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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Sharon Catherine Risch entitled "Role of the Father-Adolescent Relationship in Shaping Adolescents' Attitudes Toward Divorce." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

Deborah P. Welsh, Major Professor

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ROLE OF THE FATHER-ADOLESCENT RELATIONSHIP IN SHAPING ADOLESCENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD DIVORCE

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Sharon Catherine Risch
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, Mary Ellen Risch,

and the rest of the Risch family for always believing in me, supporting me, and encouraging me to reach higher in order to achieve my goals. Without you, this paper would have not been possible.

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ABSTRACT

The closeness of father-adolescent relationships in eleventh grade was examined as a predictor of adolescents' attitudes toward divorce one-year after high school. The sample of 514 European and African American adolescents is drawn from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context (MADIC) study. Measures included youth reports of the quality of father-adolescent relationships in the 11th grade and adolescents' attitudes toward divorce at age 19. Boys who shared close relationships with their biological custodial fathers, biological noncustodial fathers, and stepfathers felt less likely to divorce in their future marital relationships. No significant findings were observed for girls. Results suggest that adolescent boys who feel close to their fathers—regardless of father type —feel less likely to divorce in the future.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A great deal of support exists for the intergenerational transmission of divorce. Although this connection is influenced by many factors, attitudes are one vehicle by which this phenomenon occurs. For example, it is well known that adolescents who have experienced their parents' divorce tend to have more positive attitudes toward divorce (Amato & Booth, 1991; Greenberg & Nay, 1982). Evidence also suggests that attitudes toward divorce longitudinally predict marital quality. People who hold more positive attitudes toward divorce tend to experience a decline in marital quality and people who hold less positive attitudes toward divorce tend to experience improvements in marital quality over time (Amato & Rogers, 1999). Given that about 50% of first marriages are expected to end in divorce (Cherlin, 1992), investigating factors that contribute to adolescents' attitude formation about marital relationships is timely and important.

Although factors in parents' martial quality and status have been associated with adolescents' attitudes toward divorce, parent-child relationships have not been explored in this area. Most research on parent-child relationships focuses on the mother-child dyad (Shulman & Seiffge-Krenke, 1997). Until recently, research on fathers and adolescents has been scant. No literature to date has examined how closeness in father-adolescent relationships, namely the extent to which adolescents identify with, respect, and feel emotionally close to their fathers influences adolescents' attitudes toward divorce. Furthermore, we know little information about how nontraditional father types (e.g., noncustodial fathers and stepfathers) influence adolescents' development (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000), especially their beliefs about

divorce. This is true for adolescents' relationships with stepfathers and biological fathers with whom they do not live. Additional research is needed to examine how the quality of father–adolescent relationships contributes to adolescents' ideas about marriage and divorce.

Much of the literature on father-adolescent relationships and attitudes toward divorce is limited to cross-sectional studies that fail to use ethnically diverse samples. Longitudinal research is needed to better understand attitude formation. Additionally, different cultures have varied family structures and values that may influence how adolescents view marital relationships. For instance, African Americans have higher divorce rates than European Americans (Taylor, Chatters, Tucker, & Lewis, 1990), which may lead them to have more positive or negative attitudes toward divorce. A major goal of the present study, therefore, is to compare the influence of fathers, namely biological custodial fathers, biological noncustodial fathers, and stepfathers, on adolescents' attitudes toward divorce over time in an ethnically diverse sample of primarily European and African Americans.

Literature Review

According to Erickson's theory of psychosocial development (1968), a major task of late adolescence is working through intimacy issues. Middle to late adolescence is an important developmental time because adolescents are transitioning to adulthood and are beginning to establish long-term romantic relationships. During this time period as well, parents continue to be influential. Both the theoretical and empirical literature suggests that parent-child relationships should be related to adolescents' attitudes toward marital relationships. At least two theories explain how relationships with parents may shape

children's conceptions about intimacy. First, attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) emphasizes the role of mother-child relationships, and more recently father-child relationships, in developing children's internal working model of relationships. These internal working models may be one mechanism by which attitudes about intimacy are transmitted. Current attachment theorists view parent-child relationships as important not only in childhood, but in adolescence as well (Freeman & Brown, 2001). The link between attachment and intimacy in relationships in adolescence has been supported by research suggesting that securely attached adolescents are able to develop successful and satisfying relationships in adulthood (Moeller & Stattin, 2001).

Second, according to social learning theory, parents transmit ideas about opposite-sex relationships to their children via modeling. Although children may learn about intimacy from other sources such as the media, school, or friends, children's exposure to intimacy in relationships is also modeled by observing their parents and in their relationships with their parents. Children and adolescents observe how their parents relate to them and use this experiential knowledge as part of a foundation for developing intimacy in their own relationships. It seems likely that adolescents who are raised in an environment in which their fathers treat them with warmth, are emotionally available, and provide structure may be better prepared for relationships and intimacy later in life (Gray & Steinberg, 1999).

Fathers also socialize their children to behave and think in particular ways that may later influence their expectations about intimacy and marriage. For instance, fathers who teach their children that divorce is negative are likely to raise adolescents who also view divorce negatively. Adolescents whose fathers are nurturing and involved in their

lives are likely to exhibit behaviors that are warm, supportive, and low in hostility in their romantic relationships over time. In turn, these competent behaviors are positively related to relationship quality in adolescents' romantic relationships (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000).

Noncustodial Fathers and Adolescents' Attitudes Toward Divorce

High rates of divorce, remarriage, and single parenting have created a generation of children who experience family transitions on a regular basis. Because children are likely to reside with their mother in the majority of divorce cases (Montgomery, Anderson, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1992), children must often negotiate maintaining relationships with noncustodial biological fathers. Following divorce, children's relationships with their noncustodial biological fathers are often compromised (Furstenberg & Cherlin, 1991). Adolescents of divorce report feeling less close to their fathers (Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, & Dornbusch, 1993) and tend to view their relationship with their noncustodial fathers less positively than adolescents of nondivorced families (Fine, Moreland, & Schwebel, 1983). Adults who have experienced family transitions report being less positively attached to their fathers and they view their fathers as less caring than adults from nondivorced families (Tayler, Parker, & Roy, 1995).

Although some research has examined adolescents' attitudes toward marriage and divorce following their parents' divorce, few studies if any have examined how the quality of the relationship with a noncustodial father can shape adolescents' attitudes toward divorce. We do know that noncustodial fathers who maintain relationships with their adolescent children can positively influence their adolescents' lives (White &

Gilbreth, 2001). Emotional aspects of the father-child relationship involving attachment and high levels of involvement have beneficial effects including reducing both emotional distress and participation in delinquent behavior (Furstenberg & Harris, 1993). Furthermore, children's well-being is advanced when noncustodial fathers maintain positive relationships, participate in activities, and spend holidays with their children (Clarke-Stewart & Hayward, 1996). Taken together, these findings suggest that adolescents who feel close to their fathers—regardless of their custodial status—are better adjusted and may feel less likely to divorce than adolescents who do not feel close to their fathers.

Stepfathers and Adolescents' Attitudes Toward Divorce

With approximately 75% of men and 66% of women remarrying sometime following a divorce, many adolescents will live with a stepparent at some point in their lives (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994). Adolescents growing up in stepfamilies may share a different kind of relationship with their stepfathers than the ones they share with their biological fathers. This relationship may involve a different set of interpersonal dynamics and living circumstances. Because of they are biologically related, biological fathers may be more invested than stepfathers in their relationships with their children.

At first, many adolescents display intense and sustained resistance to the entry of a stepfather into their lives (Hetherington & Jodl, 1994). These adolescents tend to exhibit noncommunicative behavior such as withdrawal and avoidance. If stepfathers continue to encounter resistance from their stepchildren, they tend to become distant, feel less closeness, and exhibit less warmth toward their stepchildren (Hetherington & Jodl,

1994). Nonetheless, some adolescents' relationships with stepfathers improve over time and become close (Hetherington, 1993).

Relatively little research has examined the effect of a close stepfather-stepchild relationship on adolescents' attitudes toward divorce. Some studies have indicated that having a close relationship with a stepfather can have positive implications for adolescents' adjustment. For instance, having a good relationship with a stepfather can bolster adolescents' self-esteem and their psychological well-being (Amato, 1986). Given this connection, stepfathers also may play a significant role in adolescents' attitudes toward divorce, especially if adolescents feel close to their stepfathers. Although adolescents may share a special or close bond with someone with whom they are biologically related, adolescents who feel close to their fathers—regardless of biological status—may feel less likely to divorce in the future.

Gender Differences in Adolescents' Attitudes Toward Divorce

Few studies have examined the role of fathers in influencing both adolescent boys' and girls' marital relationships. The few studies that have directly compared father-adolescent relationships for girls and boys have found that father-son relationships are more strongly linked to the quality of adolescent boys' than adolescent girls' later adult relationships. For instance, boys who shared an affectionate and trustful relationship with their father in adolescence felt satisfaction with their romantic partners in midlife, but the same was not true for girls (Moeller & Stattin, 2001).

The empirical evidence, together with theory, suggests that fathers may be more important for boys than for girls with respect to intimacy and attitudes toward divorce in adolescence. Social learning theorists posit that same-sex modeling occurs throughout

childhood and adolescence whereby girls and boys look to their same-sex parent as a way of developing their femininity and masculinity, respectively (Crouter, Manke, & McHale, 1995). In this case, boys look to their fathers rather than their mothers for guidance. The developmental literature also suggests that adolescent boys report feeling closer than adolescent girls to their fathers (Richardson, Galambos, Schulenberg, & Petersen, 1984). In fact, previous literature has suggested that fathers play a stronger role in sons' rather than daughters' development (Lamb, 1987; Synder, Velasquez, Clark, & Means-Christensen, 1997). Given this evidence, fathers also may be more influential for boys than girls in the domain of intimacy and the development of marital attitudes during adolescence.

Aims of the Present Study

We know little about how the quality of father-adolescent relationships might be related to adolescents' views about divorce over time. Moreover, most of the research in this area has focused solely on European American families and children. Few studies have investigated relations among these variables over time in diverse samples of adolescents and their families. Looking at ethnic groups such as African Americans is especially important given that African American fathers are less likely to reside with their children compared to European American fathers; yet noncustodial African American fathers are more likely to be involved in their children's lives than noncustodial European American fathers (Bowman & Forman, 1997).

A major goal of this study is to investigate the longitudinal relations between father-adolescent closeness and adolescents' attitudes toward divorce in a diverse sample of European and African American adolescents. First, we hypothesize that adolescents

who reported close relationships with their biological custodial and noncustodial fathers in the eleventh grade would later report at age 19 a lower likelihood of divorcing in the future. Second, we expect that the pattern of relations between father-adolescent closeness and attitudes toward divorce would not differ for stepfathers and biological fathers over time. Regardless of the biological relationship and custodial status, adolescents who feel close to their fathers should feel less likely to divorce than those who do not feel close to their fathers. Third, we predict a gender effect with the father-adolescent relationship being more important for adolescent boys than adolescent girls. Specifically, we hypothesize that boys who reported close father-adolescent relationships in eleventh grade would later report at age 19 a lower likelihood of divorcing in the future.

CHAPTER 2: METHOD

Sample

Participants were part of the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context (MADIC) study, a longitudinal study examining the influences of the home, neighborhood, school, and peer relationships on adolescents' academic, emotional, and social development. At Wave 1, the sample included 1,498 families. Five waves of data have been collected to date. The first wave of data was collected in the fall/winter of 1991/1992, when the adolescents were in the seventh grade (mean age of 12.78). Families were recruited for the study through the adolescents' public middle schools. In September 1991, there were 7,841 7th grade students in the district enrolled in the 23 middle schools we were studying. A total of 1,961 families expressed an interest in the study by signing a form permitting us to contact them. After the families were initially contacted, approximately 76% agreed to participate and the remaining 24% refused to participate because of time constraints, problems with scheduling, or lack of interest. The sample included families living in rural, suburban, and urban neighborhoods of one large county, Prince George's County, located in Maryland.

At Wave 1, 49% of the adolescents participating in the study were girls. Approximately 30% identified themselves as White or European American and 60% identified themselves as Black or African American. The remainder of the sample (10%) that included other ethnic groups (e.g., mixed race categories) was excluded from further analyses because of small group sizes. The mean family income level in 1991 was $45,000 - $50,000 for African Americans and $50,000 - $55,000 for European Americans. Additionally, a majority of the parents in the sample had graduated from high

school and had at least some college education (59% and 45% for African and European Americans, respectively). About 32% of African American parents and 49% of European American parents had a college degree or some graduate or professional training. As a whole, the sample is somewhat wealthier and better educated than the average American family. Additionally, this sample is unique in its demographic features. Both groups of European and African American adolescents are drawn from populations of almost comparable socioeconomic diversity with neither group predominantly represented at the extremes of the socioeconomic spectrum. Taken together, these demographics present a unique opportunity to study the development of African American and European American adolescents in maximally comparable sociodemographic circumstances.

For this study, we used data from Waves 4 and 5 only. We selected these time periods because adolescents are beginning to form more permanent relationships in their lives during middle to late adolescence as they are beginning to transition to adulthood. The data from Waves 4 and 5 were collected when the adolescents were in the eleventh grade (mean age of 16.52) and one-year post high school, respectively. The sample at Wave 5 included 62% of the participants from the original sample at Wave 1 (n = 919), an adequate retention rate given the length and nature of this study. Participants who dropped completely out of the study (n = 286) tended to be the least well functioning people in the initial sample (see Eccles & Sameroff, 2000 for further detail). The adolescents who dropped out of the study displayed lower levels of achievement (assessed using a combination of grade point average [GPA] and test scores) and their parents were less educated on average than those who remained in the study. Although the differences are reliable, the effect sizes are relatively modest.

Analyses conducted to compare our sample to the rest of the sample from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context study at Wave 4 indicated significant differences on a variety of demographic variables including total family income, parents' level of education, and youth's academic performance (i.e., GPA). Not surprisingly, adolescents in this subsample came from somewhat wealthier and better educated families and were doing better in school than the remaining adolescents from the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context sample. To address our specific research objectives, we used data from only a subset of participants from the larger Maryland Adolescent Development in Context study. Depending on the question of interest, we limited the sample based on certain criteria. Our selection criteria as well as the demographic characteristics of each subsample are described in detail below.

Procedure

Sixty-two interviewers (60% African American, 40% European American; 89% women) participated in collecting data for Waves 1 through 4 of the study. At each wave, one of the 62 trained interviewers visited each family's home to conduct face-to-face interviews and give out self-administered surveys. Adolescents and their primary caregiver (usually the mother) were interviewed using a face-to-face interview (lasting 1 - 2 hours) and a questionnaire (lasting 30 - 60 minutes). A second caregiver (usually the father) also filled out a questionnaire. A caregiver was a person living in the home defined by the adolescent as primary or secondary. The questionnaires contained a broad range of items concerning adolescent development such as peer relationships, environmental stressors, and family dynamics. The caregivers and adolescents were each paid $20 for their participation in the study.

The fifth wave of data was collected in the summer of 1998, one-year after the adolescents finished high school. For this wave, questionnaires were mailed to the participants asking them questions about their romantic relationships and their job or schooling status, among other factors. Participants were sent a $35 check in the mail after successfully completing and mailing the questionnaires back to the researchers.

Measures

Scale Construction

Scales measuring parent-adolescent closeness and attitudes toward divorce were derived theoretically and empirically. First, all of the discrete items were organized according to conceptual constructs identified a priori by the researchers. Factor analyses then were conducted to verify each construct. Those items with factor loadings of .5 or better that did not load more than .3 on any other scale were retained. Scales were created by averaging the items for each construct. Derived from existing instruments and surveys that have been well validated (Raymore, Barber, & Eccles, 2001; Jodl, Michael, Malanchuk, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2001), the scales measuring father-adolescent closeness and adolescents' attitudes toward divorce display good face and discriminant validity as well as good internal reliability. Cronbach's *alphas* ranged from .78 to .85.

Control Variables

Some variables are likely to be correlated with attitudes toward divorce as well as father-adolescent closeness. For instance, there is some evidence that non European Americans and those with low education may be more tolerant of divorce than European Americans and those with high education (Amato, 1996). For this reason, we used total

family income and ethnicity (0 = *African American*, 1= *European American*) as control variables. These variables were created using interview data collected at Wave 1.

Demographic Variables

Gender was also measured using Wave 1 data (0 = *males*, 1 = *females*). Data regarding family structure were obtained from questionnaires and face-to-face interviews at Wave 4. The categorical variable for family structure included five different types of families: nondivorced families with both parents living in the home; stepfamilies; and single-parent families in which the parents had divorced, were never married, or in which the parent had a live-in partner. Because we had a nonmutually exclusive group of adolescents who were living in a stepfamily and reporting closeness to both a stepfather and a noncustodial biological father, we were unable to create one dummy coded father type variable. Instead, we created two father type variables—custodial status, using the adolescents' reports of their noncustodial biological father, and biological status, using the adolescents' reports of their stepfather. Custodial status has two dummy coded predictors comparing custodial biological fathers of adolescents living in nondivorced families (n = 389) with (a) noncustodial biological fathers of adolescents living in stepfamilies with a stepfather (n = 42) and (b) noncustodial biological fathers of adolescents living in divorced families with a single-parent mother (n = 83). We did not create parallel variables for adolescents living in single-parent never married or single-parent with a live-in partner because the sample contains so few adolescents (n = 10) and (n = 18), respectively. We then created a dummy coded variable for biological status comparing custodial biological fathers of adolescents living in nondivorced families (n = 389) and stepfathers of adolescents living in stepfamilies (n = 42) based on a combination

of family structure and the adolescents' relationship to the father of interest. We excluded adolescents living in single-parent never married families and single-parent with a live-in partner families. We also excluded biological fathers who were the primary caregiver; biological fathers who were the spouse/partner who was not the secondary caregiver; adolescents living in stepfamilies with their biological father and stepmother; and adolescents who were living with their single-parent divorced biological father.

Father-adolescent Closeness

Closeness of the adolescents' relationships with their biological fathers and stepfathers was assessed by the adolescents' report of how close they felt to and how much they identified with each parent at Wave 4. Closeness involved respect, identification, and emotional closeness to a father from the adolescents' perspective. All of the questions concerning the adolescents' biological father (both custodial and noncustodial) and stepfather were parallel. Four items comprised each scale for all of the parental figures. For the questions "How much do you respect your (father/stepfather)?" and "How much do you want to be like the kind of person your (father/stepfather) is when you are an adult?" scores were reported on a 4-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a lot*). For the question "How close do you feel to your (father/stepfather)?" responses were measured on a 4-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*not very close*) to 4 (*extremely close*). Finally, for the item "How often do you and your (father/stepfather) do things together that you enjoy?" scores were indicated by responses ranging from 1 (*almost never*) to 4 (*about once a week*). The composite closeness measure was created by summing and averaging the items for the father and stepfather separately. Higher scores indicated a closer relationship with the parental

figure. Cronbach's *alpha* was .80 for biological fathers. The *alpha* was .85 for noncustodial biological fathers and .85 for residential stepfathers.

Attitudes Toward Divorce

Modified from earlier work by the authors (e.g., Raymore et al., 2001), our dependent variable assessed adolescents' attitudes toward divorce at Wave 5 when the adolescents were approximately 19-years old. Adolescents' attitudes toward divorce were derived from the adolescents' predictions about how likely they thought their own marriages would end in divorce. As before, adolescents responded to two items designed to tap their attitudes toward divorce. The questions "How likely do you think you are to get divorced?" and "How likely do you think you are to marry more than once?" were measured on a common 4-point Likert scale 1 (*very unlikely*) to 4 (*very likely*). These items were summed and averaged to create a composite measure for adolescents' attitudes toward divorce. Higher scores on this scale indicated that the adolescents felt that their future marriages were more likely to end in divorce. For this scale, Cronbach's *alpha* was .78.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Plan of Analysis

A series of hierarchical linear regressions were performed to test the association between father-adolescent closeness (including biological custodial fathers, biological noncustodial fathers, and stepfathers) and adolescents' attitudes toward divorce. Multiple regression was selected over other methods because it offers a straightforward way to examine main effects and interactions. Hierarchical regression was used so that the amount of variance explained in the dependent variable could be determined as factors were entered into the model.

Two separate regressions were conducted to test biological status and custodial status because of the lack of mutually exclusive groups in the created predictors. Using attitudes toward divorce as the outcome variable, adolescent reports of the closeness of the father-adolescent relationship, gender, and father type (custodial status or biological status depending on the question of interest) were entered into the equation (Step 2) after the control variables (Step 1). The father-adolescent closeness variable was centered prior to forming the product terms of the interaction to reduce multicollinearity among the predictors. The 2-way interaction terms—gender X closeness, gender X father type, and father type X closeness—were entered next (Step 3) followed by a fourth block consisting of the 3-way interaction terms (i.e., gender X father type X closeness). Creation of the interaction terms in addition to posthoc tests of the significant interactions were conducted following techniques prescribed by Cohen, Cohen, Aiken, and West (2003). Posthoc tests tested the simple slope of the continuous predictor across levels of the categorical predictor.

A preliminary set of analyses was conducted within race. Although few significant differences were observed between European and African Americans in the study, we did find a few notable exceptions to this general pattern of findings. Given we had no specific hypotheses regarding the role of ethnicity, we did not pursue these analyses because we viewed them as exploratory in nature. Future research should investigate this further. Please contact the first author for full details regarding these findings.

Analysis 1

To investigate the relative influence of biological fathers living in and out of the home on adolescents' attitudes toward divorce, we selected a subsample of the original sample that included only adolescents and their biological custodial and noncustodial fathers at Wave 4. This subsample (n = 514) was limited to adolescents living with their biological fathers in nondivorced homes (i.e., custodial) (n = 389) and adolescents who were not living with their biological fathers (i.e., noncustodial) in either a divorced (n = 83) or stepfamily (n = 42) situation. The resulting sample is half boys and half girls (50% and 50%). 62% of the adolescents were African American and 38% of the adolescents were European American.

A hierarchical regression was performed to compare the relative influence of biological custodial and noncustodial fathers on adolescents' attitudes toward divorce over time. Specifically, we examined both the closeness of the father-adolescent relationship and custodial status as predictors of youth's attitudes toward divorce. That is, adolescents who feel close to their fathers should feel less likely to divorce regardless of whether the fathers live with the adolescents. We also investigated the role of gender in

these analyses. We expect the father-son effect to be stronger than the father-daughter effect.

All tables and figures are located in the Appendix. We found a significant interaction between the adolescents' gender and father-adolescent closeness for attitudes toward divorce (see Table A-1). As depicted in Figure A-1, adolescent boys who felt close to their biological fathers—both custodial and noncustodial—in the eleventh grade later reported at age 19 that they were less likely to divorce in the future than adolescent boys who did not have a close relationship with their biological fatherst($\beta t = -.37$, $p < .001$). No significant effect was found for girls.

Analysis 2

To compare the roles of biological custodial fathers and stepfathers in shaping adolescents' attitudes toward divorce, a subsample of the Maryland Adolescent Development in Context sample was selected to include only those adolescents living with their biological fathers and stepfathers at Wave 4. The subsample (n = 431) is limited specifically to adolescents living with their biological fathers in nondivorced homes ($n = 389$) and adolescents living with their stepfathers and biological mothers in remarried families ($n = 42$). The subsample is comprised of approximately half boys and half girls (48% and 52%, respectively). 62% and 38% of the adolescents were African American and European American, respectively.

A hierarchical regression was conducted to assess how the closeness of the father-adolescent relationship (defined here as the adolescents' relationships with their biological custodial fathers and stepfathers) predicts adolescents' attitudes toward divorce. In this instance, we examined father-adolescent closeness and the relation

between biological status and attitudes toward divorce. Adolescents who feel close to their fathers—biological fathers and stepfathers alike—should later report that they are unlikely to divorce in the future. As before, we also investigated the role of the adolescents' gender in these analyses. We expect the effect for fathers and adolescent boys to be stronger than the effect for fathers and adolescent girls.

Results are presented in Table A-2. One significant gender X closeness interaction was observed in this analysis. As depicted in Figure A-2, boys who felt close to their biological fathers and stepfathers as eleventh graders felt less likely at age 19 to later divorce ($\beta = -.37$, $p < .001$). The same effects were not found for girls. Taken together, these results are consistent with the inference that the closeness of the father-son relationship influences adolescent boys' attitudes toward divorce in the case of boys both living with their biological fathers and boys living with their stepfathers.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined how the closeness of father-adolescent relationships is associated with adolescents' attitudes toward divorce over time. First, we hypothesized that adolescents who reported close relationships with their biological custodial and noncustodial fathers in the eleventh grade would later report at age 19 a lower likelihood of divorcing in the future. We found that in measuring adolescents' attitudes toward divorce, custodial status did not matter—a finding consistent with our hypothesis. Boys who shared a close relationship with both custodial and noncustodial fathers in the eleventh grade also felt at age 19 less likely to divorce. One reason for this finding is that closeness in the father-adolescent relationship may be a positive influence on adolescents' attitudes toward divorce, even though the adolescents may have experienced divorce in their family situation. Attachment theory lends support to this notion such that adolescents who are securely attached to their parents are likely to feel attached to their romantic partners in early adulthood (Roisman, Madsen, Henninghausen, Sroufe, & Collins, 2001). In addition, social learning theory suggests that boys who learn how to have successful close relationships with their fathers also expect successful close romantic relationships later in life. Sharing a close relationship with a father may be a protective factor for boys' faith in their own marital relationships. Conversely, not sharing a close relationship with a father may be less promising for boys' beliefs in their future marriages. Nonetheless, feeling more likely to divorce in one's future reflects realistic ideas about divorce given current divorce rates, and it may imply that adolescents do not feel condemned to remain in unhappy marriages (Barber & Eccles, 1992).

Second, we examined relations among father-adolescent closeness, biological status, and adolescents' attitudes toward divorce over time. Although a relationship with a stepfather may be qualitatively different from a relationship with a biological father, we hypothesized that the pattern of associations between father-adolescent closeness and adolescents' attitudes toward divorce would not vary for biological fathers and residential stepfathers. As expected, boys who felt close to their biological fathers or their stepfathers in the eleventh grade felt less likely at age 19 to divorce in the future. These findings are consistent with the previous findings: Boys who feel close to their father—regardless of biological status—have better attitudes about intimacy and the prospect of their own married lives than boys who do not feel close to their fathers.

The importance of a close relationship with a stepfather for adolescent boys' attitudes toward divorce is interesting for two reasons. First, one might hypothesize that a close relationship with a biological father might somehow be different or perhaps even more intimate than a relationship with a stepfather given the length of time a boy has known his biological father versus his stepfather. Future research should explore the process whereby children develop close relationships with their stepfathers. Secondly, because boys who are living with their stepfathers have already experienced the divorce of their biological parents, one might guess that these boys would already have less confidence in marriage as an enduring institution more so than boys who have not experienced their parents' divorce.

An additional goal of the study was to explore gender differences. In accordance with social learning theory, we expected to find a stronger effect for fathers and sons than fathers and daughters. Our findings support this hypothesis because we did not find any

effects for girls, but we found effects for fathers and boys. A close father-adolescent relationship may foster more positive attitudes toward intimacy in adult romantic relationships for boys because boys are socialized to be more autonomous and nonexpressive as a part of their masculine identity. In contrast, because girls are socialized to be more interpersonal and nurturing as a part of their feminine identity and to see the roles of wife and mother as central to their adult lives, a close father-adolescent relationship may not be necessary to promote positive attitudes about marriage (Cooper & Grotevant, 1987). In other words, because adolescent girls generally feel more positively about marriage and the role of wife and mother as a result of their socialization, fathers are less likely to influence girls' attitudes than boys' attitudes. Others have found intimacy to be correlated with family tolerance for separateness in women and family cohesion in men. Specifically, adolescent boys and girls who reported more intimacy in their relationships also come from families that encouraged bonding in boys and separateness in girls, respectively (Feldman, Gowen, & Fisher, 1998). Adolescents growing up in these types of families may not be socialized according to typical masculine and feminine stereotypes. For girls, other mechanisms such as an ability to remain independent in father-adolescent relationships may better predict their attitudes toward divorce. Future research should explore this possibility.

Additionally, father-adolescent relationships may not influence girls' attitudes toward divorce because they have more role models of intimacy and marriage as the ideal in their environment than boys, especially in the media (Ward, 2002). Television programs, magazines, and music depict women more often than men involved in social relationships, especially romantic relationships, within the context of marriage. Boys

have fewer role models of intimacy in their environment outside of their family. Hence, fathers may be especially important as role models of interpersonal skills for boys. In fact, fathers who foster close father-son relationships have sons who are more open to intimacy in relationships (Werrbach, Grotevant, & Cooper, 1992).

A major strength of this study is that it is longitudinal in nature. Few studies have investigated such factors in relation to adolescents' attitudes toward divorce, and even fewer studies have examined these factors using a longitudinal design. Nevertheless, although longitudinal studies allow for the opportunity to examine potentially causal processes better than cross-sectional research, causal conclusions cannot be drawn from these findings because the study is not experimental in nature.

Another strength of this study is the ethnic diversity and socioeconomic status of the sample. Few studies have examined father-adolescent closeness in an ethnically diverse sample such as this one. Although African Americans and middle class families are represented, people of different ethnic origins and socioeconomic groups have been excluded. Future research should explore how father-adolescent relationships influence adolescents' attitudes toward divorce in samples that include people with a greater variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, future research should explore father-adolescent relationships for other types of fathers such as adoptive fathers or single-parent fathers. An additional shortcoming to the study is that the measures used here were self-report given by the adolescents. Self-report measures may not accurately assess attitudes because of response bias. Future research should employ other methods of measurement as well.

Attrition is another issue of concern in the present study. Although this is a problem common to nearly all longitudinal studies, it is an issue that warrants consideration because it may limit our interpretation of the data as well as the generalizability of the findings. This is especially important because those who dropped out of the study tended to be lower functioning than the rest of the sample. The adolescents who dropped out of the study may have had less close relationships, had more unstable family lives, and felt more likely to divorce than those people who remained in the study. Perhaps a close relationship with a father would have been more important for these adolescents because it may have helped them function more effectively.

Another limitation is that the predictor variables accounted for little variability in adolescents' attitudes toward divorce. Other factors such as the quality of the parents' marriage or the quality of the mother-child relationship may also contribute to adolescents' attitudes toward divorce. Likewise, we may have been measuring adolescents' expectations for their future marriages rather than their attitudes toward divorce. Attitudes toward divorce may tap one's moral views about divorce. On the other hand, expectations for divorce may tap one's projections for their own personal relationships. Testing expectations for divorce seems to be more relevant to our hypotheses and findings given that adolescents may use their experiences of intimacy in father-adolescent relationships as a model for their future marital relationships. Future research should explore other factors that contribute to adolescents' attitudes toward divorce and the differences that may exist between the constructs attitudes toward divorce and expectations for divorce.

In the current study, the closeness of adolescents' relationships with their fathers was examined as a predictor of adolescents' attitudes toward divorce. Our analyses lend support to the hypothesis that closeness in father-adolescent relationships influences boys' attitudes toward divorce over time. Boys who feel close to their fathers—regardless of custodial or biological status—report a lower likelihood of divorcing in the future. These findings suggest that fathers matter and that having them involved in their adolescents' lives is important, especially for boys.

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APPENDIX

Table A-1.

Predicting Adolescents' Attitudes Toward Divorce as a Function of Father's Custodial Status Two Years Earlier ($n = 514$)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
Predictors	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β
Ethnicity	.24	.09	.18**	.24	.09	.18**	.25	.08	.18**	.25	.08	.19**
Family Income	-.00	.01	-.01	.00	.01	.01	.00	.01	.00	.00	.01	.00
Main effects:												
Gender				-.00	.09	-.02	-.00	.09	-01	-.01	.09	-.01
Biological versus Step				.18	.17	.07	.60	.25	.23*	.60	.25	.23*
Closeness to Father				-.10	.06	-.10	-.37	.10	-.39***	-.36	.10	-.37***
2-way Interactions:												
Gender X Closeness							.45	.12	.35***	.43	.13	.33**
Biological versus Step X Closeness							.25	.22	.07	.11	.28	.03
Biological versus Step X Gender							-.65	.34	-.19	-.61	.34	-.18+
3-way Interactions:												
Biological versus Step X Closeness X Gender										.36	.46	.07
R^2		.03			.05			.12			.12	
F for change in R^2		3.99*			1.22			6.71***			.60	

Note. + $p < .10$. *$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table A-2.

Predicting Adolescents' Attitudes Toward Divorce as a Function of Father's Biological Status Two Years Earlier ($n = 431$)

	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
Predictors	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β	*B*	*SE B*	β
Ethnicity	.24	.09	.18**	.24	.09	.18**	.25	.08	.18**	.25	.08	.19**
Family Income	-.00	.01	-.01	.00	.01	.01	.00	.01	.00	.00	.01	.00
Main effects:												
Gender				-.00	.09	-.02	-.00	.09	-01	-.01	.09	-.01
Biological versus Step				.18	.17	.07	.60	.25	.23*	.60	.25	.23*
Closeness to Father				-.10	.06	-.10	-.37	.10	-.39***	-.36	.10	-.37***
2-way Interactions:												
Gender X Closeness							.45	.12	.35***	.43	.13	.33**
Biological versus Step X Closeness							.25	.22	.07	.11	.28	.03
Biological versus Step X Gender							-.65	.34	-.19	-.61	.34	-.18+
3-way Interactions:												
Biological versus Step X Closeness X Gender										.36	.46	.07
R^2		.03			.05			.12			.12	
F for change in R^2		3.99*			1.22			6.71***			.60	

Note. + $p < .10$. *$p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Figure A-1. Adolescents' attitudes toward divorce as a function of the closeness of the father-adolescent relationship for biological custodial and noncustodial fathers.

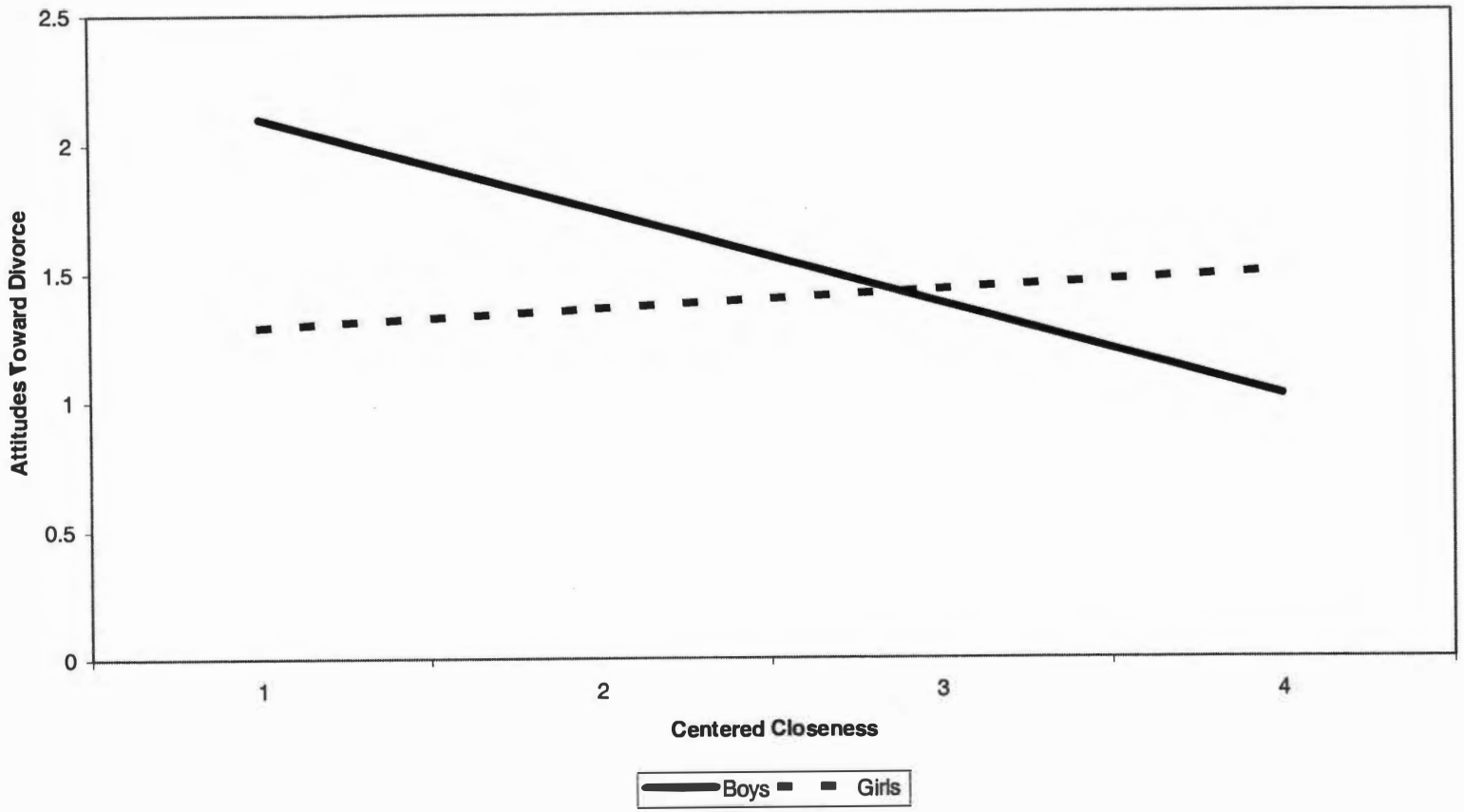
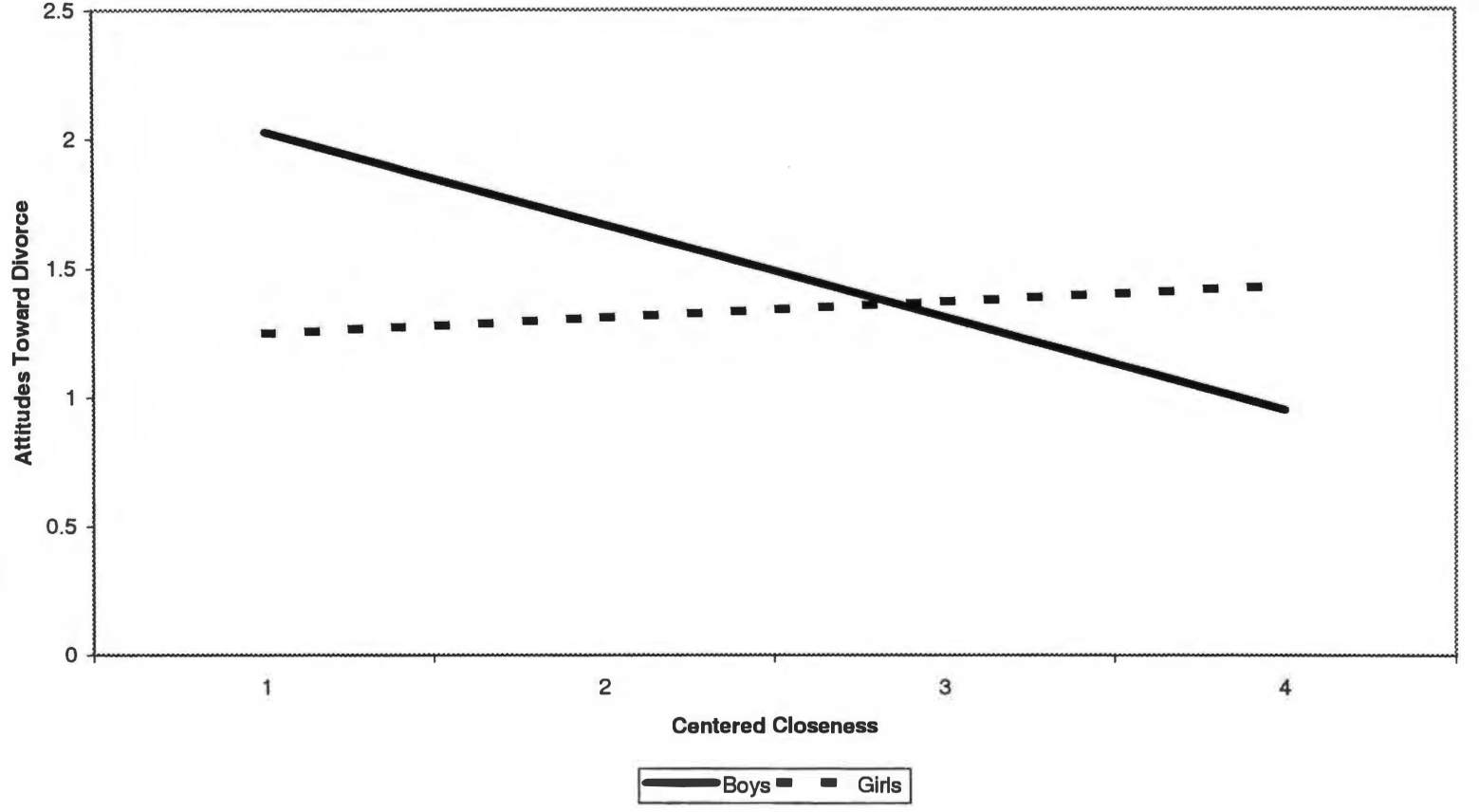

2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
Attitudes Toward Divorce
1
2
3
4
Centered Closeness
Boys
Girls

Figure A-2. Adolescents' attitudes toward divorce as a function of the closeness of the father-adolescent relationship for biological fathers and stepfathers.


2.5
2
1.5
1
0.5
0
Attitudes Toward Divorce
1
2
3
4
Centered Closeness
Boys
Girls

VITA

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