Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of

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MASc (University of Waterloo, 2009)  
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“Young Peoples’ Feelings about and Attitudes towards Marriage: The Influence of Attachment Style and Early Family Functioning”

Department of Psychology

Tuesday, August 23, 2016
10:00am  
David Turpin Building  
Room A144

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Marion Ehrenberg, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)  
Dr. Erica Woodin, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)  
Dr. Anne Marshall, Department of Educational Psychology & Leadership Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

External Examiner:  
Dr. Julie Hakim-Larson, Department of Psychology, University of Windsor

Chair of Oral Examination:  
Dr. Graham McDonough, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

Researchers are recognizing the importance of examining underlying family functioning in order to understand the varying influences of parental divorce on offspring. The current study investigated the relations among young adults’ attachment styles, their reported family-of-origin functioning and parents’ marital status (divorced or non-divorced), and their current feelings about and attitudes towards marriage, in a sample of 537 young adults, half of whom experienced the divorce of their parents. The results demonstrate that knowledge of divorce status alone does not tell the whole predictive story for a child’s later relational connections and attitudes. In fact, parental marital status may, at times, act as a proxy for lower intimacy, fewer democratic parenting practices, and higher conflict in the family. Family-of-origin functioning, and, in particular, higher levels of intimacy, was the best predictor of the young adult’s secure attachment in close relationships. Although adult children from divorced households did report more negative feelings and opinions of marriage, parents’ marital status, attachment style and family-of-origin functioning variables were all important in explaining their feelings about and attitudes towards marriage. Notably, those with higher levels of attachment avoidance were more likely to express negative feelings and opinions about marriage. It may be that the role of family functioning on attitude towards marriage includes an indirect pathway: Family-of-origin functioning predicts a young adult’s attachment style in close relationships, which, in turn, can have an important influence on their feelings about and attitudes towards the institution of marriage. Ultimately, we document that if a family-of-origin is experienced to be cohesive and close – even if parents do divorce – it appears that young adult children can still feel securely attached in their close relationships and still feel positively towards marriage. Therefore, the “intergenerational transmission of divorce,” is neither automatic nor inevitable and this term should no longer be utilized in the divorce literature.