

Emerging Adults:
Attachment and Caregiver Support in Forming Interpersonal Relationships

Melissa R. Olson
Marymount California University
Department of Psychology

Abstract

The author aims to examine factors in emerging adulthood abilities forming interpersonal relationships. The rest will be discussed later in this study. During this developmental period is a shift within interpersonal relationships which effect how people choose to remain single longer, not want children, higher divorce rates, quick to end interpersonal relationships, and unwilling to work out interpersonal relationship issues. In this study, participants were enrolled in a small private university in Southern California, United States. The samples average age was $M = 24.85$ ($SD = 7.90$) years old and were predominantly female. We found out that anxiety and feelings of love were negatively correlated to each other when means, standard deviation and Pearson correlation matrix for continuous variables ($N=20$) of twelve survey questions used to measure anxious, lonely, and love determined that a significant correlation existed. Those who were loved didn't feel lonely. Which supported the first hypothesis, emerging adults raised by supportive caregivers will have better interpersonal relationships than emerging adults raised by non-supportive caregivers. For the rest will be discussed later in full detail. One limitation found in this study is private vs. public university population in the United States.

Keywords: Emerging Adults, Relationships, Caregiver, Anxiety, Lonely

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This research constitutes a relatively new area which has emerged an additional developmental period that not all met the criteria, that is bridged in-between teenage and adulthood. This developmental period is referred to as emerging adulthood, and spans from eighteen-years-old up to forty-one for example. A common sign of transitioning out of emerging adulthood to adulthood, is low instrumental support received from caregivers and living independently. The main practical problem during this developmental period is a shift within interpersonal relationships which effect how people choose to remain single longer, not want children, higher divorce rates, quick to end interpersonal relationships, and unwilling to work out interpersonal relationship issues.

To our knowledge, no study has focused or explored male caregivers and/or both childhood caregivers. Luerksen, Shane, & Budescu (2019) mentioned these representations are related to the overall quality of an individual's relationship with their caregivers during childhood development. Which I agree, and as well as emerging adulthood is not a sequential human lifespan developmental period for all, rendering the need to investigate further. Moreover, few studies have focused on parental divorce and parental conflict correlating to effects examined in emerging adults in romantic relationships. From current study results, I disagree with Braithwaite and colleagues (2016), comment regarding parental conflict and divorce would be associated with poorer relationship satisfaction and more breakups, over the course of a semester, among emerging adults in romantic relationships.

A suggestion to this problem is proposed in our future research. To illuminate this uncharted area, we examined both caregivers and broadened our scope of variables during childhood development, also encompassed other variables discussed later in our literature.

Literature Review

Emerging adults are beginning to advance in chronological age, and we are noticing a rise in issues over multiple platforms and multiple categories found right where we live. Some may have experienced emerging adults work ethics, initiative, service to community, and so on. This study conducted a broad large-scale number of variables after extensive literature review to construct survey questions for data analysis, to further understand just how emerging adults form interpersonal relationships and other variables that contribute to conduct further research.

Theories

Emerging adulthood is commonly linked to attachment theory as a theoretical explanation for trends we observe. In our study several variables were identified, and a few significant theories help support our study. First, we investigated correlations in the series of a failing marriage from divorce to caregivers remarry, the theoretical rational on divorce children is divorce demonstrated higher rates of problematic communication and conflict tactics in their own marriages because they are more likely to imitate their parents' problematic interpersonal processes in their own romantic relationships, (Braithwaite, 2016). Interestingly, an attachment theory of representations found in emerging adults that developed anxious representations of their relationships with friends and romantic partners are less likely to be satisfied in these relationships and may internalize their fears of abandonment, thinking they are inadequate and undeserving of positive relationships (Chow & Ruhl, 2014). In our current study, we did not find

evidence to support this theory, our evidence disproved it. Another theory investigated in our current study had to do increasing feelings for security. Survey questions were tailored to investigate in current research and again, current study did not find evidence to support this theory anxiously attached individuals are more likely to see relationships as a vehicle for increasing their felt security (Jensen, et. al., 2014). And our evidence disproved it. A theory found in a study that, increasing recognition that caregivers exert an ongoing influence as their child develops into adolescences and emerging adulthood (Luerssen, Shane, & Budescu, 2019), was proven to be supported by results found in current study.

Previous Studies

Individuals with an abandonment or instability schema place excessive value on their relationships with others and tended to make unduly strong efforts to remain connected with them (Yoo, Park, & Jun, 2014). Current study proved this variable to be otherwise. Parental conflict and divorce would be associated with poorer relationship satisfaction and more breakups, over the course of a semester, among emerging adults in romantic relationships (Braithwaite et. al., 2016). We prove this variable to be otherwise. Dissatisfaction and uncertainty about these relationships will be related to more depression and psychological distress during this period in life (Chow & Ruhl, 2014). We prove this variable to be otherwise. Internalize their fears of abandonment, thinking they are inadequate and undeserving of positive relationships (Chow & Ruhl, 2014). Current study proved this variable to be otherwise.

The main objective in this study is to examine correlations to further improve contributions of evidence-based literature in hopes of improving the mental health of emerging adults. There are two hypotheses found in the current study. The first, emerging adults raised by supportive caregivers will have better interpersonal relationships than emerging adults raised by

non-supportive caregivers. The second, emerging adults that have foundations in communication instilled during childhood will have better interpersonal relationships than emerging adults that lacked childhood communication from caregivers. And lastly, this studies aim is to identify factors in the abilities of emerging adults forming interpersonal relationships.

Methodology

Participants

Participants are 20 students enrolled in a small private university in Southern California, United States. The samples average age was $M = 24.85$ ($SD = 7.90$) years old, and were predominantly female (see Appendix A, Figure 1). Class standings (e.g., “freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior”) were based upon units earned (see Appendix B, Figure 2). Demographics included origin of birth outside the United States, $N = 3$ (15%) indicated born in other countries. Primary language spoken in homes other than English, $N = 8$ (40%) indicated English was not the primary language spoken in homes.

Materials

Participants completed a four-part, 70-question survey on Google Forms using their smartphone, tablet, or personal computer. The survey constructed in Google Forms included Likert-type questions for communication (e.g., “on a scale of 1-5, how well do you communicate with your parents?”), open-ended questions (e.g., “ which caregiver did you feel closest to while growing up?”), and demographic questions (e.g., “What is your gender identity?”). Google Forms also uses SSL encryption and transmission of information that is secure. No identifying information except for basic demographic information was collected.

Procedures

Participants were recruited from various classes enrolled at the university's campus. The focus of this study was on age, indicated by the study sample of emerging adults. Majors and minors of students were not included as a predictor in recruitment. No compensation was given for completing the survey by the researcher. Participants were, then, recruited via email and/or text message through Google Forms link to participate. Participants then viewed each section of the survey in the following order: Consent Form, Survey questions Part 1: Demographic questions, "What is your age, Sexual/gender identity?", "Are you an only child?", "How many siblings do you have?", "How many younger siblings do you have?", "How many older siblings do you have?", "What year are you at MCU?", "What is your major?", "If any, what is your minor?", "What are your living arrangements this semester?", "On your living arrangements, are you being helped by your parents or guardian or other relatives?", "Are you in a romantic relationship?", "If so, for how long?", "Do you have a best friend?", "If so, for how long have you been best friends?", "Where did you grow up as a child?", "Who influenced you to pursue higher education?", "What career field would you like to pursue and why?", "Which caregiver did you feel closest to while growing up?", "What was the primary language spoken in your home?", and "Were you born in the United States?". Conclude survey questions of Part 1.

Survey questions Part 2: Caregiver questions, "How was your relationship with your caregiver? Please describe it.", "Parent (A/or Mom), Do you feel they provided a good quality of communication with you while growing up?", "Parent (B/or Dad), Do you feel they provided a good quality of communication with you while growing up?", "Are your parents divorced or separated?", "How old were you when your parents divorced or separated?", "If your parents divorced, did they remarry?", "If they remarried, do you feel your step parent

provided good communication with you?”, “Did you ever feel neglected as a child?”, “Did your parents often argue?”, “Did you often feel strain with a particular caregiver relationship?”, “Did you often feel support with a particular caregiver relationship?”, “Did your caregiver have open and honest conversations with you about life and romantic relationships?”, “Did your caregiver have open and honest conversations with you about what healthy boundaries in relationships look like?”, “Did you feel anxious often as a child?”, and “Did you feel loved as a child?”. Conclude survey questions of Part 2.

Survey questions Part 3: Attachment questions, “How old were you when you had your first romantic relationship?”, “How old do you want to be when you get married?”, “Do you want to be settled in your career before getting married?”, “Do you want to have children?”, “How many serious romantic relationships have you had?”, “What is the average length of time in these romantic relationship(s)?”, “Do you find yourself feeling anxious or depressed when a serious fallout occurs with a friendship or romantic relationship?”, “Do you find yourself able to work through tense moments in friendships or romantic relationships by strong communication resolution?”, “During an argument with a romantic partner, do you call your friend each time to vent about what just happened and get their advice and reassurance?”, “After an argument with your romantic partner, are you quick to end the relationship?”, “After an argument with your romantic partner, are you quick to delete them and their friends from your social media?”, “When you end a romantic relationship, do you start another relationship immediately?”, (Likert-scale questions) “I am confident that other people will like and respect me.”, “Other people have their own problems, so I don't bother them with mine.”, “I am too busy with other activities to put much time into relationships.”, “When I talk over my problems

with others, I generally feel ashamed or foolish.”, and “I wonder how I would cope without someone to love me.”. Conclude survey questions of Part 3.

Survey questions Part 4: Valued and loved questions, “Was your caregiver a tune with how you were feeling, could read your emotions and respond in a way that made you feel they understood you?”, “As a child, were you encouraged exploration and discovery, and helped to find and express your natural interests and talents?”, “Were you given things you wanted to have (like bicycles, toys, iPhones, certain clothes, computers, etc.)?”, “Were you taken on activities (like music lessons, sports teams, camp, etc.), and/or to visit friends?”, “Were you kept safe from danger and threat?”, “Did you feel safe when you were with your caregiver?”, “Caregiver calmed and soothed me effectively when I became distressed, upset, or overwhelmed.”, “Caregiver was around physically while I was growing up.”, “Caregiver took a genuine interest in me, and expressed delight in who I was.”, “I felt special and valued by them.”, “Did you feel comfortable opening up to your caregiver?”, “I worry that this person won't care about me as much as I care about him or her.”, “It helps to turn to this person in times of need”, “I'm afraid this person might abandon me.”, “I usually discuss my problems with this person”, “I often worry that this person doesn't really care for me”, and “For the above questions...If asked each of the above questions focusing your emotions from caregiver, now toward an interpersonal relationship (a romantic or best friend); would your emotions feel similar? “. Conclude survey questions of Part 4. And lastly, debriefing was conducted using Google Forms and was also included following participant survey questions (see Appendix C, Figure 3). The survey entirety extended about fifteen to twenty minutes in length.

A digital codebook was created once surveys were collected. Coding consisted of assigned numbers and labeled variables derived from survey questions, which were then inputted

and saved using IBM SPSS version 28, Microsoft Windows 10. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables used in the study, particularly measures of frequency and measures of central tendency. A means, standard deviation, and Pearson correlation matrix for continuous variables test was used to determine if there was a significant correlation of data to determine that the first hypothesis was supported for the assumption of emerging adults raised by supportive caregivers will have better interpersonal relationships than emerging adults raised by non-supportive childhood caregivers (see Appendix C, Table 2). The compilation of completed coded survey question results, should result in support of each hypothesis, and also provide additional results to include for future research.

Results

The sample of emerging adults average age was $M = 24.85$ ($SD = 7.90$) years old, and were predominantly female (see Appendix A, Figure 1). Class standings (e.g., “freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior”) were based upon units earned (see Appendix B, Figure 2). Demographics included origin of birth outside the United States, $N = 3$ (15%) indicated born in other countries. Primary language spoken in homes other than English, $N = 8$ (40%) indicated English was not the primary language spoken in homes. Means, standard deviation and Pearson correlation matrix for continuous variables ($N=20$) of twelve survey questions used to measure anxious, lonely, and love determined that a significant correlation existed. There was a significant negative correlation between Lonely variable and Loved variable, $r = -.60$ (20), $p = .005$, (see Appendix D, Table 1). This resulted in the studies first hypothesis supported. To test variables ($N=20$) for caregivers encouraged independent living arrangements, Measures of Frequency were used. Results showed zero participants lived at the university dorms and 57.9 % of participants lived with their caregivers (see Appendix E, Figure 4). To test variables ($N=20$)

for caregivers encouraged independent financial responsibility, Measures of Frequency were used. Findings resulted negatively as predicted, in that 31.6% of participants received no financial support (see Appendix F, Figure 5). To test variables (N=20) for participants feeling neglected as a child, Measures of Frequency were used. Results indicated 66.7% of participants felt neglected, and after utilizing SPSS data software on uploaded coded data, results indicated 88.9% of participants felt neglected as a child (see Appendix G, Figure 6). To understand male caregivers' relationships with emerging adults, as well as the dynamics of both caregivers and participants childhood experience, this studies hypothesis was tested in a few ways that also hypothesized in male caregivers. Scale Data Scores were used, and results supported our second hypothesis that emerging adults that have foundations in communication instilled during childhood will have better interpersonal relationships, than emerging adults that lacked childhood communication from caregivers. These results of these scale scores, included Measures of Frequency and indicated 55% of participants caregivers are divorced and 44.4% of participants caregivers remarried, which lead us to discover that communication from participants stepparents by finding Measures of Frequency indicated 71.4% poor communication and once coded utilizing SPSS, 100% poor communication (see Appendix H, Figure 7; Appendix I, Figure 8; Appendix J, Figure 9) and ultimately created feelings of strain during childhood as tested by Means of Central Frequency (see Appendix K, Figure 10). Lastly, to test the studies research question to yield findings to support discussion of fairly recent developmental period of emerging adulthood; the study used cause and effect statistics and yielded results supporting these studies assumptions for this newly rise. Causation results in our study indicated 70% of caregivers failed to teach emotional boundaries during childhood

development, thus effecting the decrease in marriages/interpersonal relationships (see Appendix L, Figure 11; Appendix M – Figure 12).

Discussion

In the current research, we analyzed and measured the quality of the caregiver-childhood relationship and included various predictors to draw further conclusions in emerging adults forming interpersonal relationships. The research question first proposed in this study was supported, that factors were identified in the abilities of emerging adults forming interpersonal relationships. The significant factor indicated in this study, is the emotional developmental skills needed during childhood development to form healthy boundaries further in life (e.g., interpersonal relationships, marriage, romantic relationships, lifelong friendships). This is indicated by current trends in emerging adulthood and deficit of life skills that suggests this failure to launch, at what we considered an age of adulthood (e.g., eighteen, twenty-one). The studies first hypothesis was supported, that indicated emerging adults raised by supportive caregivers will have better interpersonal relationships than emerging adults raised by non-supportive caregivers. The studies second hypothesis was supported, that indicated emerging adults that have foundations in communication instilled during childhood will have better interpersonal relationships than emerging adults that lacked childhood communication from caregivers. As mentioned, there is a need to further study the male caregiver as attempted in the study's limited sample. Previous studies also mention the significance of the male caregiver role in children of divorce. Children have psychological adjustment, self-concept, social adjustment, and poorer relationships with parents, particularly fathers (Braithwaite et al., 2016). It suffers from the same limitations associated with changes in emerging adults' priorities as identified in this study. The Romantic relation shifts include decreases in viewing marriage as a path to

happiness, seeing marriage as a priority, and one's willingness or intention to commit to a marital relationship (Jensen et al., 2014).

This study surveyed only private university students from Southern California and may not generalize to the larger population of emerging adults in the United States. The findings of the present study suggest several improvements for future research directions. First, the study should be replicated using a larger, more diverse sample with regards to gender and racial identity. This would allow researchers to generalize to the larger college student population in the United States. Future research to investigate our studies indication of high connect to mom/caregiver, while every negative report of feelings indicated strong; this does not correlate.

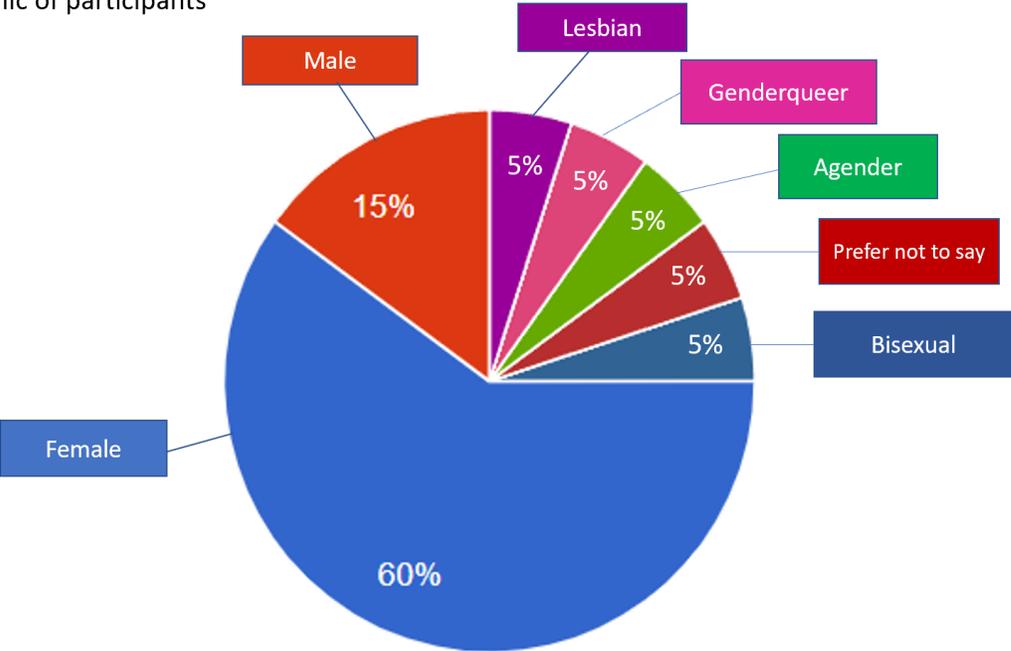
This studies research connects to a larger issue in the emerging adulthood literature review, and that is to focus greater on anxious and less on depression. In this study I touched upon three questions regarding depression and produced insignificant results. And lastly, we went back to recode all the sometimes (sometimes = is negative) survey question option/responses. We realized during data analysis that you either are or you are not. Which will lead to an increase of realistic correlations based on eliminating shades of gray, to further understand the mental health needs of emerging adults and continue to advance empirical-based treatment to assist our public health-care providers.

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Appendix A – Figure 1

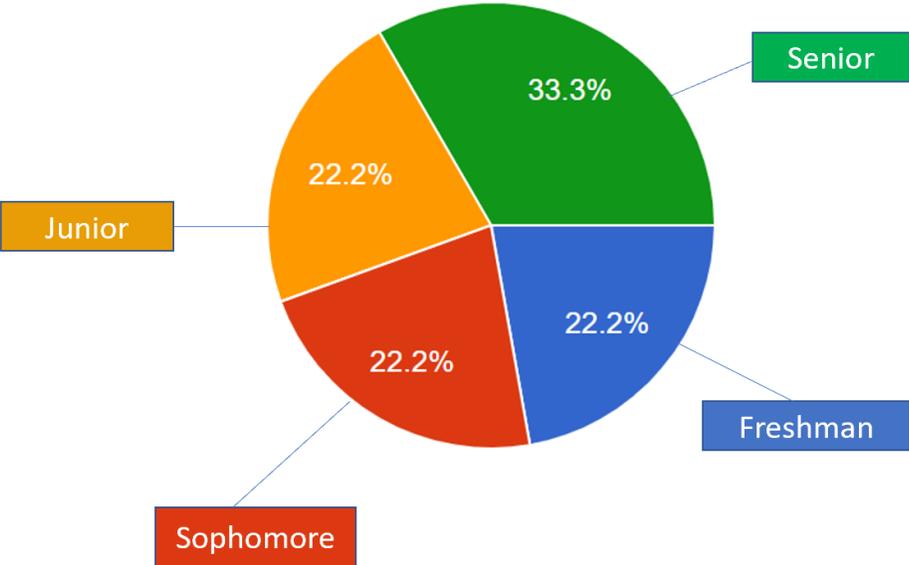
Figure 1. Demographic of participants



Note. Participants (N=20), zero indicated Gay.

Appendix B – Figure 2

Figure 2. Class Standing: Based on units earned



Appendix C – Figure 3

Figure 3. Debriefing: Attachment Factors in Relationships Survey

Debriefing

Thank you for participating in this study. The purpose of this study is to find if attachment styles are affecting interpersonal relationships in emerging adulthood.

The survey questions you took today were designed to tap into either a healthy or maladaptive attachment style and to notice by means of your caregiver growing up that you were raised in an environment that strengthen and taught ways of a healthy relationship characterized and communication skills which later as an emerging adult would impact by these formative years. Treatment to seek for people that have been diagnosed with attachment disorders usually involves a combination of therapy and counseling.

By exploring attachment styles and the affect to interpersonal relationships in emerging adulthood, we can be more informed about why we are noticing a trend in marriages occurring later, people choosing to be single longer, some choosing to not have children, higher divorce rates, people quick to end relationships verses putting effort into working out issues, and others putting more importance on career verse marriage.

Please do not discuss the survey you took today with anyone. It is important that each person who participates enters the study with as little background in the tests and testing situation as possible.

If you would like to learn more about the study or if you have specific questions about your participation, you may contact Dr. Kevin Kaeochinda at kkaeochinda@marymountcalifornia.edu. Thank you again for your assistance!

Note. Survey section 11 of 11.

Appendix D – Table 1

Table 1. Means, standard deviation and Pearson correlation matrix for continuous variables (N=20)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Anxious	1.05	.22	-		
2. Lonely	1.35	.49	.31	-	
3. Loved	1.55	.51	-.25	-.60**	-

Note. Anxious was measured by four questions tapping into childhood feelings of distress. Lonely was measured by five questions tapping into social skills, feelings of neglect, and/or rejection from parents. Loved was measured by three questions tapping into whether parents loved their children. N = 20. Lonely was marginally significant ($p = .180$).

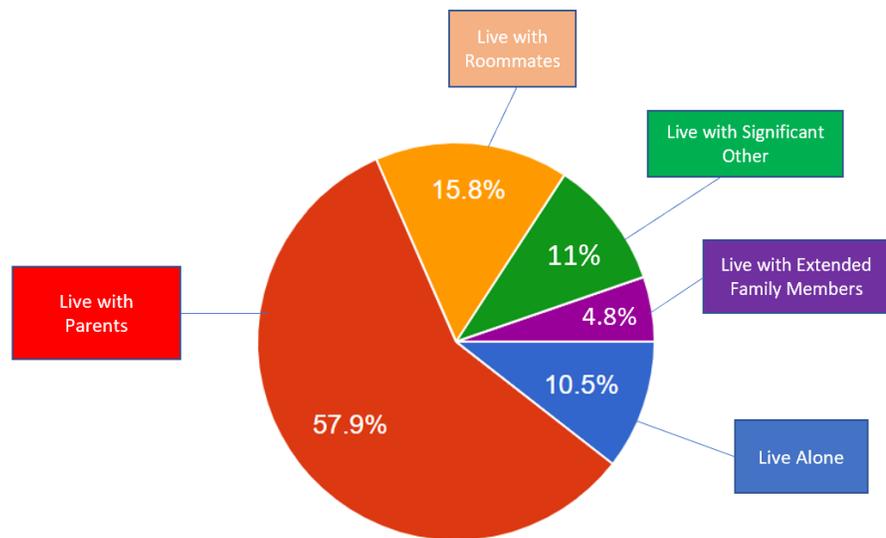
** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$.

Result:

There was a significant negative correlation between Lonely variable and Loved variable, $r = -.60$ (20), $p = .005$.

Appendix E – Figure 4

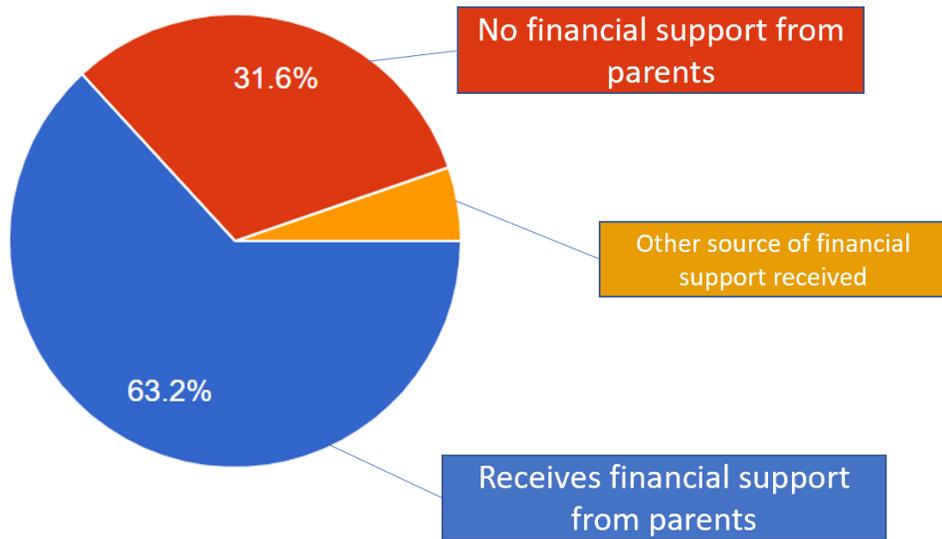
Figure 4. Living arrangements of participants



Note. Participants ($N=20$) indicated; distance traveled to Marymount California University is approximately 20 miles ($M=22.5$). Zero participants indicated living at “MCU Villa” dorms.

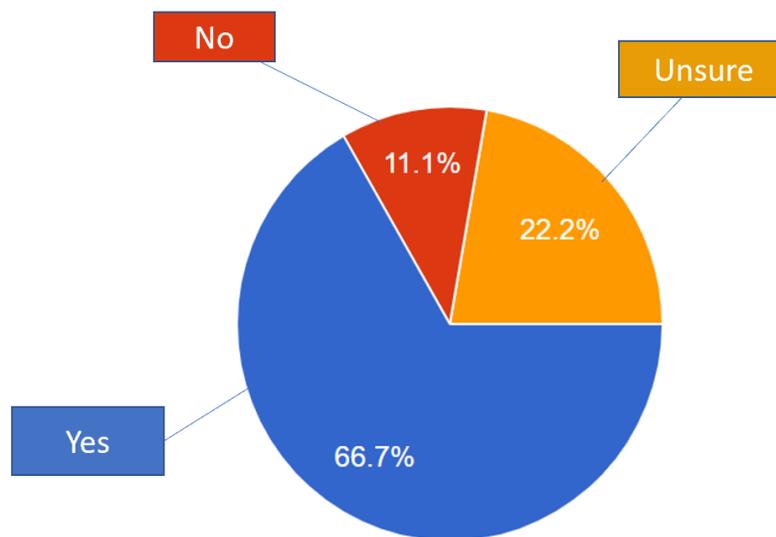
Appendix F – Figure 5

Figure 5. Participants financial income: Support from parents



Appendix G – Figure 6

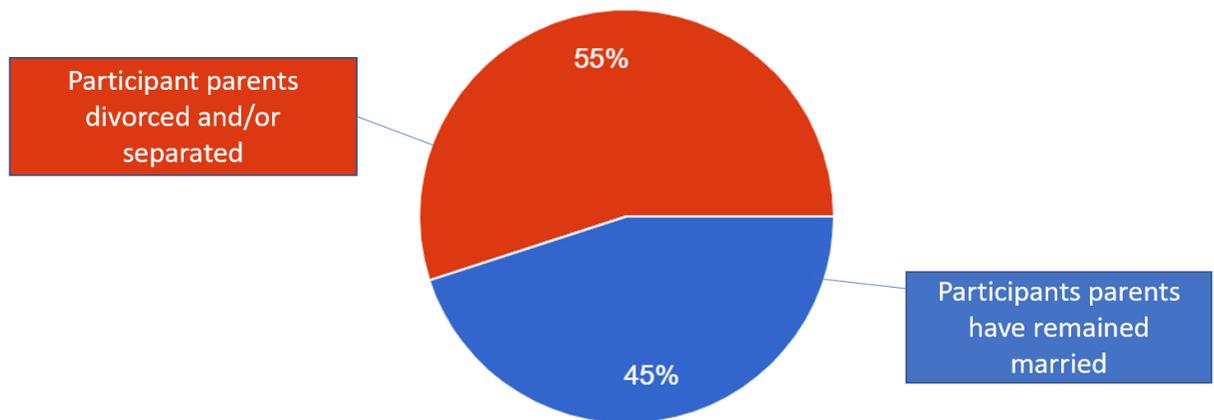
Figure 6. Participant feelings: Neglected often as a child



Note. Data coding variable using SPSS; yes= coded 1, no= coded 2, unsure=coded 1. Feelings of neglect (r)= 88.9%.

Appendix H – Figure 7

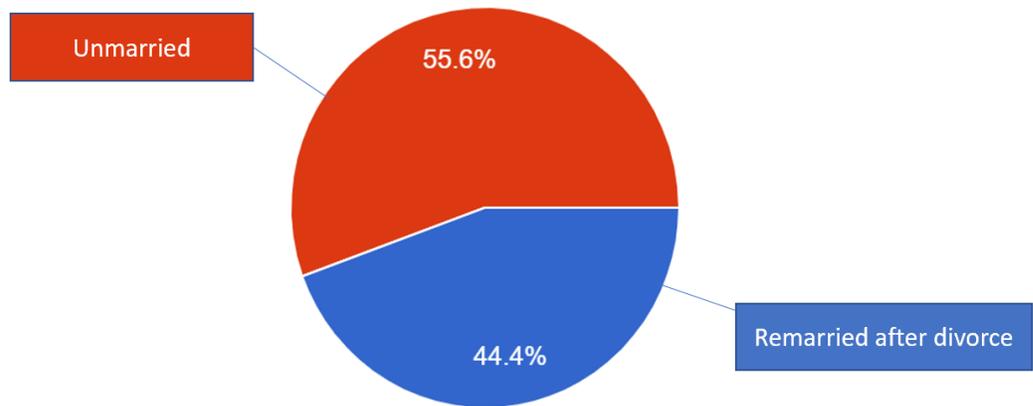
Figure 7. Participants parents: Divorced and/or separated



Note. Participants ($N=9$), average age in years when parents divorced/separated is nine years-old ($M=8.56$).

Appendix I – Figure 8

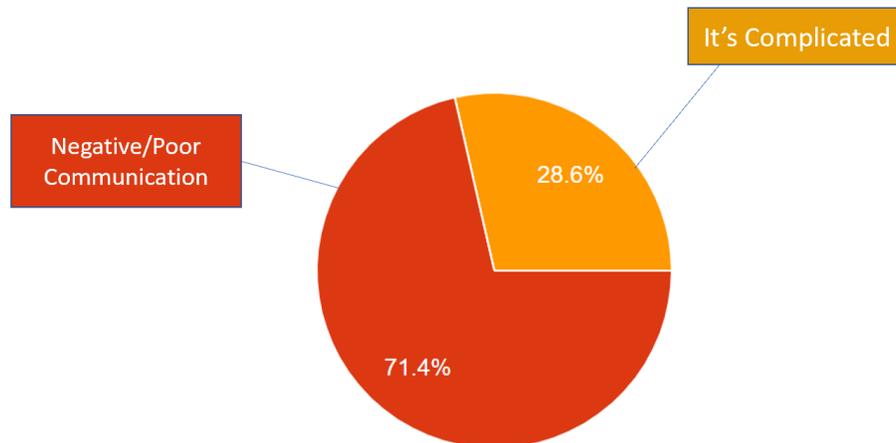
Figure 8. Participants parents: Remained unmarried or remarried after divorce



Note. Participants (N=9) response represents both parents remained unmarried or both parents remarried.

Appendix J – Figure 9

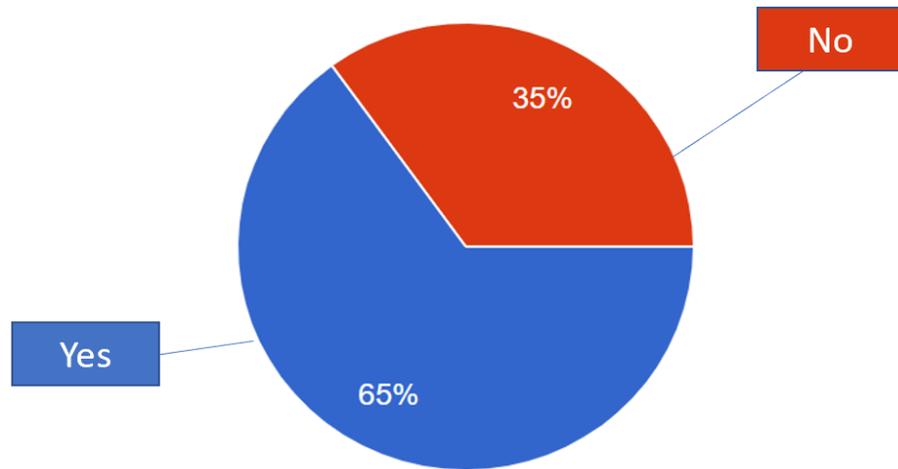
Figure 9. Step-parent: Communication with participant



Note. Participants (N=7) of remarried parents, zero indicated good communication from stepparent.

Appendix K – Figure 10

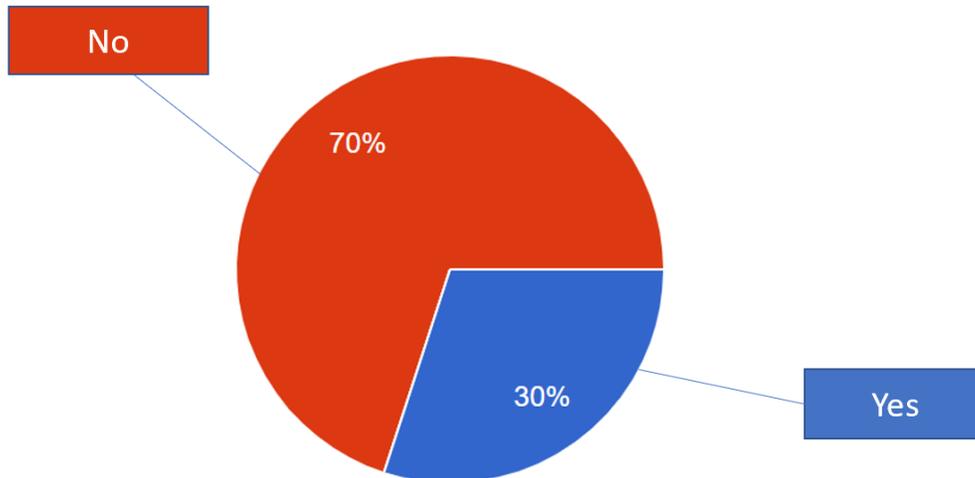
Figure 10. Participant/caregiver relationship: Strain felt often within a particular caregiver



Note. Strain effects the quality of attachment with caregiver.

Appendix L – Figure 11

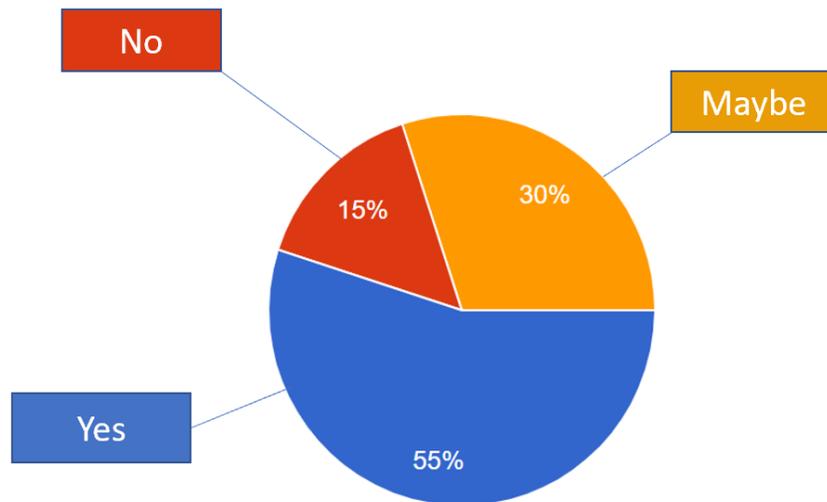
Figure 11. Participant/caregiver communication: Open/honest discussions of healthy boundaries in relationships



Note. This indicates 70% of caregivers failed to teach emotional boundaries during childhood development.

Appendix M – Figure 12

Figure 12. Marriage: Settled in career before marriage



Note. Data coding variable using SPSS; yes= coded 1, no= coded 2, maybe=coded 1. Settled in career before marriage (r)= 85%.

Appendix N - Acknowledgements

The student author of this research study very much appreciates the support and time generously invested by mentor/professor; Dr. Kevin Kaeochinda, Associate Professor of Psychology Department at Marymount California University. The student author thanks Dr. Kaeochinda for lessons and discussions introducing SPSS Statistics to prepare success for the next step. The student author would also like to thank the reviewer for taking the time for providing constructive feedback.