



The Relationships Among Parental Divorce, Adult Attachment, and Relationship Satisfaction in First-Time Parents



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INTRODUCTION

- Adults who have experienced parental divorce are more likely to divorce in their own relationships.
 - There is little research on the relationship between parental divorce and relationship satisfaction.
 - Some studies suggest that adults who have experienced parental divorce have lower relationship satisfaction than adults who have not experienced parental divorce.
- The experience of parental divorce may be a disruption of the parent-child relationship, which is significant in creating a template for a child to base expectations of future relationships on, such as relationships with romantic partners.
 - These templates are known as attachment styles, and the theory describing them is called attachment theory.
- Attachment styles in adults are based on two dimensions:
 - Anxiety is worry about one's partner leaving or not reciprocating feelings.
 - Avoidance is discomfort with intimacy and relying on others.
- Investigating the relationships among parental divorce, adult attachment, and relationship satisfaction in new parents might be especially critical, as the postpartum period is associated with a decline in relationship satisfaction.

Hypotheses:

- Adults who experience parental divorce will have lower relationship satisfaction and higher anxiety and avoidance than adults who have not experienced parental divorce.
- As anxiety and avoidance increase, relationship satisfaction will decrease.
- Anxiety and avoidance will serve as individual mediators on the relationship between parental divorce and relationship satisfaction.

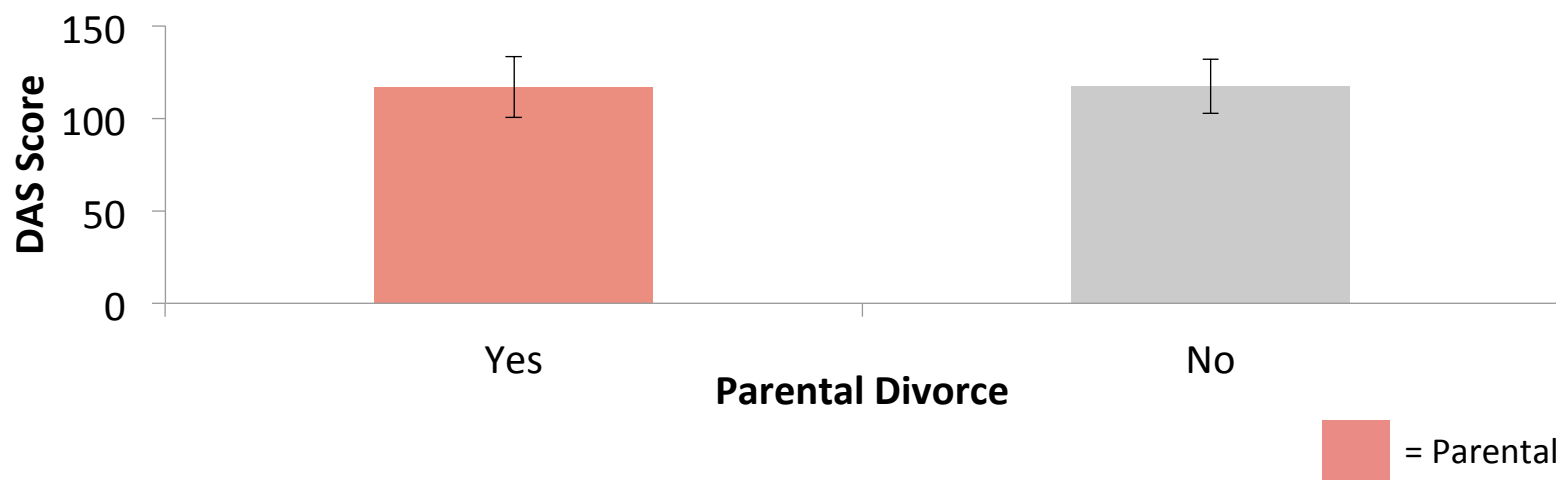
METHOD

- Participants ($N = 94$) were recruited online through social media and forums for new parents and through community postings.
- Participants:
 - Were between the ages of 18-45.
 - Were in relationships.
 - Resided in the United States.
 - Had experienced the birth of a first child within the previous 6 months.
 - Had two living parents.
- Participants answered all questions through an online interface.
 - Adult Attachment: Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (ECR Anxiety, $\alpha = .93$; ECR Avoidance, $\alpha = .94$) (Spanier, 1976)
 - Relationship Satisfaction: Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, $\alpha = .93$) (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998)
 - Participants indicated their parents' current relationship status to one another.
- The final sample was primarily female (86.2%) and white non-Hispanic (77.7%).

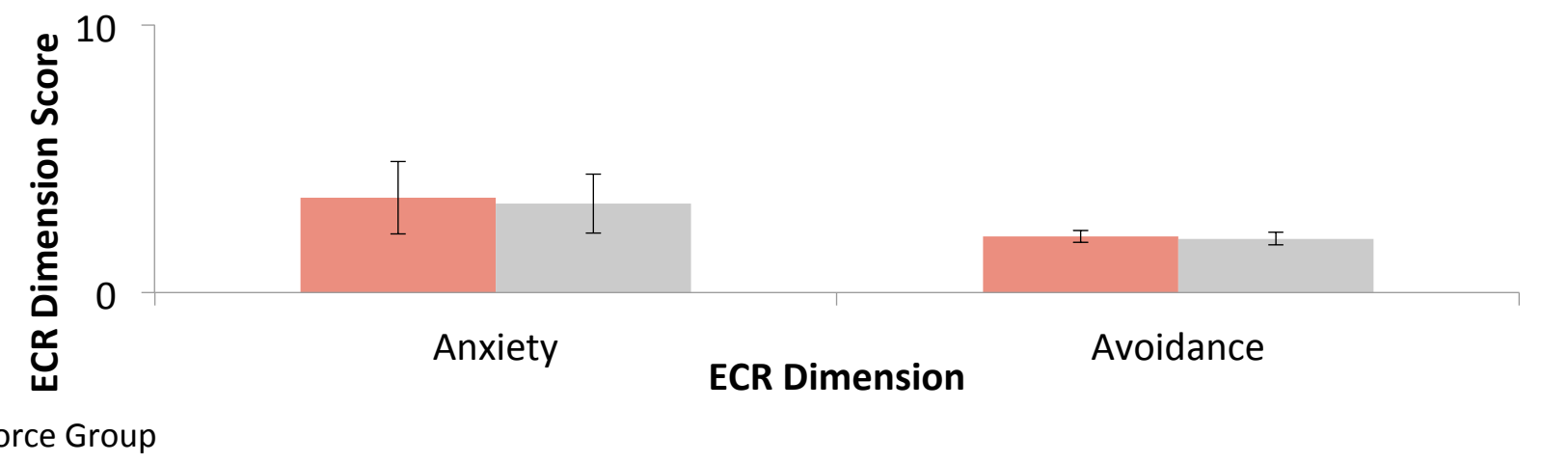
RESULTS

- Twenty-six (27.7%) participants had experienced parental divorce or separation.
- Participants' DAS scores ($M = 116.68$, $SD = 16.35$) and ECR Anxiety scores ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.19$) were consistent with population norms.
- Participants' ECR Avoidance scores ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.00$) were below average for the population.

Comparison Between DAS Scores Between Adults from Divorced and Intact Families of Origin

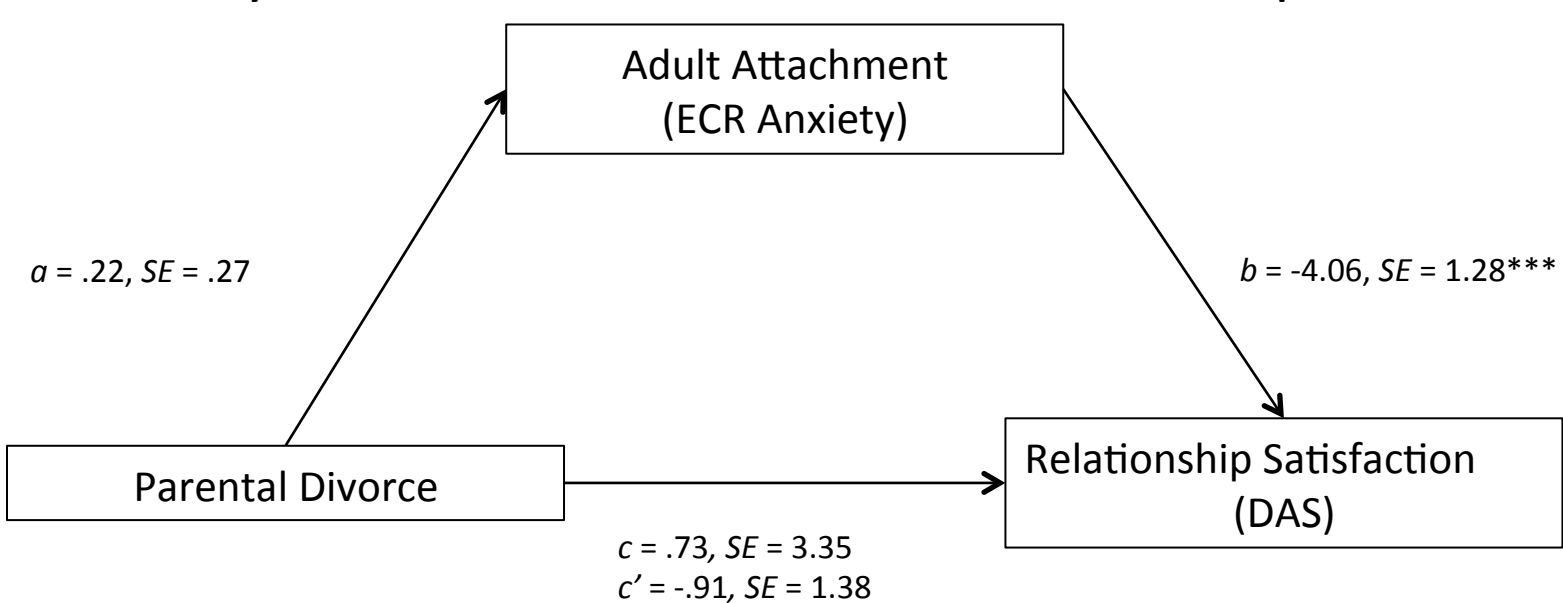


Comparison Between ECR Dimension Scores of Adults from Divorced and Intact Families of Origin

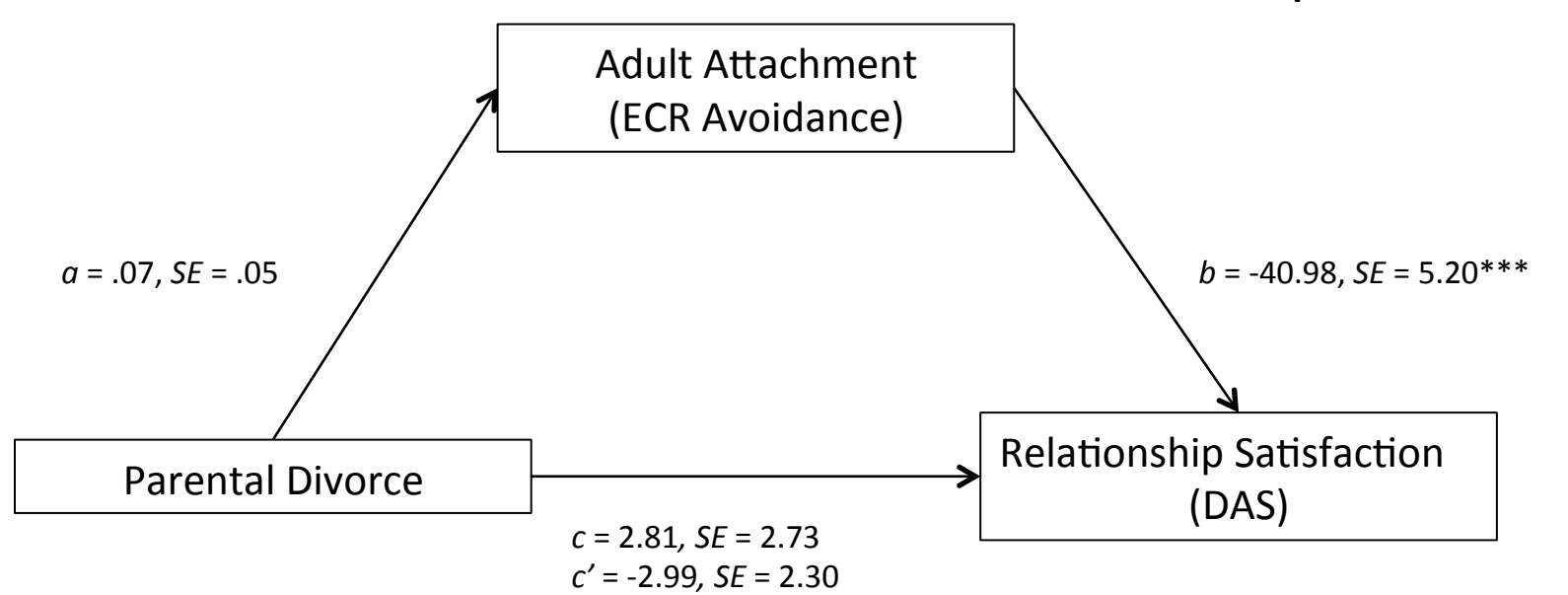


Correlation Coefficients Between Study Measures			
	ECR (Anxiety)	ECR (Avoidance)	DAS
ECR (Anxiety)	(.93)	-	-
ECR (Avoidance)	.49***	(.94)	-
DAS	-.31***	-.63***	(.93)

Anxiety as a Mediator Between Parental Divorce and Relationship Satisfaction



Avoidance as a Mediator Between Parental Divorce and Relationship Satisfaction



DISCUSSION

- Findings from this study are consistent with previous research that supports a strong relationship between adult attachment and relationship satisfaction.
- There was no relationship between parental divorce and adult attachment or parental divorce and relationship satisfaction.
 - It is possible that the definition of parental divorce was too broad for it to serve as a proxy for disruption of the parent-child relationship.
 - Aspects of the divorce that may make it more salient include custody arrangements, interparental conflict, perceived reasons for divorce, and changes in parenting behavior.
- Other studies should consider other factors that serve as a disruptions of the parent-child relationship.
 - Research suggests that death of a parent, parental psychiatric illness, serious illness of the parent or child, and physical or sexual abuse can influence adult attachment outcomes for the child.
- Findings are reassuring for divorcing or separating couples with children.
 - It may not matter what the parents' relationship is with one another as long as the parent-child relationship remains strong.