

## **Mini-thesis proposal**

**A comparative study of the marital attitudes of students from divorced, intact and single-parent families.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the research study was to examine the marital attitudes of students from divorced, intact and single parent families. Most of these students were in the intimacy versus isolation developmental phase. During this phase young adults seek to form an intimate relationship with another person, but may fear intimacy or may not want to give up their independence and may experience loneliness and isolation instead. It was thus important to conduct the study since some of the students were at a developmental stage in which they might have been dealing with intimate relationship issues.

Given the focus of international studies on the marital attitudes of students from intact and divorced families, it was considered important to include, in the comparison, students from single parent families.

A survey research design was used as a broad methodological framework and Bowen's family systems theory was used as a theoretical framework. A convenient sampling method was used to select a sample of 209 participants from the Community and Health Science Faculty. A Marital Attitude Scale and a questionnaire was used to collect data. The data was analyzed by means of basic descriptive statistics, the Kruskal-Wallis H-test, T-Test and Mann Whitney U-Test. Results showed that students' parental marital status (married, divorced, single) had no influence on their attitudes towards marriage. Generally, the students showed positive attitudes towards

marriage. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference among different racial groups.

The results suggest that except for race, there was no statistically significant difference on the marital attitudes when compared on such variables as gender, religion and age. Although the marital attitudes of participants were generally positive among the different racial groups, participants from the Black community had less positive marital attitudes when compared with their Coloured, Indian and White counterparts. Participants from the Coloured community also had less positive marital attitudes when compared to their counterparts from the Indian and White communities. The results of this study show that participants had relative positive attitudes towards marriage and that these attitudes did not differ according to parental status.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

Hart (cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 1994) states that marriage can be seen as a social arrangement and contract between adults. It includes the recognition of the rights and sharing of duties of parenthood, common residence, economic obligations, intimacy and companionship. Although monogamy is the most common form of marriage in many communities, there are communities where polygamy, and to a lesser extent, polygyny, are practiced. The latter is a form of polygamy that involves a man getting married to two or more women simultaneously. South African laws also recognize that some unions are actual marriages even though no license is issued if they last long enough. Examples of these include common-law marriages. There are also unions between homosexuals that have gained legal recognition as marriages in South Africa.

According to Coleman (1988) marriage was formed primarily for three purposes, namely, to meet the sexual needs of men, rear children and to provide for economic needs of women. Furthermore, each partner knew what was expected of him or her. Men knew that they were expected to



be strong, silent, competent, unemotional, problem-solvers, good providers, handy around the house and protectors. Women, on the other hand, knew that they had to be good cooks, competent housekeepers, seamstresses, church goers and nurturers.

In some of these marriages, the expectation was that the sexual needs of men were more important than those of women because of the perception that women were not suppose to experience sexual desire or pleasure. It is possible that this might have influenced some women to conform to this expectation. However, this is beginning to change because women marry, amongst other, to meet psychological needs such as companionship, emotional support, friendship and an intimate and romantic relationship in which they can share all aspects of their lives and achieve happiness. In agreeing with the latter, Amato (2001), Cherlin (1992), Wait and Gallagher (2000) state that the expectations of marriage as a source of personal happiness appear to have increased. In most cultures, particularly within the American culture, the purpose of marriage is to fulfill personal needs such as freedom, individualism, autonomy and happiness. According to Thornton (1998) the emphasis on individualism, freedom, autonomy and pursuit of personal happiness appears to have contributed to the increase in divorce. This is attributed to the fact that individualism undermines marital commitment. A common attitude is that if marriage does not meet individual needs, then there is no reason to stay married.

A report prepared for the Governor's Commission (1996) on Domestic violence indicated that marriage is a universal institution, found in virtually every known society. One of its most important social purposes is to publicly recognise and encourage parents to take mutual responsibility for their biological or adopted children. While the Commission acknowledges that marriage is not attainable, sustainable, or desirable for all parents, it also believes that marriage is the most effective way of attaching children to their mothers and fathers. In this way marriage becomes important to children's well being. For instance Popenoe, a sociologist (cited in Governor's Commission report) indicates that having two parents who are held together in a well functioning, non-abusive marriage is a source of advantage for the child. Married parents provide their children with certain basic assurances of nurture and support. He states that they foster attachments.

Nock (1999) states that although marriage is important to children and adults, it is weakening as the primary social institution for raising children. He believes that each passing year, a larger percentage of children live in households that do not consist of two married parents. The first contributing factor being the persistently high levels of divorce. He is of the view that roughly four out of ten marriages are likely to end in divorce.

He mentions that a second contributing factor is the historic rise of children born out of wedlock over the past 30 years. As a consequence of these combined trends, marriage and parenthood are coming apart. Single parents are raising children alone. Some biological parents live together with their children but are not married. Still other parents raise children in a household with a cohabiting partner. He concludes that almost half of children growing up today will spend some time living with an unmarried, cohabiting couple.

In a research study conducted in South Africa by Pienaar (1989) it was reported that divorce is such an integral part of modern society that it is not exceptional anymore to be a divorced person. It is a common occurrence such that it is sometimes easy to fail to realize and acknowledge the consequences it has on the children.

Hart (cited in Haralambos & Holborn, 1994) mentions that the stigma attached to divorce has been considerably reduced. He argues that the change in attitude towards divorce is partly because of the declining influence of the church. He states that during the nineteenth century, the church strongly denounced divorce, insisting that the phrase 'till death do us part' be taken literally.

Statistics reported by the Sunday Times (2003) showed that nearly 45 000 children are affected by divorce in South Africa yearly. Gauteng was

reported to have the highest number of divorces, with 181 per 100 000 people. Given the number of children that are affected by divorce and the possibility that these numbers might have increased, it will be important to investigate their attitudes and those of their counterparts from intact and single-parent families towards marriage. This will therefore contribute towards developing a better understanding of the attitudes of marriage of this significant social group.

### **1.2 AIM OF PRESENT STUDY**

- ◆ To examine the marital attitudes of UWC students from intact, divorced and single parent families.

### **1.3 HYPOTHESES**

On the basis of the literature that was reviewed and theoretical framework the following hypotheses have been developed.

- ◆ Students from divorced families will have a more negative attitude towards marriage than those from intact families.
- ◆ Students from divorced families will have a more negative attitude towards marriage than those from single parent families.
- ◆ Students from single parent families will have a more negative attitude towards marriage than those from intact families.

### **1.4 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

*Marital attitude:* The concept of marital attitude will be used in this study to denote the individuals' inclinations and feelings, prejudice or bias, preconceived notions, fears and convictions about marriage. Thus ones attitudes about marriage will be all that students feel and think about marriage.

*Intact family:* will be used as a concept to refer to those students who come from families in which their parents are married and live together.

*Single parent family:* will be used as a concept to refer to those students who are raised by one parent who never got married.

*Divorce:* will be used as a term referring to those students who come from families in which their parents were previously married but got formally or informally divorced and are living separately.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

This chapter gives an overview of the literature on attitudes towards marriage. There is a specific focus on the literature looking at children from divorced, intact and single parent families. First, the focus will be on the definition of divorce and followed by a discussion on the causes of divorce. Following this discussion will be a focus on the financial, emotional and psychological effects of divorce on children and their parents.

## **2.2. Definition of divorce**

Although divorce is by definition a legal event, it is, however, a process that rarely begins with summons ( Kaslow, 1994). It marks the culmination of a painful process that begins early in a relationship and has numerous sequelae in the post divorce period. Kaslow further states that it is important to conceptualize divorce as a process rather than a single event. As a process, it is a different experience for an adult and a child. For the child, there is loss of something that is fundamental to his/her development, namely, the family structure. The family structure lays the foundation for the child's physical, emotional and psychological ascent into maturity. The collapse of this structure leaves the child vulnerable to developmental problems because of changes in support structures (Pipher, 1996).

## **2.3 Causes of divorce**

According to Morgen and Coleman (2004) the following are some of the factors that contribute to divorce: failed expectations or unmet needs, addictions and substance abuse, sexual incompatibility, physical and sexual abuse of a partner or children. Another factor is emotional abuse in which the emotional needs of one partner are not taken into consideration by the other partner. Poor communication, incompatibility

between partners, financial problems, lack of commitment to the marriage by one or both partners, dramatic change in priorities, lack of conflict resolution skills and infidelity are some of the reasons that may lead to divorce.

Macionis (1995) provides socio-economic and socio cultural explanations for divorce. He states that low income places a strain on the marital relationship resulting in divorce, particularly if the man, who often perceives himself as the breadwinner, thinks he has failed in his obligation towards his family. This often leaves the man with a sense of worthlessness and feelings of inferiority. In some cases this may lead to physical abuse towards the female spouse as a way of trying to retain control and power. This occurs in cases where a male has been socialized to believe that he needs to provide for the family economically.

According to Macionis (1995) the involvement of married women in the work force is another reason that may contribute to divorce because it results in conflict between the spouses and the conflict can often lead to marital breakdown. Also some or most married women who work are still expected to be primarily responsible for housework and play a subservient role to their partners. These normative expectations contradict the wife's role as a wage earner since she is sharing the family's economic burden with the husband. Conflict between the spouses results from this contradiction and then leads to marital



breakdown. Finally various studies indicate a relationship between particular occupations and high rates of divorce. Hart (1987) found that spouses whose jobs require frequent separation from each other have higher divorce rates due to, among others, a diminishing sense of dependence on the spouse. Furthermore, frequent travelling provides the travelling spouse with opportunities to meet members of the opposite sex, away from the company of the other spouse. Nobles (1989) agrees with Hart (1987) and state that actors, authors and company directors have higher rates of divorce which result from their high degree of involvement in their work and less involvement in their relationships. The possibility that certain occupations may increase the vulnerability of the marital relationship is not a necessary or a sufficient condition for divorce. There are other factors that play a more crucial role in the onset of divorce as mentioned by Morgan and Coleman (2004) and Macionis (1995).

## **2.4. Effects of divorce on Adults**

### **2.4.1 Emotional Issues**

According to Amato (2001), Kitson (1992), Wait and Gallagher (2000) divorced parents tend to have more economic hardship, higher levels of poverty, lower levels of psychological well-being, less happiness, more health problems, and a greater risk of mortality. This is because some of

the survivors of divorce often find it hard to cope with loneliness, finding new meaning in life, seeking new sources of love and nurturance. This also includes difficulties of gaining financial stability and balancing childcare with other responsibilities of single parenting.

Hetherington and Camara (1984) argue that divorce is a stressful experience to the couple because it includes complex life changes. It includes changes in residence, assumption of new roles and responsibilities, reorganization of routines and schedules. They further argue that the couple is likely to become angry, depressed, moody, lonely and distressed although often relieved as well. The divorced parents are overburdened by responsibilities and are often irritable, impatient and insensitive to their children's needs. This is because they might be depressed by the separation. In terms of their capacity for child rearing, they may become less responsive to the needs of the children and less consistent in their discipline. They may also try to seize control of their children by a heavy-handed style of parenting. Hetherington and Camara (1984) also found that non-custodial fathers are likely to be permissive and indulging their children during visits. This parental response may lead to maladjustment. They state that both spouses need to manage the difficult task of revisiting their identities as single rather than married people because this might have an impact on the emotional effect of divorce on their children.

Morgan and Coleman (2004) state that usually the spouse who leaves the other often experiences a heightened sense of guilt while the other may not feel ready for the marriage to end. However these ambivalent feelings about ending the marriage may not be present in all marital situations because this depends on various marital relationship factors. Once the marriage has been ended, some of the feelings that are often experienced include loss, anger, rejection, shame, loneliness, abandonment, denial, depression and grief.

Kelly (1982) agrees with Morgan and Coleman (2004) that the person who takes the first step to end the marriage always feels a mixture of relief, sadness, guilt, apprehension and anger. The initiator is often in a better emotional space during the early months of separation than the other partner who feels the additional pain of rejection, loss of control and powerlessness. During this phases anger, depression and disorganized thinking and functioning become common. The impact of these experiences are often negative on children.

Tschann, Johnston and Wallerstein (1989) state that ending an unhappy marriage is also painful. Divorce increases the vulnerability of the parties to developing, amongst others, self doubt and low self-esteem. It leads to feelings of failure, blame, hostility and self-recrimination. An impression can be formed by children that marriage is undesirable because it leads to these feelings.

Norton and Moorman (1987) argue that for middle-aged and older people divorce becomes traumatic because they expect their lives to be settled. They further argue that people of age 50 and above tend to suffer more than younger individuals. But since divorce seems a better option than living a frustrating, conflict-filled life, many people even at this stage of life end unhappy marriages.

Uhlenberg and Meyers (1981) have noted that divorce in late adulthood is rare. They are of the view that people who divorce after the age of 50 have more trouble in adjusting to the change in their marital status and this is particularly so with older, divorced people because they tend to lose hope.

#### **2.4.2 Relationship Issues**

According to Norton and Moorman's (1987) views most divorced people do not remain single. They further argue that some divorced people cohabit or live alone. According to these scholars, most women remarry and that men are more likely than women to remarry particularly those men who would be classified as having narcissistic or borderline personality traits. Often individuals with narcissistic traits use relationships as a way of hiding a sense of self that they perceive as defective. Their relationships are often about enhancing their self -

esteem. Those individuals with borderline traits often have a fear of rejection or abandonment which tends to leave them with feelings of emptiness. Because these individuals also tend to feel both dependent and hostile towards relationship partners, their relationships do not last. This is further complicated by their impulsivity which contributes to them moving from one relationship to the next. Another possible reason why men are more likely to remarry than women is because they might be unskilled in child rearing and housekeeping.

Hetherington (1986) states that when mothers remarry they tend to be happier, better adjusted and more satisfied with life. Sons are said to relate well with stepfathers because they tend to align with the new father figure. However, daughters often have more problems due to the loss of the biological father figure.

According to Heyns and Catsambis (1986) children of employed, single parents tend to live in situations where their responsibilities are clearly explained to them. They are encouraged to be independent and assume responsibility for things that they do. This sense of responsibility helps them to take ownership over their lives and have higher self-esteem as a result of parental approval and increasing sense of control over their lives. The parents may feel guilty by being away from their children yet they may also feel competent, more economically secure and more in charge of their lives. The more satisfied a single parent is with his/her

life the more effective he/she is as a parent. This effect cuts across socio-economic levels.

### **2.4.3 Parenting Issues**

Duran-Aydintug (1997) mentioned that after divorce the spouses' initial focus is on their own problems, resulting in a weakened capacity to parent and less support being given to the children. Their inability to sufficiently support their children contribute to feelings of anxiety and may contribute to their children developing a negative attitude towards marriage (Walezack & Burns, 1984; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, cited in Snyman, 1993). Children from intact families, on the other hand, may still benefit from relatively stable and nurturing parental relationships. This may serve as a protective factor from developing a negative perception of marriage.

Mthombeni (1993) indicates that disappointment, anger and sometimes hopelessness linked to the divorce often diminish parental responsiveness to children's emotional and physical needs. Such parents tend to experience problems communicating with their children, tend to respond to criticism defensively, avoid or withdraw from problem-solving discussions, and have difficulty resolving conflict and may also be critical of their children. In turn, the children tend to feel confused, resentful and insolent towards their parents because of,

amongst others, lack of support in coping with intense, negative feelings such as guilt, sadness, anger and frustration. The absence of adult support at a time when it is needed, and the tension that often marks the divorce process, may heighten their suspicion of and cynicism towards marriage.

Furthermore, they may also have fewer opportunities to learn positive social skills that facilitate close relationships and strengthen later marital stability because of the possibility of ongoing conflict between the parents before the divorce.

Wallerstein (2000), Ross and Mirowsky (1999) also share this view and state that parents tend to focus on their own needs. They tend to demonstrate affection less often and neglect their care taking responsibilities. Their needs and those of their children are often not fully met for many years after the breakup. Mthombeni (1993) and Wallerstein (2000), Ross and Mirowsky (1999) highlight that some of the difficulties that are often experienced by children whose parents are divorced are aggression, academic difficulties, delinquency and depression. However some of the problems that they experience may also apply to children from intact and single parent families. This suggests that the effect of parental divorce depends on the relationship the child has with his/her parent(s) rather than on the marital status of parents. Also according to Bowen (1978) family culture is passed on

from one generation to the next which means in an intact or single parent family where the parent(s) hold strong beliefs that were held by their own parents it may be possible that they too might relate to their children in the same way their parents related to them.

The US Bureau of Census (1984) noted that the strains of divorce also affect parenting. The single parent becomes preoccupied with personal concerns and becomes less attentive and responsive to the children. Housekeeping and normal routines are neglected. Furthermore when the father is the custodial parent most of these men rely on child-care resources in the community such as pre-schools, day-care centers, after care schools, friends and family more than on housekeepers.

## **2.5. Effects of Divorce on Children and Adolescents**

In reviewing the literature on the effects of parental divorce on children, there seems to be an agreement amongst some South African researchers on what the impact of divorce has on children. Smith, (1974) and Loots (1991) indicated that children from divorced families may experience disabling emotional and behavioral problems. According to these researchers, high levels of conflict, which characterises the period preceding the divorce, may often lead to feelings of failure as the



child may feel that he/she failed to reunite his/her parents. Some of the potential effects include the weakening of the relationship between a child and his/her parents, destructive ways of handling conflict and a poorer self-image.

Glick and Lin (1986) and Cherlin (1992) argue that children suffer when their parents split up. They experience pain, confusion, anger, hate, bitterness, disappointment, a sense of failure and self-doubt. Family disruption is an experience with ramifications that follow them into adult life. These children face special challenges and burdens. No matter how unhappy the marriage has been, its break up usually comes as a shock to the children. They feel afraid of the future, guilty about their own perceived role in causing the divorce, hurt at the rejection they feel towards the parent who moves out and angry at both parents for not trying harder. They may become depressed, hostile, disruptive, irritable, lonely, sad, accident-prone or even suicidal. They may suffer from fatigue, insomnia, skin disorders, loss of appetite, inability to concentrate and loss of interest in academic work and social engagement.

According to Silverman (1989) the reactions of children to divorce may be influenced by their age. For example, children in their early childhood may respond differently to their parents divorce when compared with adolescents. This difference may be related to cognitive maturity. The

adolescents' cognitive maturity may enable them to understand the separation better than younger children. The latter may react to the departure of a parent with a great deal of confusion due to a lack of understanding of the nature of the marital relationship. They may constantly be anxious that they will lose the remaining parent too. In my view those children from intact and single parent homes may not have to deal with the fear or anxiety of losing a parent compared with the child who has divorced parents. It may be possible that the child who grows in an intact family may experience his/her environment as stable without any threats of losing his/her parents. A child who grows with a single parent who was never married may be comfortable with his/her one parent. However anxiety over losing that same parent may be triggered if his/her parent is ill.

Furthermore the departure of the other parent, or from the child's perspective, the rejection by the departing parent, may become a frame of reference for later relationships. This may lead to the child having a sense of unworthiness, believing that perhaps he/she is not good enough to be loved. These feelings may be experienced in later interpersonal relationships. His/her relationships may not last very long as he/she may shift between extremes of closeness to not wanting to be too close due to the fear of being hurt again.

Berman (1991) states that the impact of parental divorce on children can be devastating and long lasting. Some of the children may be able to understand and integrate the divorce into their lives. They may perceive the experience as a positive solution to a destructive family situation. Although there may be relief that a painful situation has been ended, there may also be regret that a healthy family could not be created. Earll (2001) states that divorce is a great loss to children because special events such as holidays, plays, sports, graduations, marriages, births of children revive this loss.

Furthermore, Berman (1991) states that individuals who have been raised in families where parents are divorced tend to have difficulty trusting others, have a fear of commitment, have difficulties with intimacy, experience a sense of isolation and loneliness, have poor self esteem, feel a strong need to maintain control, place a great deal of emphasis on financial security, have a strong yearning for stability, are fiercely independent and place a high value on being successful. Compared to their counterparts from divorced families, children from single families may enjoy a sense of stability that protects them from uncertainty. In this way, they may be more open to take risk and develop intimate relationships with others.

According to Beal and Hochman (1991) children whose parents got divorced may also recreate the kinds of traumatic relationships that they

witnessed in their parents. They may be inclined to engage in intimate relationships that are destructive and prohibit growth due to their experience of parental divorce. Beal and Hochman state that children of divorce are essentially 'borrowers', that is, they rely on significant others in their lives to fill in the gaps in their own emotional lives. This suggests that they use their relationship partners to enhance their own self-esteem. Borrowing, according to Beal and Hochman (1991) has to do with the way people relate to each other and the way they release their anxiety. If this process is not balanced, it can have a negative effect on a relationship.

## **2.6 Adjustment Issues**

### **2.6.1 Children's adjustment to divorce**

Wallerstein (1983) and Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) argue that children of divorced parents face special challenges and burdens regarding emotional development. First, children in their early and middle childhood may not easily understand relationship issues due to their cognitive maturity and others may deny the separation. Others are overwhelmed by fears of abandonment or retreat into fantasies of reconciliation. Secondly, at first the children may be worried to an extent that they cannot play, do school-work or take part in other usual activities. They put some distance between themselves and their

parents. Thirdly, children need to adjust to the loss of the parent that they are not staying with, to the loss of the security of feeling loved and cared for by both parents, to the loss of their familiar daily routines and family traditions. Some children take years to deal with these losses, some never do and feel rejected, unworthy and unlovable into adulthood. Fourthly, children do not believe in no-fault divorce, they may blame themselves. They believe that divorce unlike death is voluntary. This makes them believe that the parents could have avoided being divorced. As a result, they feel angry at the parents for the choice they made. When and if they forgive their parents, they feel powerful and in control of their lives'. Fifth, some children hold for years to the fantasy that their parents will be reunited. Many youngsters accept the permanence of the situation after they achieve psychological separation from their parents in adolescence or early adulthood.

Wallerstein (1983) further argues that some children succeed at most tasks and come through the painful experience of divorce with an undamaged ego. Their ability to do that seems to be related partly to their own resilience and partly to how the separation and ultimately, the divorce is handled.

### **2.6.2 Influences on adjustment to divorce**

According to Kelly (1987) children who live with their divorced mothers have more social, academic and behavioural problems than those in intact homes. This pertains mainly to boys who often miss the father figure in their lives. However some factors that influence how well the children adjust to divorce are the parenting styles. For example, he states that children of divorce, whose parents utilize the authoritative parenting style usually show fewer behavioral problems, do better in school and have fewer problems getting along with other children. This is because these children are trained to be responsible for their behaviour by being punished consistently for undesirable behaviours but they are also rewarded for good behaviour and all of this happens within a context of a warm, loving environment.

Hetherington (1986) found that custodial mothers who did not remarry have conflicted relationships with their sons who tend to show behavioral problems. However the mothers have good relationships with their daughters who tend to be fairly well adjusted. He observed that children whose parents were able to control their anger, had no difficulties parenting and did not expose them to quarreling have fewer emotional and social problems. Among 16-18 year old boys whose parents had divorced, the relationships of boys with their fathers were seen as important for their adjustment. The sons of erratic and rejecting fathers felt hurt, trapped and humiliated (Hetherington, 1986).

Furthermore, he noted that contact with the parents who do not have custody of children was found to be important.

Wallerstein (1987) has similar views that children who have reliable contact with the non-custodial parent are usually better adjusted. Adolescents who do not get along with their mothers and stay with fathers often have adjustment problems at the time of the divorce, but they show psychological growth in the long run. When the parent is responsive to the child's needs, the child develops a sense of certainty and trust and this is often an antidote to bitterness and disappointment.

## **2.7 Long term effects of divorce on children and adolescents**

Wallerstein (1987) argues that although children of divorced parents adjust well others are troubled, sometimes more than 10 years after the divorce. He further states that most of the girls between the ages of 16-18 years whose parents divorced, are able to adjust better than boys. They attend school full time, work part-time, are law-abiding and live at home with their mothers. Those living with their fathers move during adolescence to live on their own. Girls who establish good relations with their parents, are likely to be dating and involved in intimate relationships.

Wallerstein (1987) suggests that while divorce is a wrenching experience for everyone in the family, the resilience of the human spirit allows many children to come through the painful times with an increased sensitivity and compassion that serve them well in their own adult lives, including having no fears of being married.

Hetherington (1986) says that the single parent home is not necessarily pathological, and the two-parent family is not always healthy. He suggests that children grow up better adjusted when they have a good relationship with one parent than when they grow up in a two-parent home filled with discord and discontent. Rutter (1983, cited in Hetherington, 1980) captured this sentiment succinctly when he stated that an inaccessible, rejecting or hostile parent is worse than an absent one.

## **2.8 Factors influencing attitudes towards marriage**

Glenn and Kramer (1987) pooled data from 11 U.S. National surveys conducted from 1973 to 1985 to explore possible reasons for higher rates among adult children of divorce. They used the concept “adult children of divorce” to refer to adults whose parents divorced when they were young. The following were some of the factors that were used to explain the findings:



First, inappropriate modeling of spousal roles. This means that children had fewer opportunities to learn positive social skills that facilitate close relationships and strengthen later marital stability.

Second, inadequate social control. Glenn and Kramer found that during periods of marital conflict parents tended to support their children less often, placing focus on themselves due to their own distress. This often leads to poor attachment and security between the child and parent, leading to attachment and security difficulties in the child's own relationships. This also increased the risk of being a compulsive caregiver or being negligent.

Third, greater willingness to resort to divorce. This was seen in those children who did not see divorce as stigmatising and were, therefore, more willing to consider divorce an option to end conflict. This behaviour was observed from parents who demonstrated that the marital contract can be broken and that divorce can provide opportunities to seek greater happiness with new partners.

Finally, early marriages. It was found that children from broken homes tend to marry earlier, and their marriages often ended in a divorce because of the greater financial pressures since they were only beginning their working lives and their wages were often low.

Boyer-Pennington and Spink (2001) conducted a comparative study of college students from intact, single divorce, and multiple divorce families. Their interest was to investigate the impact of family structure on optimism and perceptions of control in marital relationships. The results showed that students from divorced families had less favourable expectations about future marriages than their counterparts from intact families.

Another study investigating the perceptions of students from intact and divorced families about marriage was conducted by Gelfman (1995). His results were similar to that of Boyer-Pennington and Spink in that he found that children learn that marriage does not last a lifetime, that people do not have to remain in unsatisfying relationships, and that divorce can provide opportunities to seek greater happiness with alternative partners. It seems that observational learning is the mechanism through which this learning takes place.

Sprague and Kinney (1997) conducted a study examining college students' marital attitudes as a function of structural (i.e. parental marital status, gender) and family environment (i.e. conflict, cohesion, and expressiveness while growing up). Their results suggest that parental conflict and divorce may affect children's attitudes towards marriage because parents tend to transmit negative ideas and behaviors about marriage to their children. These negative ideas and behaviours

are often internalised by the children, which often leaves them with feelings of fear about marriage, anticipating that they too might end up divorced.

Goodman (1969) disagrees with Sprague and Kinney's views that children internalize the negative ideas, attitudes and behaviours that have been transmitted by their parents about marriage. Goodman supports the views of Becker and Mead (1984). He is of the view that attitudes, behaviours, habits and values are not simply passed down but are also passed over and up. Thus what the situation offers the individual in terms of family structure is a collection of loose pieces and movable parts grouped around a few stable pillars. Goodman states that each person creates his/her own version of marriage in order to meet his/her needs. Also as many people come to reject or prize certain parts of the family structure, the society and the family structure change.

A study conducted by Booth, Brinkerhoff and White (cited in Amato, 1988) found that college students from divorced families, compared with those from intact families, expressed fewer reservations about being involved in an intimate relationship due to fear of failure. This is because they perceived their parents' inability to resolve their marital problems as a failure and therefore feared that they may experience the same in their own relationships and marriages.

Kulka and Weingarten (cited in Amato, 1988) found that adult women from divorced families of origin viewed the marital role as having less importance than did women from intact families. Women whose parents had divorced were more likely than other women to rate the role of a mother as being more important than that of a wife. The significance of the mother's role might be linked to observations made during childhood. Another possibility might be related to Bowen's (1978) theory which states that family culture is passed on from generation to generation. It might be that in the families of those women whose parents had divorced the role of a woman was rated higher and given greater importance. Furthermore, married men from divorced families of origin were more likely than other men to agree that divorce is often the best solution to marital problems. These findings suggest that some males and females from divorced families tend to attach less value to the institution of marriage.

The duration of parental divorce seems to be another important factor influencing the marital attitudes of children. Jeynes (2001) conducted a study looking at the impact that the duration of parental divorce has on children. She found that children whose parents had recently divorced showed no positive attitudes towards marriage than their counterparts whose parents had been divorced for four years or more. This suggests that the recent the divorce experience is, the greater the impact it will have on the child. However the severity of the effect may depend on

various other issues. For instance, a child who was exposed to parental conflict consistently may be relieved by the break up of his/her parents. If divorce includes a parent who was emotionally distant to a child it may also not have a significant impact on the child.

There seems to be a limited amount of research studies that have focused on looking at the marital attitudes of children from single parent homes, (i.e children whose parents never married and are not staying together or children raised by one parent due to the death of the other parent). However, Risch (2001) conducted a study in Michigan where he/she was looking at the quality of children's relationship with their single parents (parents never married and not staying together) and the impact this has on their attitudes towards marriage. The children who had a more closer relationship with their single parent had confidence in their ability to form long-lasting relationships and a positive attitude towards marriage. Risch states that this is because their parents showed warmth and affection to them resulting in secure attachments with parents. As a result parents became role models to their children on how to relate to others.

Converse (2000) conducted a study in America looking at attitudes towards marriage of children from single parent homes. The results show that these children had positive attitudes towards marriage although they expressed a plan to delay marriage and to select a partner

very carefully. They had more realistic and cautious views about marriage and family life.

## **2.9 Socio Economic issues**

Hetherington and Camara (1984) argue that divorced parents have to cope with the diminished financial resources. Divorced women with children are a group that is most affected given that they may not have access to the family income they had access to. Lopata (1979) agrees with Hetherington and Camara that an economic burden becomes a problem for both sexes. If the husband has been a breadwinner, the wife is deprived of his income. The man on his part has to buy many of the services his wife provided such as household chores. He also states that the loss of a marriage partner brings about changes such as the need to move, enter the labour force or change jobs so that one can earn more money. The financial constraints that are experienced by the divorced couple seem to have an impact on some of the children's attitude towards marriage.

For instance, Gilman, Kawachi, Fitzmaurice and Buka (2003), examined the risk that family break down and low socio-economic status in early childhood has on children's attitudes towards marriage. The results showed that family breakdown and low socio-economic status in childhood predicted a high possibility of children having negative

attitudes towards marriage because it increased the chances of childhood disadvantages. Furthermore, Gilman et al. (2003) suggest that children perceive divorce as leading to financial constraints in which their needs are not sufficiently met. This can reinforce their negative attitude towards marriage.

Another way in which socio-economic status affects children is seen in the association of low socio-economic status with marital conflict and divorce. Lach (1999) suggests that well educated couples may be able to communicate more effectively than poorly educated couples, thus facilitating problem solving within the relationship. However this could also depend on the way an individual has been socialized on how to communicate or how to deal with problems. Furthermore he adds that the stress generated by economic hardship may increase disagreements over finances and leave spouses tense and irritable. These considerations suggest that children with parents who have low socio-economic status may hold unfavourable attitudes towards getting married, from having observed their parents' relationship.

### **2.10 Alternative views on the effects of divorce on children's and adolescent's attitudes about marriage**

The impression gained from some of the reviewed literature may be that the impact of divorce is the same for most of the children and therefore,

highly predictable. These perceptions may fail to take into account the phenomenon of continuous growth and change. As the child grows from childhood to adolescence, from adolescence to adulthood, the self is reconstructed and so is the complex of meanings attached to situations. Human development is not fixed and inevitable, nor is the substance of the self unalterable. The adult's inner world and his/her progress through life is determined by a range of arbitrary variables such as nationality, age, generation and others.

There are studies that suggest that despite its negative effects, divorce does not seem to negatively affect the marital attitudes of children. Mahl's (2001) study suggests that children of divorced families do not necessarily have a negative view of marriage. The results of his study show that parental divorce should not simply be viewed as a negative event because in some situations, it results in improved family relations.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1974) conducted a study in America in which they were looking at the impact parental divorce has on adolescents' later intimate relationships. The results of their study show that adolescents whose parents had divorced expressed anxiety over their own future marriages. This anxiety took on two forms: some adolescents expressed a desire to never marry, whereas others were determined to be more selective and wiser than their parents in choosing a partner. This



suggests that some adolescents use their parents' relationship as a learning experience.

In supporting the latter, Wallerstein (cited in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) sees divorce as a relief from an intolerable situation and as an opportunity for a new beginning. She suggests that children of divorce, like adults of divorce, have an opportunity of learning from their parents' experience. These children have the opportunities to negotiate different and better solutions in their own lives and to reinterpret their earlier experiences in light of new found maturity, thus avoiding mistakes committed by their parents. They have a chance to choose better and to resolve the unresolved issues of a childhood that included the trauma of divorce.

Darlington (2001) investigated the impact of parental divorce and contested custody in childhood on children's later relationships with their partners and their attitudes to relationships and marriage. The results show that children from divorced families were determined not to repeat their parents' mistakes. They reported various strategies to achieve this, including not rushing into relationships, developing effective relationship skills, developing a strong sense of being their own persons and ensuring financial security prior to marriage and having children.

Wallerstein cited in (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) and others (Beal & Hochman, 1991; Berman, 1991; Conway, 1990) agree with the finding that children whose parents divorced can learn from their parents' mistakes. Their study investigated the impact that parental divorce has on children's later intimate relationships. They found that children whose parents have divorced preferred not to rush into marriage. They seek a good marriage, commitment, romantic love that lasts, and faithfulness. However their hopes are shadowed by the sorrowful sense that they are unlikely to achieve these goals due to their fear for rejection and betrayal in relationships. Another factor that undermines their hopes for a positive marital experience is low self-esteem. A low self-esteem may develop in situations where the child blames himself/herself for the separation of his/her parents or feels rejected or abandoned by the parent who has left. This self-criticism carries over into other relationships with other people. The person with a low self-esteem holds back, fearing that increased intimacy will result only in more pain and inevitably, betrayal.

Wallerstein cited in (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989), states that the psychological tasks for the children whose parents have divorced is to engage in committed relationships and some of the children enter into committed relationships despite negative experiences associated with divorce.

### **2.11 Modes of Change**

In Mead's (1984) views each individual occupies a unique position in his/her group. He states that while different children have experienced marital conflicts and parental divorce, there is an obvious fact that not all these experiences are efficacious for each child. He further argues that the process maneuvering through the bad experiences and situations enables each individual make his/her unique resolution, and through this process of individual norm synthesis social change takes place.

Given the research findings one may conclude that the conflict and turmoil surrounding family disruption, gender, the age of the child when the parents divorced and the period since the divorce affects children's psychological adjustment. This includes having to cope with the loss of one parent, feelings of guilt, anger, sadness and low self-esteem. Another factor that affects children's psychological adjustment to their parental divorce is the lack of support they experience from their parents after the divorce. This may lead to children of divorce to hold relatively negative attitudes towards marriage. This is because children model their parents' behaviour and in other cases parents transmit negative views about marriage, which their children then internalize.

### **2.12. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study lends itself to a Bowenian family systems theory. According to Lieberman (1979), Bowen family systems theory views the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in the unit. According to Bowen (1978) relationships among family members depend on the extent of emotional connection among them. Often people feel connected or disconnected from their families and this is related to feelings that family members have towards each other. They affect each other's thoughts, feelings and actions to such an extent that it often feels as if they are living under the same "emotional skin". In most relationships, people solicit each other's attention, approval and support and react to each other's needs, expectations and distress. The connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent. A change in one person's functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others.

Lieberman also mentions that much of Bowen's thinking intertwines with transgenerational theory which holds that family culture is passed from one generation to another, and in this way the sums of individual family culture are passed on as community heritage. Furthermore, the emotional interdependence that evolves in the family helps to promote the cohesiveness and cooperation families require, to protect, shelter, and feed their members. Heightened tension, however, can intensify these processes that promote unity and teamwork, and this can lead to

problems. When family members get anxious, the anxiety can escalate and affect other members. The increase of anxiety can undermine the emotional connectedness members experienced towards each other.

According to Bowen (1978) anxiety is a consequence of both the projection and processes within the family of origin. The family projects anxiety onto one or more children who then incorporates or introjects the anxiety within a personal intrapsychic system. The child then carries the anxiety into subsequent relationships. The first feature that may heighten this projection process is fusion, which is the degree to which the family relationships are emotionally bound. The second feature is triangulation in which a third party, in this case a child, becomes the focus of tension in the marital dyad. Triangulation serves to decrease anxiety in the relationship between a couple, but increases anxiety in the individual who is triangulated (Bowen, 1978). Such anxious individuals perceive close relationships as negative and threatening, contributing to lack of intimacy and satisfaction (Benson, Larson, Wilson, Demo, 1993; West, Zarski, & Harvill, 1986). The third feature is the amount of control and intimidation by the parent to the child. Although the rigid expectations and excessive control by the parents over the child's behaviour may alleviate the anxiety in the marital dyad, it merely shifts the anxiety from the marital dyad to the child. The excessive expectations by parents that their children should only conform to family rules in controlling families, raises fears of

disciplinary consequences such as parental withdrawal of affection. Controlling dynamics in which children are not given the chance to express their own opinions and feelings about how they experience their environment also promotes intimidating views about the world. If these expectations and views are internalized, the result is a generalized apprehension across interpersonal situations. Another concept that Bowen uses is that of differentiation. This refers to those individuals who can transcend not only their own emotions but also those of the family system. Such people can extricate themselves from emotional entanglements. People who are differentiated are also flexible, adaptable, and more self-sufficient. They feel their own feelings while being aware of the feelings of others around them and are able to maintain a degree of objectivity and emotional distance.

Amato and Booth (1991), Glen and Kramer (1987), and Conway (1990) used the term intergenerational transmission of divorce to refer to the probability that adult children of divorce are more likely to be divorced compared to those who come from intact families. Regarding the intergenerational transmission of marital instability, Beal and Hochman (1991) maintain that it is not the divorce legacy, but the family patterns leading to the divorce that seep into future generations. Divorce also affects the future generations' sense of commitment to relationships in a more profound and lasting way. However, this may not be the case for all children because this depends on, amongst others, the socialization

process as well as which parent the child feels more close to. This suggests that parental divorce elevates the risk of offspring divorce by increasing the likelihood of offspring exhibiting behaviors that interfere with the maintenance of mutually rewarding intimate relationships.

Bowen's theory provides a basis for extrapolation of several hypothesis regarding attitudes and feelings about marriage. The experience of fusion, triangulation and control in the family of origin has an influence on the children's ability to develop independent thinking. This suggests that the child is not given opportunities to express his/her views, feelings, beliefs or to learn skills for developing intimate relationships outside the family. Such individuals tend to perceive major life changes such as marriage with fear. Their relatively unsatisfying dating relationships may create negative expectations and feelings about future relationships like marriage and discourage them from pursuing a more intimate relationship like marriage. Furthermore, they are more likely than individuals from more functional families to perceive marriage as a challenge and are likely to perceive themselves as less prepared for marriage due to negative feelings (Bowen, 1978).

In the light of the above exposition, Bowen's theory became a preferred theoretical framework because it helps to explain how processes in the family of origin may influence the attitudes of children towards marriage. For instance, will an individual who was raised by both

parents who were married have different attitudes towards marriage than an individual who was raised by a single parent who never got married? The answer is unknown, because it may be that both present with positive or negative attitudes towards marriage depending on the family dynamics between the individual and his/her parents. It is possible that the individual who was raised by both parents who are married have negative attitudes towards marriage than his/her counterpart due to witnessing conflict between her parents and at times being forced by either parent to take sides. Therefore the theory will help us understand how families function and how they deal and cope with situations that are stressful. It will also help to explain what is it about family functioning that results in children having negative or positive attitudes towards marriage.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This chapter will focus on various aspects of the methodology such as the research design, sample size and sampling procedure, the instrument that was used to collect data and procedures that were used to reach participants and data analysis.

#### **3.2. Research design**

This study was located within a quantitative research method. A survey research design was used as a methodological framework. Often the purpose of a survey is to determine how people feel about a particular issue. Surveys typically identify facts, opinions, attitudes, behavioral self-reports, and relationships among psychological variables and data

are often collected through questionnaires, mailed surveys, telephone interviews, or personal interviews (Reaves, 1992).

### **3.3. Sampling method**

Given that the study was concerned with investigating the marital attitudes of students from divorced, intact and single parent families, students from the University of the Western Cape were chosen as potential participants.

A convenience sampling method was used. According to Reaves (1992) self-selected convenience sampling consists of simply observing the members of the population who happen to be handy. In this study the sample consisted of students who are willing to participate. This sampling procedure was considered because it was difficult to use other procedures such as quota sampling given the nature of the study. The sample was convenient and therefore, not representative.

#### **3.3.1. Sample size**

The sample size consisted of 209 students from the Community and Health Sciences Faculty. There were 58 (28%) males and 151 (72%)

females. Fifty-four participants' were in their first year of study, 102 in their second year and 53 in their third year. The mean age of the sample was 22 years, with an age distribution of 18-49 years. Eighty seven percent of the participants fell between 18-25 years old.

### **3.3. Research instrument**

A Marital Attitude Scale (MAS) developed by Braaten and Rosen (1998) was used in this study. A biographical questionnaire was constructed to collect biographical data. The scale consists of 23 items. Six of the items require participants to rate their feelings regarding their own present or possibly future marriage, while the remaining items require participants to react to statements dealing with general concepts regarding marriage. For each item, participants are expected to rate their opinions or feelings on certain statements (see Appendix A) on a scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The total MAS score ranges from a minimum of 23 to a maximum of 92. Higher scores indicate a more positive attitude towards marriage. The scale was retested for reliability with a group of introductory psychology students at Colorado State University. A test-retest reliability of 0.85 was found. The MAS is also suited for use with persons who are both married and unmarried (Bassett, Braaten, & Rosen, 1999). The suitability of the instrument for South Africa was

determined by piloting it to 10 UWC students. The pilot sample felt that the questionnaire was clear, understandable and comprehensible.

The internal consistency for the scale in the present study was 0.79 (Cronbach's alpha) which indicates high reliability. However clinical score values were not provided. In order to determine whether participants have negative or positive attitudes towards marriage, a midpoint value of 58 was used. Scores below 58 were regarded as indicative of negative attitudes and scores from 58 and above would indicate positive attitudes.

### **3.4. Procedure**

Permission was asked from the Senate Research Committee of the University of the Western Cape to conduct the study. Furthermore, permission was also sought from lecturers in order to administrate questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered in a group context. Before administration of the questionnaires, participants were informed of the voluntarily and confidentiality nature of the study.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

Data were analyzed by means of basic descriptive statistics, the Kruskal Wallis H-test, the T-test and the Mann Whitney U-Test. This was done

using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The Kruskal-Wallis H test was used to compare the means of more than two groups in order to decide whether the differences amongst them represented a chance occurrence or a systematic effect. The T-test and the Mann Whitney U-tests were used to determine whether two groups differed significantly in terms of some variables (Pretorius, 1995).

### **3.6 Ethical consideration**

Permission to conduct the study was sought from the psychology department and the University's research ethics committee. Participation was voluntary. Participants were assured of confidentiality. It was indicated that the study is anonymous. The participants were informed that they will be able to access the results of the study from the psychology department resource center or the library. They were also informed that referrals could be made for those who want counseling.

### **3.7 Significance of the study**

The sample of the study constituted of students from different age, gender, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds. It is possible that there are differences in the way they understand and associate meaning to the concept of marriage. Therefore the study will help us to see whether

students from divorced, intact and single-parent families have different attitudes towards marriage. An understanding of their marital attitude will help in developing effective multicultural interventions applicable within a South African context.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings of the study are discussed. First, a description of the sample will be given. This will be followed by a discussion of the descriptive statistics. The last section will focus on the findings regarding the marital attitudes of the participants.

#### 4.2 Description of the sample

A description of the sample appears in Table 1 in terms of gender, religion, race and parental marital status.

**Table 1: Biographical profile of respondents**

<b>Biographical data</b>	<b>Total= 209</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	58	28
Female	151	72
<b>Religion</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Christian	176	84.2
Islam	25	12
Hindu	1	0.5
Traditional African	6	2.9
Other	1	0.5
<b>Race</b>	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Black	67	32.1
White	2	1

Coloured	128	61.2
Indian	9	4.3
Other	3	1.4
<b>Parental Marital Status</b>		
	<b>No. of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Legally Married	112	53.6
Traditionally Married	11	5.3
Divorced	28	13.4
Single Parent (Never Married)	31	14.8
Widow / Widowed	21	10
Separated (Not staying together but still legally married)	6	2.9

According to Table 1, most of the participants in this study were females (72%). With regard to religion, a significant majority belonged to the Christian faith. The second largest group belonged to the Islamic faith. Table 1 further shows that there were more participants from the Coloured community, followed by those from the Black community. There were very few participants from the Indian and White community. The “Other” was used as a racial category for those participants who did not belong to any of the four categories commonly used in South Africa. This category included American, Japanese, Chinese, Russian ect.

Parental marital status was another variable that was used to describe the sample. According to Table 1, more than half of the participants came from intact families (53.6%), 13.4% came from divorced families and 2.9% came from single parent families.

#### **4.3. Results pertaining to marital attitudes and parental marital status**



A relationship was tested between students' marital attitudes and their parents' marital status. The Kruskal Wallis H-Test was used for analysis. Two questionnaires of participants from intact families were excluded from the analysis because they were incomplete. Initially, the analysis was guided by six parental marital status permutations, namely, legally married, traditionally married, divorced, single-never married, widowed and separated but still married.

The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference in the marital attitudes of the participants whose parents' marital status was similar to one of this six permutations (1.77,  $p < 0.05$ ).

These variables, legally married, traditionally married, divorced, single (never married), widowed and separated but still married, were then transformed to married, divorced and single-parenting. There was still no statistically significant difference in the participants' marital attitudes (0.64,  $p < 0.05$ ). An inspection of Table 2 shows no significant difference in the mean values of the three parental marital status permutations.

**Table 2 : Mean values for family type**

Marital Status Recoded	No. of Respondents	Mean Value	Std,deviation
Married	122	65.5	8.79
Divorced	27	64.9	9.14
Single parent	58	64.7	8.22
Total	207		

#### **4.4. Results pertaining to other significant variables**

##### **4.4.1. Gender**

Given gender differences in marital attitude, it was considered significant to examine gender differences in the participants' marital attitudes. The Mann Whitney U-Test was used to investigate the possible differences. The mean scores were 66.9 for males and 64.8 for females respectively. Although there was a small difference in the mean values, the results showed that the difference in the marital attitudes of males and females were not statistically significant (-1.03,  $p < 0.05$ ).

##### **4.4.2. RELIGION**

The Mann Whitney U-test was also used to compare the marital attitudes of students according to their religious affiliation. There were 176 Christians and the "Other" religious group (Islam, Hindu, Traditional African, "Other") added up to a total of 33 (see Table 1). Therefore in this case the variables were transformed to Christian and

“Other”. The mean score of the Christian religious group was 100.87 and that of the “Other” religious group was 120.52 (see Table 3 below). Although the two mean scores were different, the difference was not statistically significant ( $-1.73$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, they were very high.

**Table3: Mean values of religious group**

Variable	Number of respondents	Mean Value
Christian	174	100.87
Other Religion	33	120.52
Total	207	

#### **4.4.3. Race**

According to Table 1, there were very few participants from the White and Indian communities. As a result the variables were transformed to Black, Coloured and “Other” as illustrated by Table 4 below. This suggests that under the “Other” group the White and the Indian group were also included. The Kruskal Wallis H-Test was then used to compare participants’ attitudes towards marriage based on their racial groups. The mean value for the Black racial group was 61.94, that of the Coloured group was 66.3 and that of the “Other” group was 71.21. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference among the different racial groups ( $18.51$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). There was a statistically significant difference between the Blacks and Coloureds, with Blacks

scoring lower than the Coloureds. There was also a statistically significant difference between the Black group and the “Other” group, as well as between the Coloured group and the “Other” group, with the “Others” scoring higher than the Blacks and Coloureds. Although the mean value for the Black racial group (61.94) was lower than that of Coloureds (66.3) and “Other” racial group (71.21) all the racial groups showed positive attitudes towards marriage.

**Table 4: Mean values of racial group**

Variable	No. of respondents	Mean Value	Std. deviation
Black	66	61.94	8.81
Coloured	127	66.3	8.16
Other	14	71.21	7.02

#### **4.4.4 Age at the time of divorce**

**Table 5: Distribution of participants by age when their parents divorced**

Variable	No. of respondents	Mean Value	Std. deviation
Early childhood	10	65.4	7.9
Middle/Late childhood	9	66.9	7.9
Adolescent	9	62.4	10.9

The participants were divided into three groups based on their age at the time their parents were divorced. Participants in the age range of 1-6 were grouped into early childhood, those from 7-13 were grouped into middle childhood and those in the 16-20 age range were put in the

adolescence group. The Kruskal Wallis H-Test was used for analysis. The mean scores are reflected in Table 6. The results showed that there was no statistically significant difference among the different age groups.

#### **4.5. Summary of results**

In conclusion the results illustrate that participants' marital attitudes are not influenced by their parents marital status. Regarding gender and religion results showed no significant effect on participants' marital attitudes. The results also showed that students' age at the time of their parents divorce had no effect on their attitudes towards marriage. Race was the only variable that participants were compared on which showed a statistically significant difference on the marital attitudes of participants. Although the mean value for the Black racial group was lower than that of Coloureds and "Other" racial group all the racial groups showed positive attitudes towards marriage.

## **CHAPTER FIVE.**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the research results reported in the previous chapter will be discussed and interpreted. An attempt will be made to understand the results pertaining to the marital attitudes of participants as a function of their parents' marital status. Furthermore, the results of other significant variables such as race, gender, religion and age at the time of parental divorce will be discussed.

## **5.2 Parental marital status and participants marital attitudes**

A finding of this study is that there was no significant difference with regard to the marital attitudes of students from intact, divorced and single parent families. This means the research hypotheses are not supported. The hypotheses that were formulated included (1) Students from divorced families will have a more negative attitude towards marriage than those from intact families, (2) Students from divorced families will have a more negative attitude towards marriage than those from single parent families and (3) Students from single parent families will have a more negative attitude towards marriage than those from intact families. All the hypotheses were not supported.

Although there are several reasons to explain this finding, it is possible that methodological factors are some of the reasons that can account for this finding. One of the factors is the sampling procedure that was used.

One of the shortcomings of convenience sampling is that it presents an unequal probability of a sample. In the study this resulted in over and under-representation of some of the participants.

It is imperative in a comparative study to have the comparative groups equally or nearly equally distributed. Given the relatively small number of participants from divorced and single parent families (see Table 2), it is possible that high scores in these groups might have increased the mean, making it difficult to discriminate among the three groups. This tendency does not easily take place in large groups given the relatively high likelihood of scores resembling a normal distribution in large groups. The difficulties of an unequal distribution of the participants were also observed when results were analysed according to the participants' racial group. For instance, in the category "Other", White and Indian participants had high mean values because of their relatively small number. Often when one averages few candidates with high marks, the average tends to be high.

Another possible reason for the statistically non-significant results is the measurement scale that was used. Although this measurement was pilot-tested for face validity and clarity of items, its content validity was not established.

In addition to these methodological explanations, there are other possible theoretical explanations for this finding. These include, amongst others, the resilience of many of the participants from divorced and single parent families. This suggests that participants from these types of families might have been able to access inner and outer resources to overcome their circumstances. The seemingly difficult circumstances of these participants might have strengthened their coping strategies and enabled them to come through the painful times with an increased sensitivity and compassion that serve them well in their own adult lives.

Although Bowen (1978) concedes that the manner in which parents relate to their own children has an influence on how the children relate to others in their environment and, when they become parents, to their own children, he believes that through processes such as differentiation, there is a possibility that these children can transcend the limits imposed by their emotional family system. This means they can separate themselves from the emotional entanglements of their family of origin. This suggests that there is a possibility that the participants might have created and maintained an emotional distance from the family's emotional system that allows a somewhat objective assessment of intimate relationships.



There is also a strong association between parental marital conflict and children's overall well-being, including marital attitudes (Jenkins & Smith, 1991). The literature on family processes suggest that children from intact families with high levels of conflict and those from divorced families may exhibit similar responses to marriage (Jennings, Salt & Smith, 1992). This is because divorced parents may relate to their children in similar ways as married parents and this may lead to children from both intact and divorced families displaying the same difficulties in their intimate relationships. In addition, Levitin (1979) also argued that although research has been focused on the role of family structure (e.g intact, divorced, etc) in explaining marital attitudes, it is also important to focus on the influence of family processes such as fusion and differentiation because these processes might be useful in explaining the development of attitudes towards marriage.

The results of this study pertaining to statistically non significant difference on the marital attitudes of students from intact, divorced and single parent families can be understood as being supportive of Mahl's (2001 cited in Wallerstien & Blakeslee, 1989) and Beal and Hochman's (1991) findings. These researchers noted that children from divorced or single parent homes do not necessarily have negative attitudes towards marriage when compared to their counterparts from intact families. This is because for some children divorce may be a relief from an intorelable

situation. These children use their parents' experience as a learning opportunity and thus try not to repeat their parents' mistakes.

These views are also shared by Converse (2000) and Darlington (2001). They suggest that these children delay marriage and choose the right partner and invest in gaining a sense of individuality. In Bowenian terms, they would have achieved differentiation. Bowen mentions that such people can extricate themselves from emotional entanglements and are also flexible, adaptable, and more self-sufficient.

### **5.3. Discussion of results of significant variables**

#### **5.3.1. Race**

Although the participants from all the racial groups showed a generally positive attitude towards marriage, there was a statistically significant difference between the marital attitudes of participants from Black and Coloured communities on one hand and Coloured and "Other" racial group. There was also a statistically significant difference between the Black group and the "Other" group, as well as between the Coloured group and the "Other" group, with the "Others" scoring higher than the Blacks and Coloureds. All racial groups showed positive attitudes towards marriage although the Black racial group showed a less positive

attitude towards marriage compared to the other racial groups.

Possible reasons to explain why the Black racial group had the least positive attitudes towards marriage can be linked to the migrant labour system which had more impact on the Black community. The system had an adverse effect on family life and social development. This is due to the fact that men and women who should be playing their part as husbands and wives, as mothers and fathers and as members of the community were absent for long periods (Simkins 1981).

The migrant labour system disrupted family structure and functioning, particularly in the Black community. Furthermore, the system itself made it illegal for many African (Black, Coloured and Indian) women to live with their husbands, except during the annual holiday time when migrant labourers could go to visit their wives. The system made a mockery of family life. It created and aggravated bigamy, prostitution, homosexuality, drunkenness, breakdown of parental authority which often lead to marital breakdown. Other men who left their families started new lives for themselves with other partners. It can be hypothesized that the wives of these men particularly the Black women were left with unresolved feelings of anger, sadness, desertion, disappointment and abandonment which might have resulted to depression. These feelings might have been unconsciously communicated to the children where some of the children might be left

with the belief that when one gets married there is a possibility of being disappointed, deserted and abandoned.

It was considered possible that children who grew up under these conditions became exposed to inappropriate family structures and modeling of spousal roles. It was believed that this might have left these children with negative attitudes towards marriage.

Another factor that might have contributed to the Black racial group having the least positive attitudes towards marriage could be due Duran-Aydintug's (1997) views. He mentioned that after divorce the spouses' initial focus is on their own problems, resulting in a weakened capacity to parent and less support being given to the children. Their inability to sufficiently support their children contribute to feelings of anxiety and may contribute to their children developing a negative attitude towards marriage (Walczack & Burns, 1984; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, cited in Snyman, 1993).

Participants from the Coloured and "Other" racial group were also affected by the migrant labour system but not to the extent it affected the Black racial group. It can thus be considered possible that they might have still been able to benefit from relatively stable and nurturing parental relationships. This may have served as a protective factor from

developing a negative perception of marriage which is why they showed more positive attitudes towards marriage.

Despite the influence that the migrant labour system had on family life it seems, particularly for the Black group that resilience also played a role as participants who belonged in this group were able to maintain positive attitudes towards marriage. The Black racial group's ability to be able to maintain positive attitudes towards marriage could also be linked to Bowen's concept of differentiation. This suggests that these individuals were able to transcend not only their own emotions but also those of the family system in order not to be influenced by family beliefs, perceptions or values regarding marriage.

### **5.3.2. Gender**

Participants were also compared on possible gender differences regarding their attitudes towards marriage. The findings of the study showed that there was no statistically significant difference on participants' attitudes towards marriage. Both males and females showed positive attitudes towards marriage with males showing more positive attitudes towards marriage as compared to females.

This finding might be linked to the oppression of women in some sections of South Africa, thus it can be hypothesised that men would

have a more positive attitude towards marriage than women. This hypothesis is on the notion that marriage is possibly one of the areas where some men feel in control. As such, they would be favourably disposed to it more than women. Although methodological reasons such as the unequal distribution of males and females can be advanced to explain this finding, there are other possible explanations. For example, Becker and Mead (1984) state that as children grow they often choose to make new versions and meanings of marriage in order to meet their own needs. This they do by rejecting some of their family values and beliefs.

Another possible reason to more positive marital attitudes by males can be linked to having had an opportunity to go for counseling regarding intimate relationship issues. From a feminist perspective when individuals present for therapy with relationship issues, the way in which the individual was socialized regarding gender differences and/or the relationship that the individual's parents' had are assessed. This is because the difficulty that might be faced by the individual regarding his/her intimate relationship/s might be influenced by his/her environment. Therefore the individual client would be taught to reframe which refers to a shift from perceiving his/her difficulties from an intrapersonal and individual point of view, but rather to a societal and political view. This is accomplished by identifying the contribution of external environment to the individual's behaviour. For women this provides empowerment as it allows previously evaluated weaknesses to

be seen as strengths. For both women and men it provides them with an awareness of the severe damage caused by sex role socialization and sexism. This results to change in the perceptions previously learned about gender differences.

### **5.3.3. Religion**

An attempt was made to compare the marital attitudes of different religious groups. The religious groups showed very high mean scores which suggests more positive attitudes towards marriage. According to Table 3, the mean scores of the “Other” was higher than that of Christians. The “Other” represents participants from the Islamic, Hindu and African Traditional religions. Despite the high mean value of the “Other”, the differences were not statistically significant. This means that even though participants from the Islamic, Hindu and African Traditional religion had a more positive attitude to marriage than their counterparts from the Christian faith, these differences were not statistically significant. Religion seems to have a more positive impact on marital attitude than would be expected.

A possible reason that might have accounted for this finding is a methodological factor which can be linked to the sampling procedure that was used. One of the shortcomings of convenience sampling is that

it presents an unequal probability of a sample. In the study this resulted in over and under-representation of some of the participants.

Given the relatively small number of participants from the “Other” religious group (see Table 3), it is possible that high scores in these groups might have increased the mean, making it difficult to discriminate among the religious groups. This tendency does not easily take place in large groups given the relatively high likelihood of scores resembling a normal distribution in large groups. For instance, in the category “Other”, the mean value was high because of the relatively small number of participants. Often when one averages few candidates with high marks, the average tends to be high.

Another possible reason may be linked to participants having come from very religious family backgrounds where a lot of significance is attached to the institution of family and marriage for procreation and social solidarity. It can be considered possible that participants who grew up in such environments may have been exposed to learning positive attitudes towards marriage through socialization and/or observational learning.

#### **5.3.4. Age**

Looking at the role of participants’ age at the time of their parents’ divorce on marital attitudes, the results indicated that there is no



statistically significant difference amongst the different age groups. All participants showed positive attitudes towards marriage. Participants whose parents divorced when they were adolescents had the lowest mean score. This suggests that they had less positive attitude towards marriage compared to those participants whose parents divorced in their early childhood and middle childhood. The second lowest group was the early childhood group and the group with the highest mean was the middle childhood group. This suggests that those participants in the middle childhood group had more positive attitude towards marriage.

Some studies suggest that the age of children during divorce has an impact on their attitudes towards marriage (Glenn & Kramer, 1985; Silverman, 1989).

According to Silverman (1989) if parental divorce occurred when the child is in the early childhood developmental phase, the impact is not severe because during this phase the child doesn't fully understand the implications of his or her loss. She further states that when a child is in his/her adolescent developmental phase parental divorce has more impact because during this phase the child is cognitively matured and can better understand the implications of his/her loss. Silverman's views suggest that children whose parents divorced when they were in their early childhood may display more positive attitudes towards marriage than children whose parents divorced during adolescence.

The results of the study support the views of Silverman because participants whose parents got divorced in the early childhood developmental phase showed more positive attitudes than participants whose parents divorced during adolescence. However there are other alternative explanations to the findings.

According to Winnicott (cited in St. Clair, 2000) an environment that is good enough facilitates the maturational process of the infant. He states that emotional development of the child is enhanced in terms of the child's relationship with the mother rather than in terms of instincts. Winnicott believed that the infant's needs and maturational processes are crucial, and it is the parents' responsibility to adapt to them.

This suggests that a reason for participants' whose parents divorced during early childhood to show more positive attitudes towards marriage than participants whose parents divorced during adolescence can be linked to having had a good enough environment before and after parental divorce. This suggests that their parents were able to continue providing them with a warm, supportive, nurturing environment.

Adolescents had the least positive attitudes towards marriage compared to those participants whose parents divorced when they were in their early childhood and middle childhood. This can be linked to the emotional, physical and social crisis that adolescents are faced with.

According to Erikson (cited in Kaplan and Sadock, 1998) the main task for adolescence is developing a sense of self. However apart from that adolescents also go through a process of puberty. Erikson states that identity formation can be build if earlier developmental stages have been successfully passed through. It can also be build by identifying with healthy parents and this helps to facilitate the process of identity formation.

For an adolescent whose parents are going through a process of divorce or who have already divorced it might be challenging to be able to pass through his/her developmental crises. This is because divorce includes change in residence, assumption of new roles and responsibilities, reorganization of routines and schedules. The couple is likely to become angry, depressed, moody, lonely and otherwise distressed although often relieved as well. The divorced parents are overburdened by responsibilities and by their own emotional reactions to the divorce, they often become irritable, impatient and insensitive to their children's needs (Hetherington & Camara 1984).

Furthermore, when the parents of the adolescent divorce this perpetuates an identity and role confusion for the adolescent. For example, a boy who loses his father through divorce may assume a father role at home by taking on his father's responsibilities, while at the same time he/she may need to be nurtured by his/her parents. It can

be considered possible that any adolescent who experiences a lack of nurturance from his/her parents because of divorce and being overburdened by responsibilities due to the loss of the other parent may have less positive attitudes towards marriage. This is because such an environment adds more pressure on his/her identity crisis, as it does not facilitate the process.

Children whose parents got divorced when they were in their middle childhood had a higher mean score than both those children whose parents got divorced in their early childhood and those that were adolescents. This suggests that children whose parents got divorced when they were in their middle childhood showed more positive attitudes towards marriage.

According to Freud (cited in St. Clair, 2000) during middle childhood the child is in the latency phase. Freud states that dangerous impulses and fantasies that the child had in the previous stages of development are sublimated. He states that the latency phase is a period of relative calmness. The child redirects his/her energies into concrete, socially acceptable pursuits such as sports, games and intellectual activities. There seems to be less relational issues between the child and his/her parents', which might be the reason for participants whose parents got divorced during this phase to have more positive attitudes towards marriage.

Other possible reasons can be linked to a good enough environment, which the child was exposed to before and after the divorce including the child's own resilience to the experience of loss.

Furthermore, participants might have received the appropriate psychological intervention[s] to deal with the divorce. For others the divorce of their parents may have been a relief of a painful experience.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

In conclusion the findings of the study seem to indicate that there is no difference between the groups. Variables that participants were compared on such as gender, religion and age at the time of parental divorce, showed no statistically significant difference. Race was the only variable that showed a statistically significant difference. However, although there was a statistically significant difference all racial groups showed positive attitudes towards marriage.

## **CHAPTER SIX.**

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter the key findings of the study are summarized. There is also a discussion of the shortcomings of the study. Lastly, the recommendations for future research are discussed.

## **6.2 Summary and discussion**

The aim of the study was to examine the marital attitudes of UWC students from intact, divorced and single parent families. Generally, the students showed positive attitudes towards marriage.

The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference among different racial groups. The results suggest that except for race, there was no statistically significant difference on the marital attitudes when compared on such variables as gender, religion and age. Although the marital attitudes of participants were generally positive among the different racial groups, participants from the Black community had less positive marital attitudes when compared with their Coloured, Indian and White counterparts. Participants from the Coloured community also had less positive marital attitudes when compared to their counterparts from the Indian and White communities. The results of this study show that participants had relative positive attitudes towards marriage and that these attitudes did not differ according to parental status.

Although there was no statistically significant difference among different religious groups, it is interesting to note that participants with religious affiliations had very positive attitudes towards marriage.

## **6.3 Limitations of the study**

### 6.3.1 Sampling procedure

The sampling procedure that was used resulted in an unequal distribution of participants. This made it hard to determine the exact underlying reasons for the outcome of the research findings.

### 6.3.2 Questionnaire

Family processes such as fusion and differentiation were excluded in the questionnaire. These processes might be useful in explaining the development of attitudes towards marriage. This resulted to generalizations being made about the possible underlying reasons for the way in which results yielded.

## **6.4 Recommendations**



One of the limitations of the study was the sampling procedure that was used. As this was a comparative study, comparative groups needed to be equally or nearly equally distributed. This was not possible with some of the comparative groups due to the sampling method that was used in the study. It created an over and under-representation of some of the participants resulting in difficulties for analysis. Future research should try to avoid making use of non-probability sampling.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

The sample of the study constituted of students from different age, gender, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds. It was considered possible that there might be differences in the way they understand and associate meaning to the concept of marriage. Therefore the study has helped us understand that students from divorced, intact and single-parent families do not have different attitudes towards marriage. Furthermore, when students were compared on their religion, race and age at time of parental divorce they showed no differences on attitudes towards marriage.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Please circle the number that is most applicable to you in respect of each of the following items. Your responses will be treated as strictly confidential.**

**A. Your Age in \_\_\_\_\_ (Years).**

**B. Your Gender:**

1. Male
2. Female

**C. What is your religious affiliation?**

1. Roman Catholic
2. Anglican
3. United
4. Baptist
5. Presbyterian
6. Muslim
7. Other (please specify)

**D. Which racial group do you belong to?**

1. Black
2. White
3. Coloured
4. Indian
5. Other (please specify)

**F. Are your parents currently:**

1. Married (legally)
2. Married (traditionally)
3. Divorced
4. Single parent (never married)

- 5. Widow/ Widowed
- 6. Separated (not staying together but legally still married)

**G. If your parents are divorced, how long have they been divorced**  
\_\_\_\_\_ (put number of years)

**H. If your parents are divorced, how old were you when they got divorced?**

## MARITAL ATTITUDE SCALE

Please indicate by ticking how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding marriage:

1. People should marry

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

2. I have little confidence that my marriage will be a success

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

3. People should stay married to their spouses for the rest of their lives

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

4. Most couples are either unhappy in their marriage or are divorced

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

5. I will be satisfied when I get married

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

6. I am fearful of marriage

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

7. I have doubts about marriage

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

8. People should only get married if they are sure that it will last forever

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

9. People should very cautious about entering into a marriage

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

10. Most marriages are unhappy situations



Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**11.** Marriage is only a legal contract

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**12.** Marriage is a sacred act

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**13.** Most marriages aren't equal partnerships.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**14.** Most people have to sacrifice too much in marriage

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**15.** Because half of all marriages end in divorce, marriage seems futile

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**16.** If I divorce, I would probably remarry

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**17.** When people don't get along, I believe they should divorce

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**18.** I believe a relationship can be just as strong without having to go through the marriage ceremony

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**19.** My lifelong dream includes a happy marriage

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**20.** There is no such a thing as a happy marriage

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**21.** Marriage restricts individuals from achieving their goals

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**22.** People weren't meant to stay in one relationship for their entire lives

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------

**23.** Marriage provides companionship that is missing from other types of relationships

Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	----------	-------------------