tel:814-863-0395) or <https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/counseling/>

8. Your participation implies your voluntary consent for your responses to be used in the research.

9. The data you provide for this research will be stored for future undetermined research. No identifying information will be included with the data. The data set will only contain your responses to the questions and NOT your email address, the class you are enrolled in or any other identifying information.

10. In exchange for your time, at the end of the survey, you will receive extra credit in the class that you were recruited from. At the end of the survey you will be redirected to another Qualtrics survey that will ask for your email address and class that you were recruited from. This is so no identifiers are attached to the data.

11. *Professor , agreed to provide \_\_\_ extra credit points in return for you taking the survey.* You will earn \_\_\_ extra credit points on the next exam for completing the survey. If you decide not to participate in the survey, you will have another extra credit option. The assignment consists of applying **two** concepts/statistics/theories from your class to an event covered in the news. The event must have occurred after January 1, 2016. You must include the citation for the news event you discuss. For ideas for news events, check any news source (CNN, Washington Post, New York Times, Google News etc.) If you wish to complete the alternative assignment please contact me at: [jos5706@psu.edu](mailto:jos5706@psu.edu)

**SURVEY LINK:** [https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_eCDI1omNSBpvz3D](https://pennstate.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_eCDI1omNSBpvz3D)

## Appendix C

### Marital Conflict Survey Questionnaire

#### Marital Conflict Survey

Q1 I want to start by asking a few questions about you.

Q2 Please indicate whether you are a

- Male (1)
- Female (2)

Q3 What year are you in college?

- 1st year (1)
- 2nd year (2)
- 3rd year (3)
- 4th year (4)
- 5th year or longer (5)

Q4 What is your current cumulative GPA. If you are a freshman, please use your high school GPA. (For example: 3.6)

Q5 How much time do you spend per week on your schoolwork? Include, time spent in classes and time spent doing homework?

- less than 4 hours per week (1)
- 5-8 hours per week (2)
- 9-12 per week (3)
- over 12 hours a week (4)

Q6 How many majors do you have? If you have not yet declared a major, enter 0.

Q7 How many minors do you have? If you have not yet declared a minor, enter 0.

Q8 Have you ever made the Dean's list (achieved a GPA of 3.5 or higher) in college?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I am a first semester student (3)

Q65 How important is your religion to you?

- Extremely important (1)
- Very important (2)
- Moderately important (3)
- Slightly important (4)
- Not at all important (5)

Q58 Which of the following options is your most important goal post graduation?

- Job (1)
- Internship (2)
- Graduate Education (Medical School, Law School, Graduate School) (3)
- Military (4)
- Get married (5)
- Start a family (6)
- Other (please explain) (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q9 The next questions ask you about your family.

Q10 How many brothers or sisters do you have?

Q11 How many older brothers do you have?

Q12 How many younger brothers do you have?

Q13 How many older sisters do you have?

Q14 How many younger sisters do you have?

Q15 What is the highest level of education your mother has completed?

- Less than high school (1)
- High school or GED (2)
- Some college (3)
- 2 year college (associate) (4)
- 4 year college (BA/BS) (5)
- Master's degree (6)
- Doctoral degree (7)
- Professional degree (MD/JD) (8)
- I don't know (9)

Q16 What is the highest level of education your father has completed?

- Less than high school (1)
- High school or GED (2)
- Some college (3)
- 2 year college (associate) (4)
- 4 year college (BA/BS) (5)
- Master's degree (6)
- Doctoral degree (7)
- Professional degree (MD/JD) (8)
- I don't know (9)

Q17 What is your parents current marital status?

- Married (1)
- Divorced (2)
- Separated (3)
- Never married (4)
- Other (please explain) (5) \_\_\_\_\_

Q18 If your parents were divorced, who did you live with?

- Mother (1)
- Father (2)
- I spent split time between both parents (3)
- Other (please explain) (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Q19 Where you affected financially by the divorce?

- My family had fewer resources (1)
- My family had more resources (2)
- The divorce had no effect on my family's financial situation (3)
- I don't know (4)

Q20 Did your parents get remarried to other people?

- My mother got remarried but my father is single (1)
- My father got remarried but my mother is single (2)
- Both of my parents got remarried (3)
- Neither of my parents got remarried (4)

Q21 If your parents got remarried, did their new spouse have children?

- Yes, my stepmother already had children (1)
- Yes, my stepfather already had children (2)
- Both my stepmother and my stepfather had children previously (3)
- Neither my stepmother nor my stepfather had children previously (4)

Q22 Did your parents have children with their new partner?

- Yes, my father had children with his wife (1)
- Yes, my mother had children with her husband (2)
- Both of my parents had more children after getting divorced (3)
- Neither of my parents had more children after getting divorced (4)

Q23 Think back to your relationship with your parents before attending college. How much do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
I enjoyed spending time with my mother (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I fought or argued with my mother frequently (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoyed spending time with my father (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I fought or argued with my father frequently (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There was a feeling of togetherness in our family (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q25 How often do you and your mother participate in the following activities together?

	Never (1)	Rarely (12)	Sometimes (13)	Often (14)	All of the Time (15)
Talk about everyday events in your life (1)	<input type="radio"/>				
Talk about important life issues (2)	<input type="radio"/>				
Talk about news/politics/world events (3)	<input type="radio"/>				
Talk about personal issues such as relationships (4)	<input type="radio"/>				
Talk about stressful events such as poor performance on a test (5)	<input type="radio"/>				

Q26 How often do you and your father participate in the following activities together?

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	All of the Time (5)
Talk about your everyday events in your life (1)	<input type="radio"/>				
Talk about important life issues (2)	<input type="radio"/>				
Talk about news/politics/world events (3)	<input type="radio"/>				
Talk about personal issues such as relationships (4)	<input type="radio"/>				
Talk about stressful events such as poor performance on a test (5)	<input type="radio"/>				

Q27 Now think about your relationship with your parents while attending college.

Q28 On average, how often do you talk to your mother?

- Multiple times a day (1)
- Daily (2)
- Several times a week (3)
- About once a week (4)
- Several times a month (5)
- Once a month (6)
- Less than once a month (7)

Q29 Which mode of communication do you use most often to communicate with your mother?

- Phone call (1)
- Text message (2)
- Email (3)
- Video conversation such as Skype or Facetime (4)
- Face-to-face conversation (5)
- Other (please explain) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q30 Which answer best reflects how often you see your mother in person?

- Never (1)
- Once or twice a year (2)
- Once or twice ever 6 months (3)
- Once or twice a month (4)
- Once or twice a week (5)
- Every day (6)

Q31 On average, how often do you talk to your father?

- Multiple times a day (1)
- Daily (2)
- Several times a week (3)
- About once a week (4)
- Several times a month (5)
- Once a month (6)
- Less than once a month (7)

Q32 Which mode of communication do you use most often to interact with your father?

- Phone call (1)
- Text message (2)
- Email (3)
- Video conversation such as Skype or Facetime (4)
- Face-to-face conversation (5)
- Other (please explain) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q33 Which answer best reflects how often you see your father in person?

- Everyday (1)
- Once or twice a week (2)
- Once or twice a month (3)
- Once or twice every 6 months (4)
- Once or twice a year (5)
- Never (6)

Q35 When I have a bad day my first impulse is to talk to my (select only one):

- Mother (1)
- Father (2)
- Boyfriend/Girlfriend (dating partner) (3)
- Best friend (4)
- Brother (5)
- Sister (6)
- Other (please explain) (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q36 When I have a good day, my first impulse is to talk to my (select only one):

- Mother (1)
- Father (2)
- Boyfriend/Girlfriend (dating partner) (3)
- Best friend (4)
- Brother (5)
- Sister (6)
- Other (please explain) (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q37 Who pays for the majority of your expenses while you are in college? (select only one)

- Mother (1)
- Stepmother (2)
- Father (3)
- Stepfather (4)
- Mother and Father together (5)
- Mother and Stepfather (6)
- Father and Stepmother (7)
- Family member (8)
- Yourself (9)
- Other (please explain) (10) \_\_\_\_\_

Q38 In addition to your significant other if you have one, who do you feel the most comfortable with sharing information about romantic/sexual experiences? (select only one)

- Mother (1)
- Father (2)
- Best friend (3)
- Brother (4)
- Sister (5)
- Other (please explain) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q39 In addition to your significant other if you have one, who would be the first person you'd call if you failed an exam/class? (select only one)

- Mother (1)
- Father (2)
- Best friend (3)
- Brother (4)
- Sister (5)
- Other (please explain) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q41 Who is listed as the emergency contact in your phone? (select only one)

- Mother (1)
- Father (2)
- Boyfriend/Girlfriend (dating partner) (3)
- Best friend (4)
- Brother (5)
- Sister (6)
- Other (please explain) (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q40 People in relationships often have disagreements. Did your parents do any of the following when they were interacting?

	Yes (1)	No (2)
Yelling (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Threw something at the other parent (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pushed, grabbed, or shoved (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Slapped (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kicked, bit, or hit with fist (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Choked or strangled (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Beat up (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Threatened with a weapon (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q64 I felt like my parent's arguments were too extreme

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q65 I felt like my parent's fighting lessened after they got divorced

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)
- My parents are still married (6)

Q43 Now, I am going to ask you a series of questions about romantic relationships.

Q44 Are you currently in a exclusive relationship?

- Yes, I am in an exclusive relationship (1)
- Yes, I am engaged (2)
- Yes, I am married (3)
- No (4)

Q45 How long have you been with your current partner?

- Less than 6 months (1)
- 7 months to 1 year (2)
- Between 1.5 and 2 years (3)
- Between 2.5 and 3 years (4)
- More than 3 years (5)

Q46 Where did you meet your current partner?

- At Penn State (1)
- Home (2)
- Other (please explain) (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Q47 Do you see the potential for marriage with your current partner?

- Yes, but not in the near future (1)
- Yes, in the near future (2)
- Yes, I am already engaged (3)
- I am already married (4)
- No (5)

Q48 How often have you seen your partner in the last month?

- Daily (1)
- On multiple occasions per week (2)
- On multiple occasions per month (3)
- Once per month or less (4)

Q49 Has your current partner met your parents/guardians?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q50 What do you, personally, believe is the first step to finding a relationship in college?

- Going on a traditional dinner date (i.e. dinner date) (1)
- Meeting people at parties/bars (2)
- Meeting people on campus (3)
- Meeting people in class (4)
- Hooking up with people (5)
- Introduced by a friend (6)
- Meeting people on a dating site (7)
- Other (please explain) (8) \_\_\_\_\_

Q51 For you, which situation is most likely to lead to a long-term relationship? (Select only one)

- Meeting someone in class and going on a date (1)
- Meeting someone at a party/club/frat/bar (2)
- Hooking up with someone at a frat and then leaving together (3)
- Being introduced by a friend (4)
- Meeting someone at a religious function (5)
- Meeting someone on a dating site (6)
- Other (please explain) (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Q52 When you started college how important was it for you to start a committed relationship prior to graduation?

- Extremely important (1)
- Somewhat Important (2)
- Neither Important nor Unimportant (3)
- Somewhat Unimportant (4)
- Extremely Unimportant (5)

Q53 Which opinion most closely matches your opinion on relationships during college?

- I am not interested in forming relationships, college is time for fun (1)
- I do not need to be in a relationship during college (2)
- College is a time to experiment with relationships and learn what you want in a partner (3)
- I want to find my soul mate during college (4)
- I don't mind either way (5)

Q54 In the past 4 years, how many relationships have you had that have lasted longer than 3 months?

- 0 (1)
- 1 (2)
- 2-3 (3)
- 4-5 (4)
- 6-10 (5)
- 11+ (6)
- I don't know (7)

Q55 Did you have one or more committed relationships during high school?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I don't know (3)

Q56 When you came to college were you in a committed relationship?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- I don't know (3)

Q57 Are your friends in college in committed relationships?

- Most or all of my friends are in committed relationships (1)
- Some of my friends are in committed relationships (2)
- A few of my friends are in committed relationships (3)
- None of my friends are in committed relationships (4)

Q59 I consider my parent's relationship status to be a positive role model for my relationships.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q60 I consider my friends' relationship statuses to be positive role models for my own relationships.

- Strongly Agree (1)
- Agree (2)
- Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)
- Disagree (4)
- Strongly Disagree (5)

Q61 Please indicate the ideal age that you would like to get married

Q62 What characteristics of a partner (potential or current) are most important to you?

- Physical attractiveness (1)
- Personality or sense of humor (2)
- Similar interests (3)
- Spontaneity (4)
- Willingness to be sexually involved (5)
- Other (please explain) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q63 What do you see as the primary purpose of being in a relationship?

- Companionship (1)
- Fun (2)
- Emotional intimacy (3)
- Sexual involvement (4)
- Planning for the future (5)
- Other (please explain) (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Q66 Thank you for participating in this survey. If you are seeking extra credit for your participation, you will be directed to a new page after you hit the next button. As a reminder, your email address and class information is in no way connected to your survey responses.

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## ACADEMIC VITA

**Jenna Schwack**

Jos5706@psu.edu

### Education:

Pennsylvania State University BA Sociology/ Criminology Major with Honors <i>Date of Graduation: May 2016</i>	University Park, PA 2013 – Present
Muhlenberg College	Allentown, PA 2012 – 2013

### Experience:

**Community Service Engagement Intern** Fall 2015- Present

**Pennsylvania State University Hillel**, University Park, PA

- Help maintain Hillel's newest community service organization
- Establish organization's sustainability plan
- Work with organization's executive board

**Teaching Assistant** Fall 2015 Semester

**Criminology Department**, University Park, PA

- Teaching Assistant for undergraduate course titled Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
- Responsible for taking daily attendance and monitoring class participation
- Grade daily quizzes and writing assignments
- Organize activism groups and monitor group progress

**Teaching Assistant** Fall 2014 Semester

**Sociology Department**, University Park, PA

- Teaching Assistant for undergraduate course titled Sociology of the Family
- Responsible for taking daily attendance and monitor class participation
- Proctor all course exams
- Grade assignments and final papers
- Tutor students

**Vice President of Programs** Fall 2013- Spring 2014

**Pennsylvania State University Hillel**, University Park, PA

- Manage committee of eight program committee members
- Work with executive board overseeing Hillel general body
- Organize religious and secular events for Jewish student population

**Research Intern**

Summer 2013

**Criminology Department**, University Park, PA

- Travel to local courts to obtain files
- Code all relevant data
- Evaluate trends and patterns in observed cases

**Awards:**

Virginia and Andrew Craig Trustee Scholarship	2014 – Present
Phi Sigma Delta Educational Foundation Scholarship	2014 – Present
Chaiken Trustee Scholarship	2013 – Present
Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society	2013 – Present
College of Liberal Arts Scholarship	2013 – 2014
Klein Smith Scholarship	2013 – 2014