T.C.

BAHCESEHIR UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

THE DEPARTMENT OF GUIDANCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF EMERGING ADULTS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES

MASTER'S THESIS

MALAK SAADI

ISTANBUL 2023

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING THE RELATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF EMERGING ADULTS FROM DIVORCED FAMILIES

Saadi, Malak

Master's Thesis, Master's Program in Guidance and Psychological Counseling

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nazlı Büşra Akçabozan Kayabol

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Despite limited research, numerous studies have explored the impact of parental divorce on children in shaping their outlook on romantic relationships and marriage. This study investigated the experiences of emerging adults with divorced parents and their perspectives on romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce. The study employed a qualitative research design wherein 15 residents of Saudi Arabia whose parents got divorced between the ages of 18 and 29 were interviewed. Following Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, 15 main themes emerged discussing the cultural context of divorce, parents' motivations for divorce, participants' revelation of parental divorce, emotional responses to divorce-related decisions, and the complex interplay of thoughts and behaviors surrounding divorce. The findings revealed that parental divorce has significant implications for emerging adults in influencing their perspectives, thoughts, and behaviors in romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce. Moreover, the results also addressed the impact of cultural factors and religion on perspectives of emerging adults during this transitional period. The results of the study were discussed in the light of the existing literature and recommendations for further studies were suggested.

Keywords: Emerging Adults, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Divorce

ÖZ

EBEVEYNLERİ BOŞANMIŞ BELİREN YETİŞKİNLERİN İLİŞKİ DENEYİMLERİNİ ANLAMAK

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Alanyazındaki sınırlı sayıda araştırmaya rağmen mevcut çalışmalar şu soruyu keşfetmeye çalışmıştır: Ebeveynlerin boşanması çocuklarını nasıl etkiler ve boşanma çocukların romantik ilişkilere ve evliliğe bakış açılarını nasıl şekillendirir? Bu çalışmada, ebeveynleri boşanmış beliren yetişkinlerin deneyimleri ve romantik ilişkiler, evlilik ve boşanma konularındaki bakış açıları araştırılmıştır. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmış, araştırmanın verileri ebeveynleri boşanmış, 18-29 yaş aralığında ve Suudi Arabistan'da yaşayan 15 kişi ile görüşmeler yoluyla elde edilmiştir. Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz yöntemi kullanılarak, boşanmanın kültürel bağlamı, ebeveynlerin boşanma nedenleri, katılımcıların ebeveynlerinin boşanma gerçeğini keşfi, boşanma ile ilgili kararlara duygusal tepkiler ve boşanma ile ilgili düşüncelerin ve davranışların karmaşıklığı gibi konularda 15 temel tema ortaya çıkmıştır. Bulgular, ebeveynlerin boşanmasının genç yetişkinlerin romantik ilişkiler, evlilik ve boşanma konularındaki bakış açılarını, düşüncelerini ve davranışlarını etkileme konusundaki açıklayıcılığını göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, araştırmanın bulguları kültürel faktörlerin ve dinin beliren yetişkinlerin bakış açılarını etkilediğine işaret etmektedir. Araştırmanın bulguları ilgili alanyazın ışığında tartışılmış, gelecekte yapılacak çalışmalara ilişkin öneriler sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Beliren Yetişkinler, Yorumlayıcı Fenomenolojik Analiz, Boşanma

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This section presented a concise summary of how divorced parents can influence their children's choices and decisions regarding relationships during their transition into adulthood. The background of the study, its significance in the relevant literature, and research questions were stated. The last part of this section provided key terms discussed throughout the current study.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Divorce is a multifaceted phenomenon that can have far-reaching implications for individuals, families, and communities (Zhou & Sun, 2019), leading to complex issues such as instability, the development of mental health problems, and the inability to maintain healthy and stable relationships in adulthood (Amato, 2010). Divorce can also adversely affect children's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. While some children may adapt well to their parents' divorce, others may experience significant challenges during their childhood and as they approach adulthood.

Divorce has become more common in recent decades, increasing its prevalence, with different divorce rates being reported among countries and regions. For example, the United States initially had one of the highest divorce rates globally. However, recent years have seen a decline (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2020), with the National Center for Family & Marriage Research (2022) reporting that the United States of America experienced a divorce rate of 39% in 2021. Canada has experienced a steady divorce rate, estimated at around 48% in 2018, suggesting that nearly half of marriages end in divorce (Statistics Canada, 2019). Europe's overall divorce rate is estimated to be 40%. Still, there are significant variations between individual countries (Eurostat, 2021) with higher divorce rates observed in Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Denmark compared to Mediterranean European countries such as Italy and Greece (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021). Regardless of the reported divorce

rates, an article by Bussemakers et al. (2022) stated that the current global divorce rate is 4.08 per 1,000 married people.

Collecting accurate statistical data on divorce rates in the Middle East can be challenging due to varying reporting methods and cultural influences (Johnson et al., 2020; Smith, 2019). Compared to other parts of the world, various countries in the Middle East have reported relatively low divorce rates (Ahmed & Khan, 2020; Jones, 2018). For example, in 2014, Saudi Arabia, a target sample of the study, was reported to have the lowest divorce rates, at 1.10 per 1,000 people, compared to other Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan and Iran, respectively reported divorce rates of 2.50 and 1.90 (Fereidouni, 2016). Contrastingly, according to a study conducted by Luppicini & Saleh (2017), Saudi Arabia was discovered to hold one of the highest divorce rates in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); wherein it has experienced a dramatic increase in divorce cases - from 25% to 60% - with the steady introduction of modernization since the 1990.

The rise in divorce rates makes it imperative to comprehend its shorter and long-term effects on individuals, their children, society, and the generations that follow. Numerous studies have provided valuable insights into parental divorce's effects on children's well-being over the years (e.g., Amato, 2001; Cherlin et al., 1995; Hetherington, 1999). It should also be noted that the influence of divorce is not limited to younger children and adolescents whose parents got divorced; parental divorce has also had effects in adulthood. As emerging adults enter a stage of life in which they must make significant decisions about their education, career, and relationships, it is crucial to investigate how their experiences with parental divorce have shaped their attitudes and beliefs towards their life and individual stance in relationships. Before delving into the condition of emerging adults, it is necessary to understand the extensive research conducted by scholars on divorce, to comprehend its profound impact on children, after which emerging adults.

Various studies have highlighted the pervasive effect of parental divorce on children's overall development and all those involved. Numerous empirical studies (e.g., Amato, 2001; Cherlin et al., 1995; Hetherington, 1999) revealed that children of divorced parents frequently experience difficulties in multiple domains, such as

psychological health and interpersonal relationships. A 25-year longitudinal study by Wallerstein et al. (2000) investigated the long-term effects of divorce on children as they transitioned to adulthood. This study revealed that children of divorced parents frequently experience psychological and emotional difficulties, hurting their overall health and ability to establish stable relationships as emerging adults (Wallerstein et al., 2000). Family structure disruptions, increased family conflict, and changes in living arrangements can all contribute to increased emotional distress and psychological tension during the transition from childhood to adolescence (Amato, 2001; Kelly & Emery, 2003). The typical developmental tasks and identity formation processes inherent to adolescence increase these challenges (Steinberg & Siegel, 2008).

Transitioning from childhood to teen or adolescence, parental divorce can contribute to a higher likelihood of relationship instability and divorce in future generations. It is necessary to address that children have a much higher chance of retaining behaviors showcased by parents. The famous study conducted by Bandura et al. (1963) offered findings that highlighted the influence. of observational learning. Teens from divorced families may be more prone to repeating relationship patterns observed during their parents' divorce (Amato, 2001). Furthermore, adolescents from divorced families may face identity-related challenges as they attempt to establish a sense of self and incorporate their familial background into their self-concept (Fabricius & Luecken, 2007).

The experience of parental divorce can contribute to the child's emotional and behavioral difficulties, which may persist into adulthood and hinder their ability to establish and maintain healthy relationships (Peterson & Zill, 1986). Reaching the same conclusion within his study, Amato (2010) stated that children whose parents have divorced often struggle to form healthy relationships during their transition into adulthood, as they may develop a negative perception of relationships and marriage.

Contrary to the findings which indicated the adverse effects of divorce on children, adolescents, and adults, some studies have suggested that positive relationships with both parents after divorce can help children develop healthy relationship skills and attitudes (Amato, 2001). Additionally, it was found that positive

adult role models, such as stepparents, grandparents, or mentors, positively impact emerging adults' relationship outcomes despite their parental divorce (Simon & Barrett, 2010).

Furthermore, the impact of divorce on emerging adults' perceptions and beliefs regarding marriage and romantic relationships extends beyond their well-being (Amato, 2010). Divorce may also have broader societal consequences, such as an increased likelihood of economic hardship for women, and the long-term effects of divorce can result in increased reliance on public assistance programs (Cherlin, 2004). According to previous research, individuals whose parents got divorced, with negative views of marriage and reluctance to commit may contribute to declining marriage rates and increasing non-marital cohabitation and alternative relationship arrangements (Manning & Lamb, 2003). This transformation in relationship patterns can have implications for family formation, stability, and social cohesion.

In the context of familial divorce, cultural and societal factors can also influence emerging adults' perceptions of marriage and romantic relationships. Different cultural norms, values, and beliefs concerning divorce and marriage may influence how individuals interpret and react to their parent's divorce (Fackrell & Hawkes, 1996; Kalmijn, 1999). If one hopes to look at the different religions and their views on divorce, it could be seen that in Catholicism, divorce is opposed as stated in the Bible, "What God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matthew 19:6). Similarly, Orthodox Judaism and Islam view Divorce to be allowed; however, in grave matters: "And if you fear dissension between the two, send an arbitrator from his people and an arbitrator from her people. If they both desire reconciliation, Allah will cause it between them" (Quran 4:35). Religious beliefs may influence emerging adults' interpretation of divorce, potentially resulting in more negative views of divorce and its effects (Pearline & Pollitt, 2007).

When the perspective of divorce in Saudi society is considered, it is known that there is immense pressure on women to sustain their marriages and discourage divorce (Al-Rasheed, 2010). Nevertheless, divorce is inevitable. Therefore, for a comprehensive understanding of individuals whose parents got divorced and their

attitudes toward romantic relationships and marriage, it is essential to investigate the role of culture and society in shaping emerging adults' perceptions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

As explained above, divorce is a common phenomenon in modern society, affecting many families and individuals. Although several studies showing the negative effects of parental divorce on children's psychological, emotional, and social well-being in the short term and their later lives as well (Amato, 2000; Amato & Keith, 1991a), the literature is scarce in terms of understanding how and if divorce keeps affecting young adults' lives and relationships. Emerging adulthood, a developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood, is critical for forming and developing romantic relationships (Arnett, 2000). However, less is known about how emerging adults with divorced parents perceive and understand romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce.

Existing literature suggests that their parent's divorce may influence emerging adults' views on marriage (Cooney, 1994). Some studies have suggested that children of divorced parents were less likely to want to get married and had more negative views of marriage (Fackrell & Hawkins, 1996; Kalmijn, 1999). Teens and emerging adults whose parents are divorced are at an increased risk for developing relationship problems, including a lesser likelihood of committing to a partner and a greater likelihood of cheating (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Hetherington et al., 1998). Due to the stigma and societal pressure associated with divorce, emerging adults may experience emotional distress, identity conflicts, and difficulties forming intimate relationships (Al-Sanabani, 2006). Therefore, this study aimed to explain the impact of parental divorce on emerging adults. The study aimed to fill the gap by understanding the impact of divorce on emerging adults' views on romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce with factors such as culture and religion within Saudi Arabia.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

This qualitative research sought to understand how emerging adults' experience of parental divorce affects their views on romantic relationships, marriage, and

divorce. The overarching goal of this study was to learn more about the perspectives and realities of emerging adults whose parents were divorced by delving into their perspectives, realities, and experiences through factors such as family and family dynamics and religious and cultural beliefs.

The objective of this study was to gain a comprehensive and in depth understanding of the impact of divorce, including the divorce process itself and the subsequent changes in family structure and dynamics on emerging adults whose parents have gone through a divorce. Additionally, this research aimed to explore the influence of divorce in understanding emerging adults' perspectives towards romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce as well as the influences of cultural and religious factors.

1.4 Research Questions

In the current study, it was expected that experiencing parental divorce at a young age may affect an emerging adult's perception of and choices when pursuing romantic relationships. For this reason, the following research questions (RQ) were explored in the current study:

RQ1. What are the influences of divorce and changes in family dynamics for emerging adults whose parents went through a divorce?

RQ2. How do emerging adults from divorced families perceive romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce?

RQ3. What are the influences of culture and religion on perceptions of emerging adults related to romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Emerging adulthood is between 18 years old to 29 years old, characterized by significant changes and challenges. These difficulties can include obtaining stable employment, establishing meaningful romantic relationships, and navigating adulthood while maintaining a family connection (Arnett, 2015). Emerging adults have

also been exposed to numerous stressors, including financial difficulties, social pressures, and increased responsibilities (Hershenson & Power, 2015). It is important to consider that regardless of the child's age, parental divorce is a traumatic event that subjects all involved to both short- and long-term stresses (Amato, 2000; 2010). Moreover, emerging adults have been repeatedly found to face higher risks of emotional and behavioral adjustment problems after experiencing parental divorce, resulting in more complex emotional reactions and maladjustments in adulthood (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). By delving into the experiences of emerging adults as opposed to children or teens of divorced parents, one can acknowledge the transition from adolescence to adulthood and recognize the shift in perspectives. It can also offer the recognition of the broader societal and cultural influences that shape emerging adults in their lives (Settersten & Ray, 2010a; 2010b). However, navigating these challenges can help emerging adults develop resilience and adaptability (Arnett, 2015). Considering the negative repercussions of divorce, it is essential to take precautions to reduce the likelihood of marriage dissolution and the adverse effects of divorce. In a country slowly building tolerance for therapy and mental health, persuading individuals in Saudi Arabia to seek interventions when choosing to get married is necessary. One such measure is family counseling or therapy, which can assist couples in resolving their issues and enhancing their communication and conflict-resolution skills (Gurman, 2008). Children can also benefit from family counseling, as it provides a secure and supportive environment to express their feelings and concerns about divorce (Zhou and Sun, 2014). By highlighting the experiences of emerging adults with divorced parents in-depth, this study could address practical implications for mental health practitioners working with adults whose parents got divorced.

This study's qualitative methodology is one of its most notable contributions. While most prior research on parental divorce has relied primarily on quantitative methods, this study provides emerging adults a valuable opportunity to articulate their experiences and perspectives more nuancedly. The study used qualitative methodologies to delve into the depths of participants' narratives to understand their lived realities better.

Another significance of the study was the underrepresented sample, which included Arab participants residing in Saudi Arabia. As rich as the topic of divorce is, it is always beneficial to elevate the research surrounding the Arab world regarding intimate matters considering that research on this topic is not as extensive, especially related to intimate relationships and taboo subjects such as divorce. Divorce is a sensitive topic due to the stigma, which can make it difficult for people to talk about their experiences, limiting the amount of research on this topic.

1.6 Definitions

Within the following study, the terms illustrated and utilized in this research paper were defined below.

Emerging adulthood refers to individuals between the ages of 18 and 29 transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. Studies conducted by Arnett (2000; 2004; 2005; 2007) and Jensen et al. (2011), illustrated emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental period characterized by identity exploration, instability, and self-focus. Moreover, Arnett (2015) indicated that emerging adulthood is a time of opportunity and risk as individuals explore their identities and make important life decisions to shape their future trajectories.

Romantic relationships refer to intimate and emotional connectedness between two individuals that involve feelings of sexual attraction, emotional bonding, and mutual commitment; to each other's well-being and overall satisfaction and happiness (Hatfield & Rapson, 2018).

Marriage is a legal and social institution that involves a formalized and long-term public declaration of commitment - as well as of emotional intimacy and sexual exclusivity as drawn upon by Regnerus and Uecker (2011) - between two individuals. Most societies only permit marriage between heterosexual couples. Karney and Bradbury (1995) note that marriage is a multifaceted concept combining psychological and social components like love, commitment, and support. Marriage represents religious principles, traditions, and views concerning intimate relationships. Marriage is generally seen as a contract that legitimizes sexual relations and establishes both

spouses' familial and communal rights and duties in religious societies (Tapper & Tapper, 1992).

Divorce is the legal dissolution of a marriage or marital union between two individuals, usually initiated by one or both spouses (Seligman, 2017). Furthermore, divorce involves dividing assets and liabilities and terminating legal ties between spouses, resulting in significant emotional, economic, and social consequences for individuals and families (Amato and Keith, 1991).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter illustrated close relationships, marriage, and the family unit. This chapter also heavily explored divorce including its statistical data, reasons, and stages as well as its impact on emerging adult perceptions and decision-making when pursuing romantic relationships and marriage.

2.1 Emerging Adults

In recent years, the developmental stage known as emerging adulthood—a distinct era of life between adolescence and adulthood—has attracted more attention. A time of inquiry and self-discovery known as emerging adulthood occurs as people adjust to maturity and forge their identities (Arnett, 2000). The term *emerging adult* was used to define individuals in their late teenage years to early 20s; specifically, between the ages of 18 to 28 years (Arnett, 2007; Nelson et al., 2004; Shimkowski et al., 2018). According to research, emerging adulthood is a tremendous change and the progress period of the journey to maturity and independence. It is a moment of opportunity and growth consisting of a variety of stressors throughout the transition.

Self-identity is a crucial component of growth as an emerging adult. As emerging adults navigate this transition between youth and adulthood, they examine many facets of their identities (Arnett, 2000). Identity formation during this time is crucial because it lays the groundwork for an individual's adult identity (Schwartz et al., 2005). According to research, a person's self-identity in adolescence and early adulthood is complex and may be influenced by many factors. Family ties, societal connections, and cultural beliefs can all influence one's sense of self (Arnett, 2007). Additionally, as emerging people go through new experiences and face problems, their sense of self-identity may shift over time (Erikson, 1968).

It can be difficult for people to explore their identities when they enter adulthood because they may feel pressured to live up to social standards (Arnett, 2000).

These social standards and expectations may sometimes be challenged and reshaped through personal experiences and modernization (Al-Khraif et al., 2020; Luppicini & Saleh, 2017). These factors can also influence one's individualistic values, perspectives, and beliefs in any aspect of life, including romantic relationships, marriage, and even divorce (Al-Khraif et al., 2020). However, studies have also shown that adolescence and early adulthood offer many opportunities for personal development. People may gain a more sophisticated view of themselves and their place in the world as they study various facets of their identity (Arnett, 2000). Additionally, emerging adults might be more receptive to fresh ideas and viewpoints which could help with identity exploration and personal development. (Schwartz et al., 2005).

As emerging adults enter adulthood, they experience challenges such as financial insecurity, educational responsibilities, and career prospects and decisions (Arnett, 2007). Additionally, emerging adults may struggle to manage the social and emotional difficulties of forging adult connections and obligations (Arnett, 2004). Unlike in previous life phases, emerging adults are now more prone to interest and participation in dangerous and risky behaviors such as substance abuse and unsafe sexual activity (Arnett, 2005). The changes within this transition may cause mental health issues, leading to increased emotionality, sadness, depression, and anxiety (Kessler et al., 2005). As emerging adults seek to forge their own unique identities and traverse intricate social networks, this pressure can cause anxiety and confusion, as they could believe they are not fulfilling their parents', communities, or their own expectations (Schwartz et al., 2005).

Emerging adulthood is when people acquire a sense of direction and purpose (Arnett, 2007), which is mainly fueled by their curiosity, openness, and exploration (Arnett, 2005). Emerging adults confront a variety of opportunities for personal growth and development in addition to these difficulties. In their early 20s, emerging adults define their identities and explore their hobbies and interests, which they engage passionately in and carry into their adulthood and across their lives (Arnett, 2000). This allows them a healthier and more active social life and standing where they are subjected to many opportunities to explore their romantic and sexual interests and pursue more intimate partnerships and romantic relationships (Arnett, 2000).

During this phase, romantic relationships happen to play a substantially significant role in the lives of emerging adults, usually aiding them in their navigation across their journey from adolescence to adulthood (Rodrigues et al., 2017). These relationships are vital in aiding the emerging adults' personal development and identity formation (Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Romantic partnerships offer emotional support, an invaluable source of solace to emerging adults for coping with challenges in this transitional period (Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007; Rodrigues et al., 2017). Romantic relationships also foster both emotional and physical intimacy, allowing emerging adults to comprehend the complexities of attachment dynamics while simultaneously enriching their emotional intelligence (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Gala & Kapadia, 2013; Rodrigues et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2009). Lessons learned within this transitional period extend beyond the relationships cultivated in the present, as they could influence the emerging adults' templates and patterns of behavior in future relationships (Bowlby, 1988; Rodrigues et al., 2017; Thompson et al., 2009).

Furthermore, emerging adults will have the opportunity to build social and communication skills, which can serve as grounds for conflict resolution practices and the cultivation of meaningful interactions (Gala & Kapadia, 2013; Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007). This can assist them with the fostering of decision-making skills and individual autonomy, which catalyze personal growth, resilience, and comprehension of one's preferences (Lanz & Tagliabue, 2007; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). It is important to consider, however, that romantic relationships play a role in both the positive and negative developmental outcome of people, including emerging adults (Gala & Kapadia, 2013).

2.2 Close Relationships

Close relationships are integral to human existence and significantly impact individuals' well-being, contentment, and overall quality of life (Amato & Booth, 1997; Bradbury & Karney, 2010). Close relationships involve emotional, social, and/or personal connections between two or more individuals, consisting of platonic, familial, and romantic relationships (Noller et al., 2017).

Romantic relationships entail a complex interaction of personal and interpersonal factors such as differences in personality, attachment style, and communication skills (Finkel et al., 2014). According to Robles et al. (2014), romantic relationships are associated with positive outcomes such as increased life satisfaction, improved health, and decreased tension. In romantic relationships, partners engage in self-disclosure and trust-building by communicating personal information and weaknesses to one another (Laurenceau et al., 2005). Close romantic relationships may lead to taking the relationship one step further and result in the lifelong commitment of marriage between two partners.

Marriage is a legally recognized binding union between two individuals characterized by mutual commitment, emotional and physical closeness, and the intention of establishing a life together (Johnson & Weiner, 2017). According to the literature, marriage is linked to several advantages such as better physical and mental health, more stable finances, and social support (Braithwaite et al., 2010; Carr & Springer, 2010).

Improved physical health is one of the advantages of marriage that is most frequently mentioned. According to studies, married people are more likely to have better overall health and experience lower rates of chronic disease and disability than single people (Umberson et al., 2006). Additionally, marriage has been linked to a higher life expectancy, especially for men (Robles & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003). According to studies, married people are less prone than single people to experience despair and anxiety (Whisman & Uebelacker, 2012). Marriage has also been linked to higher happiness and life satisfaction (Proulx et al., 2007). Married people were likely to have larger household incomes and accumulate wealth than single people (Waite & Gallagher, 2000) where marriage has been associated with greater economic mobility, especially for women (Killewald, 2013).

It is important to keep in consideration that not all marriages are deemed happy affairs. In relationships, partners may sometimes experience conflict, tension, and dissatisfaction, frequently because of communication problems, differences in values, and misconceptions due to their perceptions of relationships and marriage, or within serious occurrences such as infidelity and divorce (Markman et al., 2013). Marriage

can also lead to unfavorable consequences (Bradbury & Karney, 2010), as those that exhibit poor communication and lack emotional support are more likely to contribute to relationship conflict and stress (Bradbury & Karney, 2010). As expected, marital discord and divorce have been related to adverse effects both on partners and children like emotional and behavioral issues (Cummings & Davies, 2010).

2.3 Family, Parenting, and the Impact of Parenting on Childrens' Lives

According to McGoldrick & Carter (2011), the term *family* is defined as a fundamental social institution that consists of a group of individuals bound together by blood, marriage, or adoption, sharing emotional ties, responsibilities, and mutual support. Families serve as a primary unit for socialization, nurturing, and care, playing a crucial role in shaping an individual's identity and values (White & Klein, 2008). Familial relationships revolve around love, trust, and interdependence (Popenoe, 1993) providing a sense of belonging, emotional security, and a supportive environment that facilitates growth and development (Boss, 1987; Boss et al., 2016).

Families with children are composed of parents and/or guardians and their offspring who live together as a cohesive unit, sharing emotional bonds, and responsibilities (Boss, 1987; Boss et al., 2016). These families play a vital role in raising and nurturing their family's next generation, providing care, guidance, and support to their children as they grow and develop (White & Klein, 2008). The dynamics of families with children can vary widely, influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors (McGoldrick & Carter, 2011).

Numerous studies have examined the influence of the various factors that shape individuals' perceptions and beliefs about relationships on relationship outcomes (Fincham et al., 1997; Fletcher et al., 2000). The interactions and relationships within these families can significantly impact the emotional and cognitive development of children, shaping their values, beliefs, and behaviors (Boss, 1987; Boss et al., 2016). Luecken and Roubinov (2013) claimed that positive family communication can enhance people's social competence, particularly their capacity to establish and preserve healthy connections. Despite the changes in family structures due to

modernization and changes in societal norms and demographics, the fostering of emotional bonds and social cohesion remains common.

Parenting is defined as the different methods and techniques utilized and aimed toward the rearing of children within the family unit. Parenting consists of many basic responsibilities, including providing children with the necessary physical care, emotional support, finances, guidance, and safety (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Effective parenting relies heavily on family structure, support, and parenting methods and styles. Moreover, families are essential for the transmission of cultural traditions, values, and beliefs from one generation to another (Erikson, 1950).

The parents' reactions, behaviors, attitudes, and values should be implemented effectively to promote their children's well-being, development, and adjustment (Darling & Steinberg, 1993) which may greatly shape their children's development, attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions (Amato & Rivera, 1999; Baumrind, 1991). Previous literature has investigated the numerous elements that go into good parenting and how that affects children's overall development (Bornstein, 2002; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). The warmth and attentiveness of the parents were one of the major characteristics that facilitate effective parenting (Baumrind, 1991). For instance, studies indicated that children who experience their parents as warm and responsive have more vital social skills, higher levels of empathy, and better academic performance (Bradley et al., 2001; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Yang et al., 2018). Furthermore, Baumrind (1991) asserted that parents who are compassionate and receptive to their children's needs and feelings are likely to raise children who display favorable outcomes, including improved academic achievement, stronger self-esteem, and lower levels of anxiety and despair (Baumrind, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

Parenting styles are a crucial component of effective parenting that has a huge impact on the upbringing of children. Research by Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016) claimed that positive disciplinary techniques like argumentation and positive reinforcement typically result in better outcomes than severe discipline techniques like corporal punishment. Additionally, studies have indicated that authoritative parenting, which entails establishing firm limits and expectations while being kind and attentive

to children's needs, tends to provide better results than authoritarian parenting practices (Baumrind, 1991).

The degree of parental participation in their children's lives is another crucial parenting factor that impacts young children's development. According to research, children whose parents are involved in their education typically do better in school (Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001). Parental involvement has been linked to better psychological outcomes, including higher levels of self-esteem, as well as decreased levels of anxiety and despair (Lau & Power, 2018). On the other hand, Amato and Keith (1991) found that children raised in single-parent homes are more likely to suffer from adverse effects like lowered academic success and performance, aggressive behavior, and decreased self-esteem. Additionally, studies have also shown that family support, such as that provided by grandparents or other relatives, might lessen some of these adverse outcomes (Hayslip et al., 2017).

The impact of family unity and parenting continues to be influential in adult children's lives, as well. Parental conflict, communication patterns, and post-divorce parenting practices have been identified as significant predictors of the relationship outcomes of emerging adults. Additionally, individual factors such as attachment style, self-esteem, and gender interact with parental divorce, further influencing emerging adults' relationship beliefs and behaviors (Johnson et al., 2017). A study by Wallerstein and Lewis (2004) reported difficulties in the development, formation, and maintenance of romantic relationships by adult children who experienced parental divorce in their childhood. In another study by Eldar-Avidan et al. (2009) discovered that most adult children’s perceptions of themselves, their social and relational functioning, and their ability to perform developmental tasks were greatly impacted by their experiences of parental divorce. Children’s ideas and beliefs about factors of healthy relationships such as intimacy, trust, and appreciation were also affected by their parents’ perceptions (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009). Alternatively, in the study, resilience, a sense of security, and optimism were also discovered, where the emerging adults had formed their own perceptions, and built and maintained stronger relationships and ties in their adulthood, especially when they believe the parental divorce was a good outcome for both parents (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009). Various studies by Amato (1988; 2000; 2001)

indicated that children who had positive relationships with their parents were less likely to have unfavorable attitudes regarding relationships and were more likely to have successful romantic relationships.

Upon the exploration of this idea, it was found that these optimistic and/or pessimistic views were tied to the emerging adults' personal development. Surprisingly, family structure has been shown to not be as significant in the lives of children. A study by Burns and Dunlop (1998) stated that family structure did not affect a child's perception and attitudes toward romantic relationships and intimacy as much as parent-child relationships; further confirming that the quality of the parent-child relationship is much more significant in comparison to the family structure, including the event of parental divorce (Turtiainen et al., 2007).

Parental involvement has been shown to be crucial to the development of children's well-being and functionality. Parents who nurture and support their children emotionally can aid in developing stable attachment styles, which can result in more fulfilling relationships and better adult mental health. (Bowlby, 1969).

2.5 Divorce and Divorce Statistics

Divorce refers to the legal termination of a marriage, involving each party going their separate ways following the dissolution of a marital union (Amato & Keith, 1991b). Divorce is a stressful life event that could lead to negative emotional, psychological, financial, and social consequences for all those involved, especially children (Cabılar & Yılmaz, 2022).

Divorce has become more common in recent decades, increasing its prevalence, with different divorce rates being reported among countries and regions (Afifi et al., 2013. For example, the United States initially had one of the highest divorce rates globally. However, recent years have seen a decline (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007), with the National Center for Family & Marriage Research (2022) reporting that the United States of America experienced a divorce rate of 39% in 2021. Canada has experienced a steady divorce rate, estimated at around 48% in 2018, suggesting that nearly half of marriages end in divorce (Statistics Canada, 2019). Europe's overall divorce rate is estimated to be 40%. Still, there are significant

variations between individual countries (Eurostat, 2021), with higher divorce rates observed in Scandinavian countries like Sweden and Denmark compared to Mediterranean European countries such as Italy and Greece (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2021). Regardless of the reported divorce rates, an article by Bussemakers et al. (2022) stated that the current global divorce rate is 4.08 per 1,000 married people.

Collecting accurate statistical data on divorce rates in the Middle East is challenging due to varying reporting methods and cultural influences (Fereidouni, 2016; Iversen et al., 2005). Compared to other parts of the world, various countries in the Middle East have reported relatively low divorce rates (Jones, 1997; Sheykhi, 2020), whereas it could be otherwise contradictory. For example, in 2014, Saudi Arabia, a target sample of the study, was reported to have the lowest divorce rates, at 1.10 per 1,000 people compared to other Middle Eastern countries such as Jordan and Iran, respectively reported divorce rates of 2.50 and 1.90 (Fereidouni, 2016). Contrastingly, according to a study conducted by Luppicini & Saleh (2017), Saudi Arabia was discovered to hold one of the highest divorce rates in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); wherein it has experienced a dramatic increase in divorce cases - from 25% to 60% - with the steady introduction of modernization since the 1990s. The rise in divorce rates makes it imperative to comprehend its shorter and long-term effects on individuals, their children, society, and the generations that follow.

2.5.1 Reasons for Divorce. According to previous literature, the reasons for divorce have transformed over the past half a century. These reasons vary across interpersonal, intrapersonal, and social factors including levels of education, changes in individualistic needs, diminished spousal satisfaction, injustice in spousal behavior, and feelings of lovelessness (Coşkun & Sarlak, 2020; Hawkins et al., 2012; Platte, 1988). Studies have also stated infidelity, domestic violence, frequent conflict, relationship problems, low levels of trust and love, and a weak commitment to the marriage as other predictors of divorce (Aarthy, 2022; Chang, 2004; Cohen & Finzi-Dottan, 2012; Eyo, 2018; Goode, 1956; Platte, 1988). Moreover, in the past two decades, there have been reports of other reasons such as conflicting lifestyles, changes in social status, addiction, the emergence of physical illnesses, and lack of freedom (Coşkun & Sarlak, 2020; Chang, 2004; Platte, 1988). Regarding gender differences in

the reasons for divorce, women were found to report lovelessness and belittlement by their partners (Chang, 2004). On the other hand, men stated incompatibility of interests and/or values and spousal negligence as grounds for divorce (Chang, 2004). Additionally, a 2009 survey by the Permanent Committee for Population Studies reported 50% of respondents - the majority of which identified as men - that failure or a lack of sexual satisfaction with partners was a reason to divorce as well. Chang (2004) also found ethnicity-related differences in reasons for divorce. Caucasian individuals reported a lack of support and engagement in childcare/rearing and decreased communication while African American individuals indicated extra-marital affairs and physical abuse as reasons for divorce (Chang, 2004).

Divorce is a worldwide phenomenon that affects all regions of the world, including the Middle East. Divorce is not prohibited in Islam but is greatly frowned upon and discouraged in Saudi Arabia due to the country's religious and traditionalistic nature (Rasheed et al., 2021). As observed in many cases in the Middle East, couples have resorted to 'emotional divorce', a term used to define a couple's emotional and psychological distancing and separation, while committing to their responsibilities of managing the family unit (Rasheed et al., 2021). Usually, emotional divorce is done to maintain the family's status and reputation within the community as well as to live up to society's cultural and religious traditions and expectations (Rasheed et al., 2021). Emotional divorce has also been shown to be more destructive than an officialized divorce (Rasheed et al., 2021; Shiri, 2016).

Despite the possible inaccuracy of the reported numbers, studies have indicated a drastic increase in divorce rates in the Middle East over the past few decades (Iversen et al., 2005; Rasheed et al., 2021), especially due to the influence of modernization and technological advancements (Abdulrahman & Alamri, 2021). Just as in the case of global observations, reasons for divorce such as infidelity, spousal incompatibility, domestic violence, and economic problems were also commonly observed in Saudi Arabia (Abdulrahman & Alamri, 2021; Osafo et al., 2016). A study by Abdulrahman and Alamri (2021) discovered that specific reasons pertaining to the Saudi Arabian societal and cultural climate included sharing the same house as in-laws, lack of communication and conflict resolution skills, cultural and religious expectations, and

incompatibility in education and socioeconomic status (Abdulrahman & Alamri, 2021; Bahry, 1982; Osafo et al., 2016).

2.5.2 Stages of Divorce. Researchers have discovered that those who experience and are coping with divorce display similar emotional and psychological reactions as those who are mourning (Hagemeyer, 1986; Lawler, 2002) such as physical ailments, sleep disruptions, changes in appetite, mood swings, substance use, and even suicidal thoughts (Lawler, 2002).

The stages of divorce have been closely related to the stages of grief, due to its distinctive pattern of coping with loss from the divorcee and the divorced (Hagemeyer, 1986; Lawler, 2002). Lawler (2002) addressed the grieving process of the loss that follows divorce in seven stages: 1) shock and disorganization, 2) denial, 3) anger, 4) loneliness, 5) guilt and shame, 6) evaluation, and 7) acceptance. Each stage was explained below, respectively.

Stage 1: Shock and Disorganization. Shock is the first stage involved people may experience as they are made aware of their partner's or their own view of the strength and value of the relationship. This may be followed by feelings of numbness and sadness, and loss of interest in activities they engage in and enjoy, which may cause disruptions in their daily routines (Lawler, 2002).

Stage 2: Denial. In the second stage, denial often acts as a coping mechanism, allowing the involved persons to slowly face the reality of the divorce. Individuals may have dreams of reunion, avoid making decisions that could escalate the speed of the divorce, and deny the existence of any marital conflicts, especially in front of friends and family, and sometimes, children, if any. At this stage, couples may hesitate to make decisions about property and asset distribution (Lawler, 2002).

Stage 3: Anger. Anger is a normal response to loss. This anger can emerge from feelings of betrayal, frustration, or even just a general sense of disappointment toward the leaver or themselves. Individuals may feel anger towards their ex-spouse because of past, unresolved problems from the marriage. In this stage, people may display or experience physical ailments or depression because of their anger toward their partner (Lawler, 2002).

Stage 4: Loneliness. As friends and family members may start to take sides, divorce can create a sense of void and loss of emotional support within the involved persons. Individuals may feel isolated, misunderstood, and believe that their emotions are unique to them. Feelings of relief at this stage are normal, as individuals learn that they are no longer expected to deal with the problems related to their partnership. However, that relief can also be met with feelings of sadness and loneliness as they adjust to the thought of being single again (Lawler, 2002).

Stage 5: Guilt and Shame. This phase involves feelings of guilt and shame as the persons may assign blame onto their partner and/or themselves, eventually recognizing that both may have contributed to the marriage's issues. This stage can be difficult, as it requires couples to face the possibility of life without each other. Couples may also feel guilt and shame for not being able to save their marriage and question how things would have been if they had done things differently, like the bargaining phase (Lawler, 2002).

Stage 6: Evaluation. During this phase, individuals assess the marriage, how both partners changed, and how these changes affected the relationship's happiness. Couples may still feel sad and lonely at this stage, but they have typically made peace with the decision to divorce. They may also look forward to new possibilities (Lawler, 2002).

Stage 7: Acceptance. This phase involves letting go of the past, releasing resentful feelings, and embracing the new post-divorce phase in life. This is when ex-partners have come to terms with their ended marriage, thus moving on with their lives. They may also start to see the positives of being uncommitted and begin to focus on their own happiness, freedom, and individuality (Lawler, 2002).

2.5.3 Theoretical Framework in Understanding Divorce. To better understand divorce and its societal impact on individuals and families, researchers have developed various models and theoretical frameworks. Some of the more prominent models and frameworks were explained below.

***2.5.3.1 The Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory Model*.** This theoretical framework was developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1979, aiming to understand human

development within the context of various interconnected environmental systems. These systems span from immediate and direct impacts on individuals (microsystem) to broader societal and cultural elements (macrosystem), while also accounting for intermediate levels of influence (mesosystem and exosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In the context of divorce, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model can be utilized to observe the impact of divorce on across the model's systems — microsystem (family), mesosystem (interactions between family and other systems), exosystem (external influences on the family), macrosystem (cultural beliefs and values), and chronosystem (historical context) - in which individuals and their families operate in (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These systems were explained in detail below.

2.5.3.1.1 Microsystem. The microsystem is a person's immediate environment which includes crucial settings such as family, school, and peers (Crawford, 2020). Individuals experience daily interactions, relationships, and influences that determine their development within this microsystem. Divorce can negatively affect individuals within the microsystem, especially in emotional adjustment, academic performance, and behavioral problems (Amato & Keith, 1991; Lansford, 2009). Divorce frequently causes substantial changes in family dynamics, such as increased family conflict, altered parenting methods, and disrupted routines (Amato & Keith, 1991; Cooney et al., 1995). These alterations can contribute to an individual's emotional difficulties, such as sadness, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009). In addition, divorce can disturb the integrity of the microsystem, resulting in poor academic performance and increased behavioral issues (Amato & Keith, 1991).

2.5.3.1.2 Mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined the mesosystem as the connections and interactions between various microsystem components, such as family and school. Positive family and peer relationships within the mesosystem may act as protective factors in the context of divorce and its effects on individuals' mental health. Strong and supportive family relationships, for instance, can mitigate the negative effects of divorce, such as depression and anxiety (Kruk, 2012). Similarly, positive peer relationships can provide social support and a sense of belonging leading

to improved mental health outcomes for individuals from divorced families (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1995; Sandler et al., 2015).

2.5.3.1.3 Exosystem. In the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory (1979), the exosystem refers to a person's social and cultural environment, indirectly influencing their perceptions and beliefs regarding marriage and romantic relationships. It includes external factors that can influence individuals even if they are not directly involved in those contexts. In addition, culture significantly impacts marriage and divorce norms and patterns (Afifi et al., 2013; Amato & DeBoer, 2001). Their cultural values, traditions, and social expectations may affect individuals' perspectives on marriage and divorce.

2.5.3.1.4 Macrosystem. In the Bronfenbrenner Ecological Theory (1979), the Macrosystem encapsulated the broader cultural and societal norms, values, and conventions that influence an individual's development. It emphasized how the larger social context influences the perceptions and beliefs of individuals regarding various aspects of life, including marriage and divorce. The Macrosystem has a significant impact on how individuals perceive marriage and divorce. According to research, divorce rates can influence how individuals view and approach marriage and divorce in their relationships. Amato and DeBoer (2001) discovered that acceptance of divorce has grown, especially among younger generations. This suggests that societal attitudes toward divorce have evolved and may influence the perspectives of individuals regarding marriage and divorce.

2.5.3.1.5 Chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979) illustrated that the chronosystem refers to the influence of time and historical context on the development of individuals. It acknowledges that societal changes, evolving norms, and altering attitudes can influence individuals' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences over time (Crawford, 2020). The chronosystem illustrated how shifting divorce rates and societal attitudes toward divorce can influence the views and perspectives of adolescents and emerging adults. For instance, emerging adults from the 1980s may have grown up during a time of higher divorce rates and greater social acceptability, which may have affected their attitudes and beliefs regarding marriage and divorce (Amato & DeBoer, 2001). On the other hand, emerging adults from the 2010s may have been exposed to

diverse cultural and societal values, resulting in unique perceptions of divorce and marriage compared to previous generations.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory Model provided a framework for understanding how various systems and contexts influence individuals' perspectives on romantic relationships and marriage (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the scope of this study, this model was utilized to illustrate the impact of divorce on emerging adults and families, in forming their perceptions of relationships and marriage. Studies by Amato and Keith (1991) and Emery (1999) found that children who have experienced parental divorce frequently manifest elevated levels of anxiety and despondency. These negative outcomes can be attributed, at least in part, to the tension and conflict that frequently accompany divorce (Hetherington, 1979). Changes in family structure and routines because of divorce can disrupt children's sense of stability and security, which can, in turn, influence their perceptions and beliefs regarding marriage and romantic relationships (Amato & Keith, 1991).

2.6 The Impact of Parental Divorce on Children

Parental divorce is among the most influential factors in individuals' attitudes and relationship beliefs, especially the involved children (Cabılar & Yılmaz, 2022). Numerous studies have provided valuable insights into parental divorce's effects on children's well-being over the years (Amato, 2001; Cherlin et al., 1995; Hetherington, 1999). A study by Amato and Previti (2003) explored the different negative consequences of divorce on the parents as well as their children. On an emotional scale, divorce can result in feelings of sadness, anger, confusion, and loss (Amato & Keith, 1991; Amato & Previti, 2003; Kelly & Emery, 2003). It can also lead to a skewed perception of relationships and love, reduced trust in others, and risks of mental health problems such as increased anxiety and depression (Amato & Previti, 2003; Dew et al., 2012). In addition, children of divorced parents are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, such as aggression and delinquency (Amato & Keith, 1991; Fagan & Churchill, 2012). Divorce can disrupt a child's sense of stability and security, potentially resulting in behavioral issues. These behavioral problems can range from aggression and disobedience to delinquent behavior (Amato & Keith, 1991; Fagan &

Churchill, 2012). In addition, whereas boys are more likely to have behavioral issues after a divorce, girls are more likely to face emotional troubles (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Divorce can also affect an individual's identity and sense of self-worth (Amato, 2020). Parental divorce can impact parenting style, as it can result in children experiencing emotional distress and adjustment issues and disrupt the parent-child relationship altogether (Amato, 2020). Ongoing intense conflicts between parents, loss of financial and emotional support, confusing visitation arrangements, adaptation to parents' new relationships, changes in geography, and lack of parental involvement may all greatly affect a child (Kelly, 2003).

It should also be noted that the influence of divorce is not limited to younger children and adolescents whose parents got divorced but it has been found to affect the involved children's adulthood. As emerging adults enter a stage of life in which they must make significant decisions about their education, career, and relationships, it is crucial to investigate how their experiences with parental divorce have shaped their attitudes and beliefs towards their life and individual stance in relationships (Fletcher et al., 2000). Before delving into the condition of emerging adults, it is necessary to understand the extensive research conducted by scholars on divorce, to comprehend its profound impact on children, after which emerging adults. Consistently, studies have demonstrated that parental divorce can profoundly affect the attitudes, expectations, and behaviors of adolescents and emerging adults in their romantic relationships.

The effects of parental divorce extend well into maturity beyond childhood and adolescence (Amato & Booth, 1996; Shimkowski et al., 2018). Children of divorced parents frequently experience higher levels of family conflict and instability, which can negatively affect their adult romantic relationships (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Shimkowski et al., 2018). Studies have revealed that individuals who have experienced parental divorce may have a more negative outlook on marriage and relationships. For instance, Braver et al. (1993) and Shimkowski et al. (2018) indicated that emerging adults who had witnessed parental divorce were less likely than those from intact homes to view marriage as a desirable aim. They also had more unfavorable opinions toward marriage (Braver et al., 1993). Cartwright (2006) elaborated that emerging

children who had experienced parental divorce have been found to leave their parents' home and work from a young age, sometimes even prematurely forming a union, and sometimes experience adolescent pregnancy. Likewise, Riggio and Weiser's (2008) study discovered that people who had experienced parental divorce had more unfavorable attitudes toward commitment and were less likely to believe in the concept of a 'soul mate.' However, the protective effects of parental divorce on people's attitudes toward partnerships can be lessened by supportive and constructive familial interactions (Luecken & Roubinov, 2013). Notably, emerging adults who have experienced parental divorce may exhibit positive and negative outcomes, with some individuals exhibiting resilience and relationship growth (Jappens & Van Bavel, 2019; Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Shimkowski et al., 2018). For some, however, the experience of parental divorce can contribute to difficulties with trust, commitment, and relationship stability (Amato & Keith, 1991; Scott et al., 2013). Furthermore, Amato (1999) and Shimkowski et al. (2018) indicated that children who experience parental divorce are more likely to experience similar problems in their romantic relationships and marriages as they employ the same communication and behavioral patterns as their parents.

An important point to consider is that interparental conflict prior to divorce was able to determine the beneficial or harmful nature of divorce on the children (Ross & Miller, 2009). In some cases of highly conflicted divorced couples with children, one parent may try to actively alienate the other parent from their children. This phenomenon is called the "Parent Alienation Syndrome" in which one parent engages in attempts to wrongly portray or target the other parent as abusive, neglectful, or harmful, which may skew the children's perspective. These actions can be profoundly damaging to the children, impairing their emotional capacity and well-being which may later affect their own romantic relationships in adulthood (Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007).

It is crucial to remember that not all children of divorced parents suffer unfavorable consequences. Positive relationships with both parents and solid parental support are protective variables that help lessen some of the negative impacts of divorce (Amato & Keith, 1991; Kelly & Emery, 2003). Children's adaptability to

divorce-related changes can also be significantly influenced by their resilience and coping mechanisms (Lansford, 2009). Further research is required to identify effective interventions and support systems that promote healthy relationship development in this population (Amato & Booth, 1996; Johnson et al., 2002; Ryan & Claessens, 2012; Wang et al., 2014).

2.7 Differences in Experiences of Parental Divorce among Children and Emerging Adults

Various research has proven that the experiences of children and emerging adults differ when it comes to parental divorce. In the case of younger children, it has been reported that upon subjection to parental divorce, they often experience confusion, fear, sadness, and a sense of loss (Berman, 1988; Fiorini & Mullen, 2006). They may struggle to understand the reasons behind the decision and may even blame themselves for the commencement of the divorce (Bryner, 2001; Fear et al., 2009; Healy Jr. et al., 1993; Wallerstein & Tanke, 1996). Additionally, children may find it challenging to adjust to changes in their living arrangements, routines, and the absence of one parent (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002; Lee & Hett, 1990). Thus, this adjustment may lead to behavioral problems, academic difficulties, and/or regression in developmental milestones (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Lee & Hett, 1990).

Depending on the child's age and gender, the effects of divorce may also differ. For instance, younger children were found to have difficulties adjusting to the changes brought about by divorce while older children were affected long-term (Amato & Keith, 1991). Regarding gender differences, parental divorce has stronger effects on boys than girls (Amato & Keith, 1991; Fischer, 2007). Fischer (2007) stated that boys would struggle with the effects of parental divorce due to the lack of a male figure in their life. Moreover, boys were found to be more inclined to disobey their mothers' rules, as girls are reported to have increased levels of subordination (Carbone, 1994). This leads to believe that boys would require more supervision post-parental divorce in comparison to girls (Fischer, 2007). Girls are more likely to experience greater emotional difficulties compared to men due to their nature (Symoens et al., 2013; Williams & Dune-Bryant, 2006). Interestingly, different studies showed mixed results,

where some discovered a stronger effect on boys (Morrison & Cherlin, 1995; Simon, 2002), and the same was determined for girls (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Aseltine & Kessler, 1993).

On the other hand, emerging adults were reported to experience a range of emotions, including anger, betrayal, sadness, and relief (Conklin, 2008; Wallerstein, 1985; Wallerstein et al., 2000). Compared to younger children, emerging adults have a more developed understanding of the complex nature of divorce (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Roper et al., 2020). While they may face similar challenges as children in adapting to the emotional aftermath of divorce, emerging adults often have a better capacity to cope, especially if they seek support from their peers and/or from mental health counselors (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009; Hinton & Mayer, 2014; Reed et al., 2016). Emerging adults also have more autonomy and independence compared to children, as they can make decisions regarding their post-parental divorce living arrangements as well as other legal matters (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009; Leung et al., 2022; Ryan & Lynch, 1989). They may establish independent relationships with each parent and act as a source of support for their parents during the divorce process (Reed et al., 2016). Masten and Wright (2010) observed in their study that emerging adults show more resilience towards the outcomes and challenges of parental divorce than younger children, consistent with other studies' findings.

2.8 The Impact of Religion and Culture on Perceptions of Romantic Relationships

Religion is known to play a significant role in shaping an individual's identity, emotional development, and as well as their perceptions of romantic relationships, through affiliated teachings, practices, and norms (Eggebean & Dew, 2009; Felmlee & Sprecher, 2000; Hill & Pargament, 2008; Shimkowski et al., 2018). Religious practices, along with one's *religiosity*, may affect ideas pertaining to their engagement in romantic relationships. The term 'religiosity' is defined as one's involvement in religious practices, in navigating through experiences and in shaping their overall outlook in life (Shimkowski et al., 2018).

Religions offer ethical guidelines that extend to romantic relationships and crucial components of healthy partnerships such as fidelity, honesty, and respect (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). Religious beliefs often dictate the recognized duties and responsibilities affiliated with the gender roles, influencing one's perceptions of equality, communication, and decision-making within the relationship (Mahoney et al., 1999; Shimkowski et al., 2018). Additionally, these beliefs also communicate teachings on sexual ethics and premarital sexual relations, shaping perspectives on physical intimacy, boundaries, and the timing of one's engagement in romantic contexts (McFarland et al., 2011; Regnerus & Uecker, 2011).

Religion also provides guidelines or preferences for the religious background of a partner, which affects one's partner selection (Shimkowski et al., 2018; Youniss & Smollar, 1985). Moreover, Amato and Previti (2003) state that religions emphasize the sanctity of marriage, fostering an outlook that prioritizes commitment, loyalty, and resilience. Research discovered that those with strong religious beliefs may regard marriage, fidelity, and family values more highly (Mahoney et al., 2001). Contrastingly, people who identify as religiously unaffiliated or hold more liberal religious ideas could place a higher value on their happiness and autonomy in their relationships (Lefkowitz et al., 2004).

2.9 The Impact of Religion and Culture on Perceptions of Divorce

Despite being two different phenomena (Jaafar-Mohammad & Lehmann, 2011), religion and culture are interconnected and play an influential role in an individual's perceptions and overall outlook, including the topic of divorce (Afifi et al., 2013; Eyo, 2018). Religion emphasizes and accentuates the permanence and sacred nature of marriage and matrimony, through the officialization and sanctification of a romantic relationship into a marriage (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000). On the other hand, cultural views on divorce are complex and evolving, with a range of opinions within each culture based on individual interpretations and experiences (Afifi et al., 2013; Aghajanian & Thompson, 2013; Konstam et al., 2016). However, when it comes to divorce, especially in religious communities, it is often connected to shame as well as other concepts such as family honor and reputation, which could discourage many

from commencing the process (Jaafar-Mohammad & Lehmann, 2011; Mahoney et al., 2005).

Islam sees family as the central unit of society, wherein marriage is strongly advocated and seen as a part of Muslimhood (Almalki & Ganong, 2018). Thus, divorce is frowned upon in many religions and cultures, where the concept is met with discouragement and resistance, and a complicated and long process (Hackstaff, 1999; Jaafar-Mohammad & Lehmann, 2011). Religious leaders and institutions may be sought by the involved individuals and their families to influence divorce decisions, guiding individuals based on their faith's moral code (Jaafar-Mohammad & Lehmann, 2011; Mahoney et al., 2003). Additionally, religions valuing family unity may prompt individuals to weigh the repercussions of divorce on children and extended family, shaping their decision-making process (Jaafar-Mohammad & Lehmann, 2011; Nock, 2005). Gender roles proscribed by religious teachings can impact perceptions of marital responsibilities within divorce, influencing choices regarding division of duties and child custody (Fincham & Beach, 2002). Thus, religious teachings often emphasize exhaustive efforts to salvage marriages before the consideration of divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Hackstaff, 1999), encouraging the utilization of practicing forgiveness, compassion, and understanding to resolve both interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts (Almalki & Ganong, 2018; Fincham & Beach, 2002).

Studies have also demonstrated that depending on one's religious or cultural background, divorce may affect emerging adults' attitudes about marriage and romantic relationships differently (Afifi et al., 2013). For instance, children of divorced parents may acquire unfavorable attitudes toward divorce and emphasize the security of their future relationships in cultures where divorce is stigmatized (Afifi et al., 2013; Aghajanian & Thompson, 2013). On the other hand, children of divorced parents may perceive divorce as a feasible choice for addressing marital issues in societies where divorce is more acceptable or even anticipated (Amato & James, 2010).

2.10 The Impact of Religion and Culture on Perceptions of Romantic Relationships and Divorce in Saudi Arabia

As Islam is the leading religion in The Kingdom Saudi Arabia, the target sample of this study, it is certain that it plays a substantial role in the country's cultural views and, social and political views and features (Rasheed et al., 2020). Regarding Islam's view on divorce, it is not prohibited but is usually discouraged and frowned upon due to several factors (Al-Khateeb, 1998; Rasheed et al., 2020). Muslim scholars find the practices of divorce, especially woman-initiated divorces, quite controversial (Yakar, 2019). Saudi Arabia is shaped by Wahhabism, a sect of Islam that serves as the kingdom's official ideology, with the Qur'an as its constitution (Dillon, 2009). Wahhabi Muslims insist on the kingdom adhering strictly to the Sharia law system in every aspect of life (Dillon, 2009). As Wahhabism shaped the cultural understanding, thoughts, and perceptions of involved judges, this greatly influenced their approach to handling divorce or other marital-related cases as well (Yakar, 2019).

Saudi Arabia is considered a patriarchal and male-dominated society, with little importance placed on the woman, mainly if she displays behavior that does not abide by the Shariah laws of obeying her husband's wishes and needs (Yakar, 2019). However, there has been a dramatic increase in divorce cases, with Saudi Arabia holding one of the highest divorce rates (Saleh & Luppicini, 2017). According to a study by Saleh and Luppicini (2017), since the 1990s, divorce rates in Saudi Arabia have risen from 25% to 60%. Almalki & Ganong (2018) have also stated that divorce has greatly increased in Saudi Arabia, reporting 80% of divorces taking place within the first three years of marriage, 70% of which were filed due to family issues. Although the exact reasons behind this increase in divorce rates may not be entirely specific, it can be assumed that this could be due to the introduction of modernization and due to the changing roles of women in Saudi Arabian society (Al-Khateeb, 1998; Rasheed et al., 2021; Saleh & Luppicini, 2017).

Chapter 3

Methodology

The aim of this chapter was to set the methodology employed within this study to investigate emerging adults' perceptions regarding romantic relationships and marriage expectations, with a specific focus on the impact of parental divorce. This chapter presented the methodological approach adopted. It presented the sample, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative research design was employed in this study. The researcher specifically utilized the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative research approach to explore how individuals make sense of their significant personal and social experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Smith et al., 2009) by identifying themes and patterns. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the subjective nature of individuals' experiences and the role of the researcher in interpreting these experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). A qualitative research method was considered due to its greater capacity to gain more depth and meaning based on emerging adults' perceptions of romantic relationships and marriage expectations due to parental divorce.

3.2 Participants

Utilizing a specific sampling approach must reflect the purposes and questions directing the study (Punch, 1998). Purposive sampling, also known as criterion sampling or judgmental sampling, was utilized by the researcher to strategically select participants who met the study's criteria and objectives (Creswell, 2013). Purposive sampling was used to strategically select participants who met the criteria and objectives of the study. According to Bryman (2004), purposeful sampling ensures that research questions and study participants are essential to one another.

Furthermore, snowball sampling was employed to enhance participant recruitment. Snowball sampling involves initially identifying and recruiting participants who meet the study's criteria. Individuals can refer to other potential participants who meet the criteria (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). By combining purposive and snowball sampling, the researcher aimed to access diverse participants who offered rich insights and perspectives related to the research objectives. The mentioned sampling methods were chosen to align with the study's specific requirements, research questions, and the need to identify participants essential to address the research objectives effectively.

The inclusion criterion was based on participants who were emerging adults (currently between 18 and 29 years of age) of Arab ethnicity who have experienced parental divorce after the age of 6. The researcher also selected participants who lived and grew up in Saudi Arabia during the divorce. Participants were also selected based on their ability to communicate in and understand English. The parents' marital length range changed from 11 to 27.5 years. The participants' mean age when their parents divorced was 12.53 years (*SD*=5.79). See Table 1 and Table 2 for the details of sample characteristics.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Participants (n=15)

Participant No.	Sex	Length of parents' marriage (in years)	Age when parents divorced (in years)
1	F	15	8.5
2*	F	3 11	1.5 17
3	F	25	21
4	F	18.5	19
5	M	17	11
6	F	27.5	17

Table 1 (cont.)

Characteristics of the Participants (n=15)

7***	NB	20	11 17 22
8	F	7.5	6
9	M	11	7
10	F	17.5	7
11	F	6.5	6
12	M	8.5	6.5
13	F	18	16
14	F	18	13
15	M	12.5	12

*Note: F= Female; M = Male; NB = Non-Binary; * Participant 2's parents' length of first marriage is 3 years and the second is 11 years; Participant 2 experienced parental divorce twice; at the age of 1.5 years and 17 years; *** Participant 7 experienced parental divorce three times; at the age of 11 years, 17 years, and 22 years*

All 15 participants were of Arab ethnicity and were residing in Saudi Arabia at the time of the study. The participants comprised four males, ten females, and one non-binary individual, with a mean age of 24.2 years (*SD* = 2.80). Eleven participants (73.3%) were bachelor's students, three were completing their Master's degree (20%), and one had graduated at a high school level. Of the 15 participants, six were employed full-time (40%), four were unemployed (26.7%), three were employed part-time (20%), and two were looking for job opportunities (13.3%). Regarding financial dependency on parents, ten participants stated they were partially dependent, four were entirely dependent, and one was financially independent. Out of the 15 participants, seven had one sibling, three had two siblings, three came from households with three or more siblings, and two were the 'only child.'

Participants were also asked about their current relationship status. Ten participants were single (66.7%), four were married (26.7%), and one was in a relationship. When asked whether they had ever pursued a relationship, only one participant had not gotten into it. Regarding the length of their current relationship, 5 participants (33.3%) stated they were in a relationship for less than a year, and 3 (20%) were in the relationship for 4 or more years. Moreover, the categories 1-2 years, 2-3 years, and 3-4 years held two participants each. See the details about participants' characteristics in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (n=15)

Characteristics	Frequency (*n*)	Percentage (%)
Gender Identity		
Female	10	66.7
Male	4	26.7
Non-Binary	1	6.7
Education Level		
Bachelor's degree	11	73.3
Master's Degree	3	20
High School Degree	1	6.7
Employment status		
Full-time	6	40
Unemployed	4	26.7
Part-time	3	20
Looking for opportunities	2	13.3
Financial dependency status on parents		
Partially dependent	10	66.7
Fully dependent	4	26.7
Independent	1	6.7

Table 2 (cont.)

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (n=15)

Current relationship status		
Single	10	66.7
Married	4	26.7
In a romantic relationship	1	6.7
Length of relationship		
Less than a year	5	33.3
4 years or more	3	20
1-2 years	2	13.3
2-3 years	2	13.3
3-4 years	2	13.3
Never Been in a Relationship	1	6.7
Number of siblings		
One	7	46.6
Two	3	20
3 or more	3	20
None	2	13.3

3.3 Data Collection

3.3.1 Data Collection Instruments.

3.3.1.1 Demographic Information Form. The researcher developed the demographic information form. It consisted of 18 close-ended questions (Appendix C), aiming to explore the participants' demographic information, such as their sex, age, relationship status, and the length of their most recent relationship. Additionally, participants were asked about the length of the parental marriage, when their parents divorced, with whom they continued to live after the divorce, and how frequently they saw either parent.

3.3.1.2 Semi-Structured Interview Form. The researcher developed this form based on the theoretical and empirical literature on marital relationships and divorce. The two-part semi-structured interview form consisted of 22 open-ended questions (Appendix D).

Part One consisted of 10 questions that explored the participants' experience with the divorce process, the impacts of parental divorce, and its changes on the participant's family dynamics. An example question from Part One is, "What kind of changes did you (if any, your siblings) experience during the divorce?". Moreover, Part Two consisted of 12 questions that explored the participant's perceptions and beliefs about romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce. An example question from Part Two is, "What do you think you bring from your parents' relationship to your relationship in terms of positive/negative issues, events, and behaviors." This semi-structured questionnaire allowed the participants to elaborate and express their feelings and thoughts openly. Additionally, such questionnaires provide more flexibility, range, and the capacity to elicit more information from the participant.

3.3.2 Data Collection Procedures. Before initiating the data collection process, the researcher filled out a form supplied by Bahçeşehir University's Ethics Committee, and ethical approval was granted (Appendix A). After receiving ethics committee approval, the researcher proceeded with participant recruitment.

The recruitment process began with the researcher creating a Twitter post, where she had identified herself as a master's program student and expressed her intention to conduct research interviews. The post invited those interested in participating by privately messaging the researcher for further instructions. Upon receiving the messages from potential participants, the researcher collected their email addresses to share additional research details, such as purpose, requirements, and available time slots. Eligibility confirmation was sought by asking participants to disclose their age (6 years or older), residency in Saudi Arabia at the time of divorce, and proficiency in the English language. Once confirmed, participants were asked about the best-suited time slot. The researcher sent a consent form to participants and instructed them to thoroughly review it and sign it before the interview, along with the link scheduled for the interview. The interviews were conducted over two months and

three weeks (27 September 2022 to 20 December 2022) through Zoom, a platform that allows individuals to connect for audio and/or video meetings. The researcher used English for dialogue and sought to use comprehensible and relevant wordings to ensure participants navigated the interview. The interviews conducted for the study had a minimum duration of 22 minutes and a maximum duration of 58 minutes. In total, the cumulative duration of all interviews amounted to 492 minutes.

Before the interviews, participants were given advance notice, a generalized outline of the subject to be discussed, an indication of the type of information required, the purpose of the research, and how the information they provided would be utilized. At the start of each interview, participants were informed of the duration, and sufficient time was allowed before and after the interview for participants to pose any questions related to the research topic. All participants completed a consent form that indicated their willingness to participate in the interview and be audio-recorded (Appendix B).

3.3.3 Data Analysis Procedures. The data was analyzed by conducting content analysis, an inductive method in which researchers construct replicable and valid interferences between meaningful content and useful contexts (Krippendorff, 2018). Content analysis was used to analyze the data and it consisted of the following steps: coding the data, identifying relevant themes, organizing themes, subthemes, and codes, and identifying and interpreting results (Alase, 2017). The researcher followed each step to analyze the data**.**

After conducting every interview, the researcher noted down qualities that stood out in the interview and saved them within every participant's folder to ensure organization and tracking. After all the data had been collected, the researcher transcribed all interviews verbatim; the total number of pages amounted to 135 pages. First, the researcher and her advisor manually coded one participant's transcription on Microsoft Excel to create a draft list of codes, sub-themes, and themes. Then, the researcher moved to code two more transcriptions manually by using the draft list and adding new codes, sub-themes, and themes. The researcher and her advisor discussed the second set of codes, sub-themes, and themes and reached a consensus. Later, the researcher continued coding the rest of the transcriptions through the MAXQDA, robust qualitative data analysis software (VERBI Software, 2021) to analyze the

qualitative data collected for this study comprehensively. Regarding the qualitative data, transcripts of the participant interviews were input into MAXQDA for qualitative data analysis. MAXQDA enabled efficient exploration of emerging themes and patterns by facilitating the systematic organization and coding of the data.

The data underwent a comprehensive classification procedure guided by a predefined coding scheme developed in response to the research questions. Once all the transcriptions had been coded, the researcher and her advisor scheduled a series of meetings to examine and discuss the identified codes, sub-themes, and themes in depth. Relevant concepts, such as perceptions of romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce, were incorporated into the coding scheme. These meetings served as a forum for in-depth discussions, during which the researcher presented her preliminary analysis and received insightful feedback from her advisor.

With a strong emphasis on rigor and precision, the researcher reviewed the received feedback, analyzed the existing analysis framework, and implemented the necessary modifications based on her advisor's discussions. This iterative procedure ensured that the final codes, sub-themes, and themes accurately represented the subtleties and complexities captured by the qualitative data.

Furthermore, an expert opinion was gathered from two professors in the field of Psychological Counseling and Guidance with expertise in qualitative research. The initial expert provided a comprehensive evaluation encompassing the identified codes, sub-themes, and themes. Meanwhile, the second expert demonstrated a more intricate understanding, meticulously scrutinizing each theme to ascertain its alignment with the research questions and the study's aim. Consequently, due to the experts' vast expertise, three themes were deemed irrelevant and subsequently excluded from further consideration, thus ensuring a focused and relevant exploration of the research question.

3.3.4 Trustworthiness. The conduction of qualitative research provides a valuable source of information which explores in-depth human experience. According to Morse (2006), qualitative approaches address the more complex topics and issues that may not emerge if explored quantitatively. An element of reliability in qualitative

research is *trustworthiness*, the extent to which the findings of a study authentically represent the personal experiences of the explored phenomenon (Curtin & Fossey, 2007; Shenton, 2004). Although, the researcher's subjectivity may be captured within the study, trustworthiness acts as a template to ensure the findings of the study are accurately presented (Stahl & King, 2020). For the following study, the researcher had worked closely with her advisor as well as with an expert in the studied field of romantic relationships and marriage. The academician, possessing specialized knowledge and expertise, critically evaluated the questionnaires for their content validity and relevance to the research aims. Their feedback, constructive suggestions, and expert insights were incorporated into the questionnaires, enhancing the validity of the research instruments.

To ensure the clarity and effectiveness of the questionnaires, a pilot interview was conducted before the research commenced. The pilot interview involved engaging an interviewee who provided valuable feedback on the questions, allowing for iterative improvements in wording, structure, and overall coherence. This process enhanced the validity of the questionnaires by aligning them more accurately with the research objectives and participant perspectives. The data collected during the pilot interview was not included in the final analysis, as its purpose was to refine the research instruments, not to contribute to the substantive findings.

The researcher had partaken in rigorous steps across the study to validate the demographic and semi-structured interview questionnaires. The researcher carefully identified and included appropriate research questions for the following study, based on existing literature and research conducted using theoretical frameworks to further explore and describe the nuances of the phenomenon. With this research topic, aimed, and questioned in consideration, the demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interview sheet were designed, ensuring the alignment with what was to be studied.

Furthermore, the participants were expected to be proficient in English and able to communicate and express themselves. This was an important criterion in both transcribing the interview verbatim and eliminating the possibilities of misinterpretation. Upon the completion of the interviews, the researcher transcribed the interview recordings into text, and established a list of themes, sub-themes, and

codes. To ensure proper organization and accurate grouping of codes, the researcher manually coded two additional transcriptions before transitioning to the widely utilized qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. The researcher sought expert opinion from two Psychological Counseling and Guidance professors to further enhance the study's credibility. The experts were able to ensure that the themes, sub-themes, and codes aligned with the research questions, as well as the aim. Themes that failed to relate to the research question and aim were omitted.

Direct quotations from the interviews were provided in the results section to showcase the transferability of the findings. These quotations have helped to demonstrate the accuracy and transferability of the study's findings.

3.4 Positionality Statement

The researcher who conducted this qualitative study duly considered her positionality and its potential impact on the research process and outcomes. At the time of the study, the researcher, a 26-year-old woman originally from Beirut, Lebanon, had spent most of her formative years in Saudi Arabia until the age of 23. Her parents had a history of two divorces. While parental divorce and separation of the researcher undoubtedly granted her a unique perspective and a profound connection to the research topic, they also introduced the potential for bias in her interpretation of the collected data. In recognition of this possibility, the researcher diligently employed a reflexive approach to mitigate potential biases and ensure the rigor of the research process. After each participant interview, she engaged in thoughtful self-reflection, meticulously examining her own observations and assumptions. Furthermore, to minimize bias during the data analysis phase, the researcher conscientiously shared the developed themes, sub-themes, codes, and participant quotations with her academic advisor, as well as an expert.

By openly acknowledging her positionality and actively practicing reflection, the researcher was able to uphold transparency throughout the research. Additionally, she remained aware of the ethical considerations of safeguarding participant confidentiality, ensuring anonymity, and securing informed consent for the inclusion of participants' subjective experiences in this study.

Chapter 4

Results

This chapter displayed the results of the study, presenting characteristics, descriptive statistics, and results of the qualitative analysis. Additionally, direct quotations from the participants, pertaining to each theme, were presented in this chapter.

4.1 Results of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

The following section presents the findings of the content analysis conducted which used the phenomenological approach to obtain comprehensive understanding of the influences of cultural and religious factors on emerging adults' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes towards romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce. Furthermore, it offered valuable insights and in-depth information into the intricate connections between parental divorce, cultural/religious background, and emerging adults' perspectives in relation to key aspects of intimate relationships. The analysis was guided by the three research questions presented in earlier sections.

The major themes that emerged following the data analysis because of parental divorce were Perspective of Divorce in the Culture, Parental Reasoning for Divorce, Parental Relationship Before Divorce, Participant Discovery of Parental Divorce**,** Perceived Role in a Romantic Relationship, Expectations from a Romantic Partner, Decision of Getting Married Associated to Parents' Divorce, Similarities/Repeated Patterns in Parents' and One's' Own Relationship**,** and Lessons Learned from Parents' Marriages. See Table 3 for the list of themes, sub-themes, and codes. The most striking and explanatory quotations for each code were provided to describe the findings in detail.

Table 3
Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes

Theme	Sub-theme (*f*)	Code (*f*)
Perspective of Divorce in the Culture	Stigmatization	Not Acceptable (10) Being Looked Down Upon (3) Decreases the Woman's Value (1) Disturbs the Perfect Family Image (1) Last Resort (1) Makes Children Affected the Most (1) Considered as Toxic (1)
		Accepted (1)
Parents' Relationship Before Divorce	Negative Relationship (17)	Abusive/Problematic Relationship (11) Distant Relationship (4)
	Positive Relationship (4)	A Good Relationship (4)
	Neutral Relationship (2)	Both Good and Bad Relationship (1) Not Observed by Participant (1)
Parental Reasoning for Divorce		One Parent Committed Infidelity (3) Not Explained by Either of Parents (4) Not Getting Along (4) One Parent Was Religious (1) One Parent was Abusive (1) Family Interferences (1)
Participants' Discovery of Parental Divorce		Participant Anticipated Parental Divorce (5) Participant Discovered the Reason (2) Explained in an Easy Language (2) One Parent Left with No Explanation (2) Explained in a Fight (1)

Table 3 (cont.)
Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes

	Unexplained Relocation (4)	Moved to Grandparents' House (2) Left the Country to Come Back to Another Household (1)
Feelings Towards the Decision to Divorce	Negative Feelings (15)	Feeling Sad (4) Feeling Confused (3) Feeling Numb (2) Feeling Shocked (2) Feeling Betrayed (2) Feeling Scared (1) Feeling Worried (1)
	Positive Feelings (5)	Feeling Excited (2) Feeling Good (1) Feeling Comforted (1) Feeling Protective (1)
Thoughts and Behaviors Towards the Decision to Divorce		Accepting the Situation (2) Having Positive Thoughts Until Parents' Remarriage (2) Encouraging Parents to Divorce (2)
Parent-Child Relationship After Decision to Divorce (Unofficial)	Friendly Relationship (12)	Mother was Friendly to Participant (4) Father's Efforts to Mend Relationship (Participant's) (4) Balanced Parent-Participant Relationship (2) Participant and Sibling lived with Father (2)
	Negative Relationship (10)	Father was Neglectful to Participant (4) Participant and Sibling Limited Contact with One Parent (2) One Parent was Aggressive to Participant (2) Participant Refused Friendly Relationship with Mother (1) Participant and Sibling Refused Relationship with Father (1)

Table 3 (cont.)
Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes

Changes in Familial Dynamics After Parents Were Separated	Negative Familial Dynamics (9)	One Parent was Aggressive (2) Parents Received Backlash from Family Members (3) One Parent was Distant (2) Religion Used to Persuade the mother to Stay in the Marriage (1) One Parent Pretending like Nothing Happened (1)
		No Change in Family Dynamics (5)
	Positive Familial Dynamics (3)	Mother's Family in Support of Her Decision (1) Parents were Good to Each Other's Families (2)
Changes in Participants Life After Parental Divorce	School Shift (12)	Participant/Sibling Changing School (3)
	Social Shift (9)	Having More Friends (1) Not Socializing with Friends (1)
	Residential Shift (9)	Moving to New Home (8) Moving to Another Country (1)
	Evident Financial Shift (10)	Positive Financial Shift (on one's parent's side) (6) Negative Financial Shift (on one's parent's side) (4)
	Negative Family Relationship (17)	Dependent Relationship (5) Strained Relationship (4) Distant Relationship (8)
	Positive Familial Relationship	Close Relationship (6) Improved Relationship (7)
Perceived Role in a Romantic Relationship		Friendship, Honesty, and Balance (5) Masculine/Male Roles (leader, responsible) (3) Feminine/Female Roles (Caregiver) (2)

Table 3 (cont.)
Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes

Expectations from A Romantic Partner		Maturity and Independence (8) Security (8) Being Compassionate (3) Openness and Agreeableness (3) Honesty (2) Transparency and Comfort (2) Physical Attractiveness and Smartness (1) Familiarity (1)
Lessons Learned from Parents' Marriage		To Communicate (7) To Never Commit Impulsively (4) Relationship Requires Effort (3) Enjoy Partners' Company (2) Not to Force Religion (1)
Participant Linking Marriage Decision to Parental Divorce		Positive Attitudes Towards Marriage (10) Negative Attitudes Towards Marriage (4)
Similarities Between Participants' and Parental Relationships		Inability to Communicate Effectively (5) Resemblance in Partner and Parents' Characteristics and Behaviors (4)
Coping Mechanisms in Participants' Own Romantic Relationships	Destructive Coping (9)	Inability to Communicate Verbally (3) Isolating Oneself (2) Self-Soothing Through Medicine and Food (2) Emotional Suppression (2)
	Constructive Coping (7)	Communicating (5) Coping through Humor (1) Coping through Hobbies (1)

4.1.1 Perspective of Divorce in Culture. In the cultural context, divorce is perceived and understood through multiple lenses. One prevalent perspective is that divorce is not fully accepted by society, and therefore, is stigmatized, which is the sub-

theme, due to its highest frequency code of "*Not accepted*" (*f*=10). The other codes under this theme were as follows: "*Being looked down upon*" (*f*= 3), "*Accepted*" (*f*= 1), "*Decreases the woman's value*" (*f*= 1); "*Disturbs the perfect family image*" (*f*= 1), "*Last resort*" (*f*= 1), "*Makes children affected the most*" (*f*= 1), and "*Considered as toxic*" (*f*= 1).

The following quotes offer the range of perspectives identified.

"Actually, it's not that accepted. It is my family like my parents. They've been on bad terms for a very long time, but the family, like the other family members were the ones who were standing against it. Since it was not something that's supposed to happen, between 2 married people" (Participant 3, Female, Code: Not Accepted).

"Women would - I feel like stay in a marriage, just because you know they have to keep up the perfect image" (Participant 2, Female, Code: Disturbs the Perfect Family Image).

"It would be like the last resort in a way." (Participant 2, Female, Code: Last Resort).

"Divorced from what I'm from what I've been told and in Islam and stuff Is if if basically if two parents get divorced then it's instantly going to go down to the children. The first, the first people that are going to get affected are the children." (Participant 15, Male, Code: Makes Children Affected the Most).

4.1.2 Parental Relationship Before Divorce. The analysis of participants' experiences revealed three distinct sub themes that characterized the nature of their parents' relationship prior to divorce. The first subtheme, "*Neutral Relationship,*" (*f*= 2), combining two codes, *"Both Good and Bad Relationship"* (*f*= 1) and *"Not Observed by Participant,"* (*f*= 1), depicted instances where participants lacked

significant positive or negative interactions between their parents. *"Negative Relationship"* (*f*= 15) which is the second subtheme, which reflected three codes which portrayed instances where participants described and shared their parents' relationship as *distant* (*f*= 4), and Abusive/*Problematic Relationship* (*f*= 11). The third subtheme that falls below, *Parental Relationship Before Divorce* is, *"Positive Relationship." "A Good Relationship"* (*f*= 4) code was used to describe highlighted, positive aspects by the participants to showcase their positive relationship.

"I don't know if I blocked things out, but what I remember was pretty fine, we laughed a lot. I laughed, a lot of this with both of my parents, I remember seeing them laugh together, when I was younger, I thought everything was okay" (Participant 1, Female, Code: A Good Relationship).

"We always had rough patches. Because my dad worked in the airlines, he never was around much. And when he was around, they were always fighting." (Participant 7, Non-Binary, Code: Abusive/Problematic Relationship).

"Always in disagreement, always screaming, yelling, fighting, never on the same page and never we never used to sit down all together." (Participant 12, Male, Code: Abusive/Problematic Relationship).

"I've seen both happy moments and not very happy moments" (Participant 14, Female, Code: Both Good and Bad Relationship).

"I feel like they were friends more than a couple." (Participant 14, Female, Code: Good Relationship).

4.1.3 Parental Reasoning for Divorce. Based on the analysis of participants' narratives, parents expressed several factors and reasons to explain their decision to divorce. *"One Parent Committed Infidelity"* (*f* = 3), assigned to instances where one

parent engages in extramarital affairs, indicated its significance within the sample. A code, which highlighted its prevalence within this sample was, *"Not Getting Along"* (*f*= 4). Participants mentioned a general lack of compatibility, harmony, or the inability for their parents to get along. However, four participants disclosed that their parents either chose not to disclose the reasons or failed to provide a satisfactory explanation as to what the reasoning for divorce was. Therefore, the following participants' responses were coded as, *"Not Explained by Either of Parents"* (*f*= 4) The third coding used was, *"Family Interferences"* (*f*= 1), which indicated external influences from extended family members who contributed to the decision to divorce. Participants had vocalized instances where the pressure from relatives impacted the stability of their parents' relationship. The code *"One Parent Was Religious"* (*f*= 1) highlighted instances where one parent forced religious beliefs onto the other parent, as well as the participant and siblings. This code suggests that religious views strained the marital bond. Lastly, *"One Parent was Abusive"* (*f*= 1) highlighted a case where the participant reported instances of emotional and verbal abuse perpetrated by one parent.

"My mom and my dad. They come from different family backgrounds, so it was mostly that the family got involved. And makes it worse because they're like my mom. Like you know, any two people would disagree on something like one or two. So, they would decide on some stuff and what made it worse is that my family. Used to interfere. A lot and they would change like they changed my dad's mindset after my mom worked on it to change it for him. So, it was like going backwards" (Participant 3, Female, Code: Family Interferences).

"My dad got married, like a second wife, when I was 11. Um and basically at first, my mom wanted to - was kind of trying to be okay with it, because she didn't want to split the family." (Participant 4, Female, Code: One Parent Committed Infidelity).

"There wasn't a particular reason, and it was just them not getting along and I tried to understand." (Participant 1, Female, Code: Not Getting Along).

"They didn't really come to me and like - like it wasn't really like the - the where like, 'okay we have to talk to you'" (Participant 17, Female, Code: Not Explained by Either of Parents).

"She told me everything that abuse was the reason basically and she called the police and that's what happened basically, and that's how she got her divorce." (Participant 15, Male, Code: One Parent was Abusive).

4.1.4 Participant Discovery of Parental Divorce. Participants' accounts revealed diverse experiences and circumstances surrounding their discovery of their parents' divorce. A sub theme that emerged was *"Unexplained Relocation"* (*f*= 5). It encompasses the instances in which the participant and siblings moved to another accommodation without a clear explanation. Within the subtheme, three codes were identified: *"Left the country to come back to another household"* (*f*= 1) to express that the participant had left the country for university and had come back to find that they had to live elsewhere due to their parents' divorce. The second code being, *"One parent left with no explanation"* (*f*=2) which represents the instances in which one parent was absent from the household without clear or explicit reasons provided. Therefore, added to the confusion and emotional impact experienced by the participants and the siblings. The Third code, *"Moved to grandparents' house"* (*f*= 2) which described the scenarios in which participants moved with one of their parents to the grandparents' house which further contributed to the participants' discovery of their parents' divorce.

Several codes were identified, however, did not fall underneath specific subtheme(s), and they captured the distinct aspects of the participants' discovery of their parents' divorce, such as: *"Participant Anticipated Parental Divorce"* (*f*= 5) that indicated some participants had sensed or anticipated their parents' impending divorce before it was officially communicated to them. This translates into participants becoming more aware, noticing subtle signs or tensions throughout their parents' relationship. Another code, *"Explained in a Fight"* (*f*= 1) depicted a scenario in which the participant was aware during one fight between her parents in which it was

announced through an ultimatum. The fourth code that falls without a sub-theme within the *'Participant Discovery of Parental Divorce'* theme, is *"Participant Discovered the Reason"* (*f*= 2). The final code is, *"Explained in an Easy Language"* (*f*= 2), which indicates the tone and wording used by parents to express to the participant the decision and the reason as to why the divorce was taking place. The manner was age appropriate, easy to comprehend, using simplified language and explanations.

"I felt there was something wrong, so she started to put me in the picture - there is this this this going on and. Like they had a lot of problems. Family even likes some sickness and there's a lot of stuff that happened in the middle, but. With my mom, my dad doesn't put me in the picture much like he doesn't like he never talked to me about it, never said a word to me, but I would feel that there is something wrong, and she's the one who like she came. And she talked to me. She's like 123 is happening with us and I think it's for the best." (Participant 3, Female, Code: Explained in an Easy Language).

"I would say my mom was very upfront with me as a child. Of course, she said it to me in a language that I would understand because as a child you don't understand" (Participant 12, Female, Code: Explained in an Easy Language).

"I found that out by going to their room and my mother was crying and she was saying that you have to live with your dad for about - for a while because we - because we just got divorced." (Participant 5, Male, Code: Participant Discovered the Reason).

"It was clear that it was gonna happen after that, you know. So they didn't have to talk they just got a divorce and I - no one - no one came and talked to us; me and

my sister; and we didn't have a conversation with my - my parents like they explained to us none of the options" (Participant 4, Female, Code: Participant Anticipated Parental Divorce).

"My mom, she wasn't there, so I kind of assumed" (Participant 7, Non-Binary, Code: Participant Anticipated Parental Divorce).

"I think we sat down altogether. I can't remember quite well, but what I remember was that it - it was basically an ultimatum from my dad. There was like a huge fight between them and that he had an ultimatum: you either do this or I'm gonna divorce you" (Participant 6, Female, Code: Explained in a Fight).

"I just came from with my sister to what do you call it from school? And she wasn't there, no more. All her stuff was gone. She had told us the day before that, you know, she would always be there for us and all that shit. And then she just got up and left. We didn't see her or hear from her for like 2-3 years" (Participant 9, Male, Code: One Parent Left with No Explanation).

"I got home from school and my mom was packing my bags and she said we're gonna move to your grandparents before your dad comes home" (Participant 5, Male, Code: Moved to Grandparents House).

"I actually got picked up and dropped off to my grandparents' house and I got the hint that we will no longer be living together" (Participant 10, Female, Code: Moved to Grandparents House).

4.1.5 Feelings Towards the Decision to Divorce. The following theme delves into the range of emotional experiences and reactions participants felt towards their

parents' decision to divorce. There were two distinct sub themes which emerged, reflecting participants' feelings, such as: The first sub theme was, *"Positive Feelings"* (*f*= 5) expressed the participants' positive emotions in response to their parents' decision to divorce. Four codes were identified, *"Feeling Good"* (*f*= 1) which represented instances where participants expressed a sense of well-being or positivity associated with divorce. *"Feeling Excited"* (*f*= 2) captured instances where the participants stated and shared their excitement. *"Feeling Protective"* (*f*= 1) reflected instances that the participants reported, wanting to support and ensure one parent's well-being. And last, *"Feeling Comforted"* (*f*= 1) which was expressed by participants as a sense of comfort or relief knowing their parents' decision could lead to healthier and happier life for themselves, as well as their parents.

The second subtheme, *"Negative Feelings"* (*f*= 15), describes the participants' experiences of negative emotions in response to their parents' decision to divorce. There were seven codes that fell beneath this subtheme: *"Feeling Betrayed"* (*f*= 2) where participants expressed feelings of betrayal, *"Feeling Worried"* (*f*= 1) which represented participants' fear over her sibling, and the consequences of the divorce. *"Feeling Sad"* (*f*= 4) which depicted instances where participants expressed their sadness, grief, or sense of loss. *"Feeling Confused"* (*f*= 3) where participants expressed their confusion of how divorce came to be. *"Feeling Numb"* (*f*= 2) depicted instances where participants reported feeling emotionally numb or detached as a response to divorce. *"Feeling Scared"* (*f*= 1) stated by a participant going through a rollercoaster of emotions. And lastly, *"Feeling Shocked"* (*f*= 2) based on the instance that the participant felt that he was certain his parents were getting a divorce.

"I remember at that moment I was also looking at him like, 'how would you wake her up?' it's her daughter and I mean what kind of - I don't I didn't understand the interaction and this one stuck with me more than them telling me…There was another reason, I was confused for the divorce because they have so many friends and so I have so many visions of being places with everyone laughing the whole time, you know." (Participant 1, Female, Code: Feeling Confused).

"I felt like I was lied to. Because all my life my mother was trying to put a good image of my father, which wasn't even a good image in my eyes." (Participant 8, Female, Code: Feeling Betrayed).

"'I promise you, I love you. I love your dad, I love your sister blah blah blah.' The next day she disappeared and I didn't hear from her for a few years." (Participant 9, Male, Code: Feeling Betrayed).

"I don't remember feeling anything in particular, because it became a reality. I was really young and I just woke up one day and I just started living it. I don't think that there was a particular mark." (Participant 10, Female, Code: Feeling Numb).

"I just wanted to do anything for her, because she deserves that so much and I want my father to feel that. Because he doesn't." (Participant 8, Female, Code: Feeling Protective).

"My mom always told me that she wasn't worried one bit because she knows my dad would take care of us no matter what." (Participant 1, Female, Code: Feeling Comforted).

"I was actually worried about my sister because she was like she was really small in in that period of time." (Participant 14, Female, Code: Feeling Worried).

"I don't remember feeling anything in particular, because it became a reality. I was really young and I just woke up one day and I just started living it. I don't think that there was a particular mark." (Participant 10, Female, Code: Feeling Numb).

4.1.6 Thoughts and Behaviors Towards the Decision to Divorce. The analysis revealed various thoughts and behaviors exhibited by the participants as a

response to their parents' decision to divorce. Three distinct codes emerged which captured various aspects of participants' reactions. The first code, *"Accepting the Situation"* (*f*= 2) depicted instances where participants exhibited a level of acceptance towards their parents' decision. This acceptance may have been accompanied by an understanding of the reason behind the divorce and a willingness to adapt to the changes it brought. *"Having Positive Thoughts until Parents' Remarriage"* (*f*= 2), represented instances where participants initially held positive thoughts or hopes for their parents' divorce, which was then limited when the parent had a subsequent remarriage. The third code, *"Encouraging Parents to Divorce"* (*f*= 2) depicted situations in which participants expressed active encouragement or support for their parents' decision to divorce. By encouraging divorce, participants aimed to facilitate their parents' happiness and create a healthier environment for themselves, as well as their family.

"I wanted them to get a divorce because I think they can be happier separated, it was always my opinion that I want them to get a divorce you know. I mean like they can - they can live a happy life if they're not together and that's what's happening" (Participant 4, Female, Code: Encouraged Parents to Divorce).

"Positive until like three years later my dad got married" (Participant 1, Female, Code: Having Positive Thoughts Until Parents' Remarriage).

"It was fine up until my mom got married" (Participant 4, Female, Code: Having Positive Thoughts Until Parents' Remarriage).

"I don't think my dad leaving impacted me like that as a child, like in the initial divorce" (Participant 11, Female, Code: Accepting the Situation).

4.1.7 Parent-Child Relationship After Decision to Divorce (Unofficial). Through analysis, two sub themes and one coding emerged, revealing several aspects of the parent-child relationship. *"Friendly Relationship"* (*f*= 12) is the first sub theme,

and it captured the instances where participants described a positive relationship with one or both parents after the divorce. There are four codes that fall below: *"Balanced Parent-Participant Relationship"* (*f*= 2) which is characterized by mutual support, understanding and involvement. *"Participant and Sibling lived with Father"* (*f*= 2) represented situations where participant and sibling(s) lived with their father, harboring a closer bond. *"Father's Efforts to Mend Relationship"* (*f*= 4) where the father actively made efforts to mend and strengthen the relationship with the participant, leading to an improved relationship. *"Mother was Friendly to Participant"* (*f*= 4) captured instances where the mother demonstrated friendliness and warmth towards the participant.

The second subtheme, *"Negative Relationships"* (*f*= 11) reflected instances where participants experienced strained and/or challenging relationships with either parent after the divorce. There are six codes that fall beneath this sub theme: *"Participant and Sibling Limited Contact with One Parent"* (*f*= 2) pointed to the limited or restricted contact between the participant, sibling and one of the parents. "*One Parent was Aggressive to Participant*" (*f*= 2) depicted situations where one parent displayed aggression or hostility towards the participant resulting in a strained and negative relationship. *"Participant Refused Friendly Relationship with Mother"* (*f*= 1) represented instances where the participant intentionally rejected attempts to establish a friendly relationship with their mother. *"Father was Neglectful to Participant"* (*f*= 4) code displayed situations where the father demonstrated neglect or lack of attentiveness towards the participant, leading to a distant and unsatisfactory relationship. Finally, the code *"Participant and Sibling Refused Relationship with Father"* (*f*= 1) portrayed situations where one parent showed favoritism towards the participant's sibling, leading to feelings of inequality.

"They were fine with us like they were pretty chill. Like towards us, they were pretty chill." (Participant 13, Female, Code: Friendly Relationship).

"I think that they both tried their best to give me their own time. Like whenever I went out with my dad one-on-one like he would. He would do activities that I would

enjoy. Take me to like Chuckie cheese, like just have a good time with me. And then my mom has always been like a superstar mom." (Participant 11, Female, Code: Balanced Parent-Participant Relationship).

"He tried to encourage my mother to stay and all that stuff for for our sake" (Participant 9, Male, Code: Father's Efforts to Mend Relationship (Participant)).

"My dad's basically like tried to have a relationship with us and he tried to explain himself" (Participant 15, Male, Code: Father's Efforts to Mend Relationship).

"My mom used to talk to me like it was fine. She used to come and tell me everything what was going on to put me in the picture like she used to take me as her friend sometimes" (Participant 3, Female, Code: Mother was Friendly to Participant).

"My dad actually never talked to me about it and he started being very distant from us like I get it. What's happening with him? Him and my mom but like? We had nothing to do with it. So he started putting the pressure on me" (Participant 3, Female, Code: Father was Neglectful to Participant).

"My mom was there, she always had my back" (Participant 8, Female, Code: Mother was Friendly to Participant).

"My dad did things – like I was a priority that needed to be done, rather than because he wanted to." (Participant 8, Female, Code: Father was Neglectful to Participant).

"At that time I don't remember talking to my mom a lot. She was like we only saw her weekends. Because we didn't have a cell phone or anything. We couldn't call

her every day or talk to her everyday, but we were like we got distance a little, but like every weekend we would spend it with her every Friday and Saturday." (Participant 14, Female, Code: Participant and Sibling Limited Contact with One Parent).

4.1.8 Changes in Familial Dynamics After Parents Were Separated. The analysis of participants' responses shed light on the social dynamics of parents after the decision to divorce. There are two sub themes, beneath the Social Dynamics of Parents Post-Divorce Theme. The first sub theme, *"Positive Familial Dynamics"* (*f*= 3) includes two codes that depict specific aspects of positive familial dynamics. *"Mother's family in support of her decision"* (*f*= 1) which captured instances where participants' maternal families expressed their support of the mother's decision to divorce. The second code, *"Parents were Good with Each Other's Families"* (*f*= 2) representing situations where the mother maintained a respectful and cordial relationship with the father's family, fostering a sense of mutual respect and understanding.

The second sub theme, "Negative Familial Dynamics" (*f*= 9) revealed instances where participants experienced negative or strained interactions within their respective families. There were 5 codes that emerged and reflected the several aspects of negative familial dynamics. *"One Parent was Aggressive"* (*f*= 2) depicted situations where one parent exhibited passive-aggressive behaviors, leading to tension and discord within the family dynamic. *"Parents Received Backlash from Family Members"* (*f*= 3) illustrated instances where one parent faced criticism or backlash which led to a strained relationship and conflict. *"One Parent was Distant"* (*f*= 2) represented situations in which one parent became disconnected and estranged. The code *"Religion Used to Persuade Mother to Stay in the Marriage"* (*f*= 1) captured instances where relatives on either side of the family used religious beliefs to ensure both parents maintain their relationship. And lastly, *"One Parent Pretending like Nothing Happened"* (*f*= 1) portrayed instances where the father projected an image of harmony and unity between family members, potentially masking underlying issues, as well as tensions. A separate code named as *"No Change in Family Dynamics"* (*f*= 5) emerged,

characterized by an absence of strong positive or negative interactions, a lack of visible change.

"She treated his family the same because they've known each other for years. So, it made sense for the respect to be there" (Participant 11, Female, Coding: Parents were good with each other's families).

"My dad actually went way openly to the others, which made it a bit worse. Like people started knowing what we have at home, what what's happening exactly" (Participant 3, Female, Coding: One Parent was Aggressive).

"My mom, actually she kind of went into her own bubble. She started having just issues with everyone. Doubt the person in front of her. She stopped trusting the like at the point she stopped trusting her own family just. From all of the pressure she has," (Participant 3, Female, Code: One Parent was Distant).

"He was mean and rude to my mother's family. He would speak so badly of my mom. He was mean, and even to his parents. His siblings, he would talk to because he only had them" (Participant 8, Female, Code: One Parent was Aggressive).

"His mom was trying to keep my mom in the marriage. Basically, sort of trying to persuade her, in a religious way, to stay in the marriage, but she just was not happy." (Participant 3, Female, Code: Relatives Used Religion to Join Parents).

"Everybody loves each other dearly and like my every - my mum's side of the family loves my dad and my dad's side of the family loves my mom so all of that is good." (Participant 12, Male, Code: Parents were good with each other's families).

4.1.9 Changes in Participants Life After Parental Divorce. According to the analysis, a significant sub-theme presented was *"Social Shift"* (*f*= 5) experienced by participants and their siblings. One code emerged, *"Having More Friends"* (*f*= 1) which reports that participants' social dynamics and relationships with friends underwent noticeable changes after their parents' divorce, and "*Not Socializing with Friends*" (*f*= 3).

The second sub-theme that emerged was, *"School-Related Shift"* (*f*= 7) with two codes: *"Participant/Sibling Changing School"* (*f*= 7) where participants shared their experiences of changing schools because of their parents' divorce, which may have disrupted their academic and social environments.

The third sub-theme, *"Evident Financial Shift"* (*f*= 11). With two codes, "*Positive Financial Shift (on one parents' side)* (*f*= 7) and "*Negative Financial Shift (on one parents' side)"* (*f*= 4). The fourth sub-theme, *"Residential Shift"* (*f*= 11) delved into the change in living situation after parents got divorced. There were two codes that emerged, *"Moving to a New Home"* (*f*= 8) and *"Moving to Another Country"* (*f*= 1) both indicating the kind of living or residential shift of participants when parents got divorced.

The fifth theme, *"Negative Familial Relationship"* (*f*= 15). Three codes fall underneath, *"Strained Relationship"* (*f*= 4) which indicates the severed relationship. *"Dependent Relationship"* (*f*= 5) which indicates a parent-participants reliance and lack of independence. *"Distant Relationship"* (*f*= 8) which indicates the relationship between a parent-participant relationship becoming distant with little to no contact.

The sixth and final sub-theme, *"Positive Familial Relationship"* (*f*= 13) which showcases two codes, *"Improved Relationship"* (*f*= 7) in which participants discuss the betterment of their relationship with one or both of their parents, and *"Close Relationship"* (*f*= 6) in which participants maintain their close relationship with their parents.

"I was very sad, and it was actually pretty bad. I used to cry like the entire time, crying to the point where I would throw up every morning on my way to school, so it

was very anxious at its peak. I would say that was like the biggest like transition that happened" (Participant 11, Female, Code: Moving to Another Country).

"We changed houses a lot. We were - sometimes with my mother, sometimes with my dad, sometimes with my grandparents, sometimes with my other grandparents." (Participant 14, Female, Code: Moving to New House).

"We'd be with my grandparents from my mom's side and then like we'd go and then when they pressure them back together like some, there was even a time like I remember they kept their separation a secret." (Participant 13, Female, Code: Moving to New House).

"I kind of had to take responsibility like I was the one that always would have to call my dad for like money or anything or if we needed anything and I kind of had to convince him or try to convince him that I'll be taking care of the financial side like the planning and everything" (Participant 13, Female, Code: Negative Financial Shift (on one parents' side)).

"Financially, my mom realized that she could get a divorce now, because thankfully, financially, she got a promotion at that time and like she didn't need anyone to help her." (Participant 15, Male, Code: Positive Financial Shift (on one parents' side)).

"We changed schools because of the financial situation that was happening" (Participant 18, Female, Code: Participant/Sibling Changing Schools).

"Schools. I had to jump through a lot of schools before settling on one, and even though that didn't last that long until middle school, I switched to another high school." (Participant 12, Female, Code: School-Related Shift).

"It affected me mostly in my university like in my studies. Because of the fights I couldn't concentrate - I have no place to sit and go to work on my on my uni work, so that's something that changed. Like I was - I couldn't work at all sorry nothing else" (Participant 4, Female, Code: School-Related Shift).

"I think it was more financially better...you know, more stable. Everyone started traveling, they got new cars. it was more liberating for them financially." (Participant 7, Non-binary, Code: Positive Financial Shift (on one parents' side)).

4.1.10 Expectations of Oneself in A Romantic Relationship. The analysis revealed multiple codes that highlight the mentioned theme. *"Masculine/Man-related roles (Leader, Responsible)"* (*f*=3) indicates the strong inclination towards traditional masculine or man-related roles in their romantic relationship. *"Friendship, Honesty, and Balance"* (*f*= 5) was emphasized by participants on the importance of building a solid foundation of friendship between participant and their partner, along with honesty, and balance in their romantic relationships. *"Caregiver/Mother Roles"* (*f*= 2) examined the way participants expressed the expectation of assuming caregiver or mother-like roles within their romantic relationships. This indicates features such as providing emotional support, nurturing, and taking care of their partners' needs.

"I would be the one that is generous and. And like to do everything they want. If they need something, I will help them. Even if they did their own goal, be there for them basically." (Participant 15, Male, Code: Caregiver/Mother Roles).

"It was based on friendship and on respect and on having a safe place" (Participant 14, Female, Code: Friendship, honesty, and Balance).

"I would like and prefer that I'd be the person who - If I'm with someone that can deliver, but I'm I do believe that it's not that simple for a man to just deliver like there has to be balance between both" (Participant 12, Male, Code: Masculine/Man-Related Roles (Leader, Responsible)).

"40% father; I have a very strong male energy too. I think - I think if-if that is something you're touching on, and that is because that has something to do with being left to deal with my sister and my dad. Feeling alone and something like that." (Participant 1, Female, Code: Masculine/Man-Related Roles (Leader, Responsible).

4.1.11 Expectations from A Romantic Partner. The analysis revealed six codes that fall beneath Participants' *Expectations from a Romantic Partner*. A prominent code that emerged was *"Being Compassionate"* (*f*= 3) and "*Openness and Agreeableness*" (*f*= 3). Participants expressed the importance of receiving empathy, understanding, and kindness from their partner, highlighting the significance of emotional support, and nurturing in their relationship. Another code featured was, *"Physical Attractiveness and Smartness"* (*f*= 1) which emphasized the significance of physical appearance and intelligence. *"Maturity and Independence*" (*f*= 8) emerged as a key expectation. Participants expressed the importance of having a mature, self-sufficient partner. *"Security"* (*f*= 8) both financial and emotional, emerged as a significant code. *"Transparency and Comfort"* (*f*= 2) and *"Familiarity"* (*f*= 1) were identified as important expectations. Participants expressed the necessity of having open and honest communication, as well as a sense of comfort and familiarity with their partners highlighting the importance of safety and security in a relationship.

"I would look for someone who understands the things I've been through. Someone who would - would calm me down, but I would still want someone who understands and who would help me overcome transitions." (Participant 4, Female, Code: Being Compassionate).

"Someone who is caring and isn't cold towards me or anyone and respects you and understands you" (Participant 8, Female, Code: Being Compassionate).

"Kindness, consideration for me and others. He is kind of a caretaker." (Participant 14, Female, Code: Being Compassionate).

"As a male I care a lot about looks, so she's got to be pretty, but she also has to have a brain." (Participant 10, Male, Code: Physical Attractiveness and Smartness).

"Someone who's kind, someone who's ambitious in their career, um and then uh someone that is responsible, and you can rely on" (Participant 6, Female, Code: Maturity and Independence).

"Stability, emotional awareness. Definitely emotional – what is it called – emotional vulnerability, sensitivity" (Participant 10, Female, Code: Maturity and Independence).

"Someone who doesn't judge because I do believe people grow and it's constant. There are lows. There are highs. And I need someone that's willing to accept all of that" (Participant 12, Male, Code: Maturity and Independence).

"I would look for someone who is understanding of the things I've been through. Someone who would - would calm me down, but I would still want someone who understands and who would help me overcome transitions." (Participant 4, Female, Code: Being Compassionate).

"I look for protection, love. The will to work through things, patience" (Participant 13, Female, Code: Security).

"There are certain souls that you sit with and you feel like a genuine connection is there. If you're not trying you're not, and not just the connection…you feel happy…you could be friends with someone for 6-7-8 years. But when you sit together you don't know…your soul is not sitting right and sometimes with some people it sits right and you spend like five hours with this person." (Participant 1, Female, Code: Familiarity).

"I look for someone that I can be myself with someone that I feel they can be themselves with and we can both be transparent towards each other, so transparency, comfort, the love of course. Also, I really do feel like it's important that the person encourages me to be better and brings out the best in me instead of like the opposite." (Participant 13, Female, Code: Transparency and Comfort).

4.1.12 Lessons Learned from Parents' Marriage. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed five codes: *"Enjoy Partners' Company"* (*f*= 2) in which participants recognize the importance of enjoying their partner's company. *"To Never Commit Impulsively"* (*f*= 4) which recognized the thoughtful and deliberate decisions when it comes to commitment. *"To Communicate"* (*f*= 7) which emerged as a vital lesson learned from their parents' marriage. Clear and honest communication promotes understanding, trust, and the resolution of conflicts. Another code was, *"Not to Force Religion"* (*f*= 1) in which participants learned not to force their religious beliefs onto their partners. Last, but not least, *"Relationships Require Effort"* (*f*= 3) where participants learned that investing time, energy, and commitment is essential for nurturing and sustaining a loving and supportive partnership.

"It's a lot of work and just have to put that right into all of this Yanni into understanding the fights center is standing the other person accommodating for another person also how important emotions are" (Participant 1, Female, Code" Relationship Requires Effort).

"To understand the other person more because my parents were like each in a different bubble. They're not understanding each other like he has. He is right. She is right. She has a point, and he has a point, but they are not understanding each other. And the biggest thing that I want to do is to understand my partner. Let's say I want to understand his point of view, why does this make him mad? Why this makes him sad so I can understand and I can relate with him and he should understand me when this happens." (Participant 14, Female, Code: To Communicate).

"I think to always communicate. I feel like that I've never had a partner that would communicate, as well as I would or as much as I would, but that to me I guess is the biggest thing I would carry with me - it's always talk and communicate" (Participant 2, Female, Code: To Communicate).

"Never lie. We shouldn't lie. um you should always communicate to your partner or whatever you're feeling yourself. Never scream. Whatever you're feeling, you should communicate with some space that's something uh I learned that" (Participant 4, Female, Code: To Communicate).

"Being respectful to each other and actually talking smoothly is definitely something." (Participant 6, Female, Code: To Communicate).

"I just learned that no matter how the person seems in the beginning, no matter how sweet and caring, it'll change. Even if you think they love you it's also not true." (Participant 8, Female, Code: To Never Commit Impulsively).

"That you should never be with the person that you don't get along with" (Participant 5, Male, Code: To Enjoy Partner's Company).

4.1.13 Participant Linking Marriage Decision to Parental Divorce. Participants were found to have varying attitudes towards marriage, offering two prominent codes: *"Positive Attitudes Towards Marriage"* (*f*= 10) which participants shared their attitudes towards marriage, perceiving it as desirable, meaningful and leaves room for potential love, companionship, and personal growth. *"Negative Attitudes Towards Marriage"* (*f*= 4) was the second code in which participants displayed negative attitudes towards marriage, attributing their skepticism to the impact of parental divorce.

"Because my dad did what he did to my mom that's a big factor so that's where I guess the truck comes in. I just saw everything she went through and then when she got remarried, she also got a divorce because he turned out to be like the worst person possible…No way like I can - I cannot do that, so to me, like my parents divorced impacted my views on relationship and then also my step dad and my mom made it extra. Because at one point in my life, I truly believed that I could be happy and like marry someone and trust someone because my mom and stepdad had the healthiest relationship… They wanted to show us, like happy front, and they were for the most part but then he just completely changed. I'm not even joking within the span of 24 hours so it was just my world and that belief fell apart it was like, like, what is going on like, nothing - nothing is real." (Participant 2, Female, Negative Attitudes Towards Getting Married).

"I never knew what my husband, or my boyfriend at the time, was going to do, so I'm like yeah, you might just betray me, like in 10-20 years, I'm just going to be ready for that. It's not like I know it's just like okay this is something I need to keep in mind, but like it's a possibility, it's always - it's always been a possibility just because of how my dad like betrayed my mom after 20 or 30 years of marriage, so I always thought that 20 years in I'm not going to know who you are going to be, you're going

to be a completely different person, so you might actually do something about that would hurt me tremendously,"(Participant 6, Female, Code: Negative Attitudes Towards Getting Married).

"Yeah, I've seen them and if this is what it's like to be married, then I don't want it." (Participant 7, Non-Binary, Code: Negative Attitude Towards Getting Married).

"Because I saw what - what I should not do in a marriage, I don't think I would do it, so that's why I'm getting married, I'm not against the idea just because they're weren't - they weren't right for each other, and that's the point to find someone who's right for you but they weren't" (Participant 4, Female, Code: Positive Attitude Towards Getting Married).

"No, there's no association whatsoever because I'm married to a person that I felt was one of a million so from my experience I haven't met something that I could understand - understand that way, that could support me and I could support them and know it. So, it was just based on the person but if it wasn't for this specific person I think I wouldn't get married." (Participant 5, Male, Code: Positive Attitude Towards Getting Married).

"Yes, because first of all they got divorced when I was young. I never got to see them having a family. I want to have a family. I want to make it up for myself. Have a dad that loves our kids." (Participant 8, Female, Code: Positive Attitude Towards Getting Married).

"Growing up with no stability, I like the feeling that no matter what this person will be there. I think marriage was that thing that gave me that. Also see – the idea that a relationship that is long term, it was something that I wanted, and that it exists" (Participant 10, Female, Code: Positive Attitude Towards Getting Married).

"If I want to think about my parents' relationship, I would not want to get married. Like they were, they were not a good example at all. But from my point of view. I would do exactly the opposite of them." (Participant 14, Female, Code: Positive Attitude Towards Getting Married).

4.1.14 Similarities Between Participants' and Parental Relationships. A notable theme that emerged from the analysis resulted into two codes, *"Inability to Communicate Effectively"* (*f*= 5) in which participants described experiencing challenges in effectively communicating with their romantic partners, mirroring certain difficulties they observed in their parents' relationship. The second code, "*Resemblance in Partner and Parents Characteristics and Behaviors*" (*f*= 4) in which participants noted resemblances between their partners' characteristics and behaviors and those of their parents.

"He would let out his frustrations out on me as a child and unfortunately In my first relationship was probably someone who was the exact copy paste of my dad kind of 10/10" *(Participant 2, Female, Resemblance in Partner and Parents Characteristics and Behaviors).*

"A tone of voice when there's a situation getting out of hand, either or the kind of connecting personality traits or the person. That's my relationship…with my mom. Like for example, if he gets mad, I'm like, oh shit this reminds me of my mom" (Participant 12, Female, Code: Resemblance in Partner and Parents Characteristics and Behaviors).

"When my mom is mad, she kind of lashes out at people who have no connection to the issue. I do that too. My dad smokes a lot, so I do that a lot." (Participant 7, Non-Binary, Code: Inability to Communicate Effectively).

"From relationship to my parents' relationship, I would say the lashing out and not being able to communicate" (Participant 12, Female, Code: Inability to Communicate Effectively).

4.1.15 Coping Mechanisms in Participants' Own Romantic Relationships. An important aspect of the participants' experiences during their own romantic relationship conflicts was the employment of various coping mechanisms. Codes were broken into two sub-themes: "*Constructive Coping*" (*f*= 7) and "*Destructive Coping*" (*f*= 9). There were seven codes identified. Beneath "*Constructive Coping*" fell: *"Communicating"* (*f*= 5) which allowed for the participant to engage in communication to express feelings and concerns to their partner. *"Coping Through Humor"* (*f*= 1), "*Coping Through Hobbies*" (*f*= 1) which are healthy forms of emotional expression. (*f*= 1). Below "*Destructive Coping*" fell: *"Emotional Suppression*" (*f*= 2) in which participants were suppressing their emotions to cope with the conflict. *"Isolating Oneself"* (*f*= 2) where participants would withdraw themselves from conflicts, seeking solace in solitude. *"Inability to Communicate Verbally"* (*f*=3) where participants were unable to communicate or express themselves. Lastly, "*Self-Soothing Through Medicine and Food*" (*f*= 2) where participants soothed their emotions using medicinal remedies and food.

"I like to talk about things. Sometimes I think that I'm very patient, but I usually - like my default - will end up wanting to talk about it. I like communicating. I like talking about how they feel. It's so, so important, and I encourage others." (Participant 15, Female, Code: Communicate).

"In my own relationship we discuss them, it's - it's not something it's - it's all definitely not as how it used to be, with my parents. Um we're both not the type of people who would scream or shout or anything, so we'd just discuss them, and we try to work through them. We both understand that so that's basically how we work and think things out. we discuss, we compromise and then we try to make up as soon as we can, within one- or two-days max" (Participant 6, Female, Communicate).

"Really, sometimes I am direct. If I see that the situation is, for example, my mistake and I need to assess it." (Participant 12, Male, Code: Communicate).

"but you see I use humor as like a defense mechanism a lot so" (Participant 2, Female, Code: Coping Through Humor).

"Because I did so much grow up, when I felt any sort of intense emotion - and I do the same now, so when I feel like I'm wasting too much time" (Participant 1, Female, Code: Coping Through Hobbies).

"I just shut myself out. I become more distant I try not to blow up, or speak to anyone" (Participant 7, Non-Binary, Code: Suppression of Emotions).

"I guess another way I would cope is just I mean I think that's a bit silly I would eat a lot. It also affected my life a lot because I've gained so much weight throughout the years and it affected my self-esteem because I would get picked on for it and you know I would get looked at weird for it but I turned to food for comfort and I ate a lot. I ate my feelings a lot" (Participant 2, Female, Code: Self Soothing Through Medicine and Food).

"I'm very explosive, I react very quickly. Even though I know I should not, I still do. Even defensiveness is a big one" (Participant 10, Female, Code: Inability to Communicate).

"I get severe anxiety because of this, and I just wouldn't know how to communicate. I freeze, I try to communicate but then when I see that person isn't um like giving me like, the same sort of, um like they're not they're not communicating back the way I'm communicating to them I would just freeze and I wouldn't know how to react and I've just shut off and I go into this bubble of anxiety" (Participant 2, Female, Inability to Communicate).

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusions

The following chapter contained the discussion of the findings of the study with regards to research questions. The conclusion also consisted of the study's limitations as well as suggestions and recommendations for future studies and practitioners.

5.1 Themes of the Study

The present study aimed to investigate the influences of divorce and changes in family dynamics for emerging adults their perceptions about romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce through in-depth interviews which explored the experiences of emerging adults who had been through parental divorce.

Following the conducted data analysis, a total of 15 major themes emerged: a) perspective of divorce in the culture, b) parents' reasoning for divorce, c) parents' reasoning for divorce**,** d) participant's discovery of parental divorce, e) feelings towards the decision to divorce, f) thoughts and behaviors towards the decision to divorce, g) parental relationship after decision to divorce, h) parent-child relationship after decision to divorce, I) social dynamics of parents post-divorce, j) participant's and siblings' experiences during parental divorce, k) changes in participants' life after parents' divorce, l) parents' current relationship, m) expectations of one's self in a romantic relationship, n) expectations from a romantic partner, o) lessons learned from parents' marriage, p) participant linking marriage decision to parental divorce, q) similarities between participants' and parents' relationships, r) coping mechanisms

when parents were in conflict, and s) coping mechanisms in participants' own romantic relationships.

All the themes are connected and intertwined. After conducting data analysis, the findings concluded that emerging adults' perceptions of romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce in intimate areas of an individual's life have been affected by parental divorce.

5.2 Discussion of the Themes

5.2.1 Perspective of Divorce in Culture. Under this theme, participants indicated that divorce is viewed negatively and unacceptable in their culture. Rasheed et al. (2020) states that divorce is not only discouraged and not accepted in some cultures, but it is also seen as a disruptive force that disturbs the idealized image of a perfect family (Rasheed et al., 2020). In line with the findings of previous studies (Rasheed et al., 2020; Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018; Yakar, 2019), the participants shared negative viewpoints, such as decrease in the woman's value, being looked down upon, last resort, makes children affected, and considered toxic) that it is often viewed as a last resort, stating that couples explore other options before choosing to divorce. The impact of divorce on children has already been recognized and children have been believed to be the ones who are most affected by divorce (Bryner, 2001; Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018). In the context of Saudi Arabian culture, divorce conveys profound implications and a predominantly negative connotation. Scholars indicated that the prevalent perspective on divorce is profoundly rooted in religious, societal, and legal landscapes, with Islam serving as the cornerstone of these perspectives (Al-Krenawi, 2012; Rasheed et al., 2020; Yakar, 2019).

Wahhabism is a strict and conservative interpretation of Islam that affects both cultural norms and legal systems (Dillon, 2009) which has a significant impact on Saudi Arabia's societal structure. Wahhabi ideology has imbued divorce with multiple and complex implications. While divorce is not expressly forbidden in Islam, it is typically viewed as a last resort due to the religion's strong emphasis on the preservation of marriage (Rasheed et al., 2020) as some participants indicated in this study. The complex interaction between religious teachings, societal expectations, and legal practices has contributed to the perception that divorce is disruptive and a departure from the idealized image of the perfect family unit (Rasheed et al., 2020; Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018). Participants spoke of the stigmatization that surrounds the phenomenon of divorce. In fact, 10 participants mentioned that divorce is ‘unacceptable’ and 3 stated it is looked down upon, especially within the society of Saudi Arabia. Another participant mentioned how it disturbs the image of the family unit. The prevalent belief that divorces negatively impacts the stability of children, leaving them vulnerable to emotional distress, and societal judgment, reinforces the stigma associated with divorce (Bryner, 2001; Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018). One participant pointed out how children are affected the most after experiencing parental divorce. Saudi Arabia's Sharia-based legal framework intersects with cultural norms to produce a complex divorce environment. Islamic scholars hold differing viewpoints on the subject, and the interpretation of religious texts can vary considerably (Yakar, 2019). This results in a nuanced approach in which divorce is neither universally accepted nor categorically condemned (Rasheed et al., 2020). Divorce instigated by women challenges explicitly traditional gender roles and norms dictated by Wahhabi teachings, adding complexity to the discourse (Yakar, 2019). One participant

mentioned how a woman's value is decreased, post-divorce. This aligns with the findings of Konstam et al. (2016), which discovered how a woman might be seen as tainted, of less worth, and less desirable after they have been divorced. Moreover, as society modernizes, women have grown more comfortable to the idea of divorce, as they have earned financial freedom and independence, and become more aware and educated to seek their own happiness (Afifi et al., 2013).

It is important to consider the influential roles of religion and culture in shaping perceptions pertaining to divorce. One's religiosity or cultural background may play a role in how they perceive divorce as well as their attitudes about marriage and romantic relationships. Similarly, perceptions on divorce can vary greatly across cultures (Afifi et al., 2013; Konstam et al., 2016). In traditional and conservative societies, divorce is often stigmatized or seen as a failure to uphold the commitment of marriage (Afifi et al., 2013; Aghajanian & Thompson, 2013) whereas, in secular and progressive cultures, divorce is often viewed as a valid choice to end an unhealthy marriage (Afifi et al., 2013). One's religiosity can strongly influence attitudes (Bartkowski & Xu, 2000), with some religions strictly prohibiting divorce, while other religions may allow for it under specific conditions (Jaafar-Mohammad & Lehmann, 2011). Additionally, divorced individuals, particularly females, are often viewed to be worthless, less desirable, and even, tainted (Konstam et al., 2016). With time, as societies modernize and prioritize individualism, divorce has become more accepted as people seek personal happiness (Afifi et al., 2013).

According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979), both the macrosystem and exosystem address the influences of culture and religion on a family's belief system as well as its impact on the society's view of a phenomenon

such as divorce. Amato and DeBoer (2001) claimed that within the macrosystem, an individual is placed in the position where their perspectives and ideas about divorce are challenged and thus shaped by the society's own persecution of what is deemed 'normal' or 'prohibited'. For example, if it is a norm to deem divorce to be prohibited, then this may influence how one views the phenomenon of divorce and shapes the way their society treats it (Amato and DeBoer, 2001). Divorces would then be made difficult to initiate and follow through as society and even legislature may provide limited resources to commence its process. As societal attitudes toward divorce evolve, so will the perspectives of the individual that lives within it.

As explained by the participants, the families who have experienced divorce were 'looked down upon' due to the meaning of divorce within the Saudi Arabian society, as seen through the lens of Islamism. On a more individualistic level, Bronfenbrenner's Theory (1979) explains how divorce can affect a child or the parent itself, as they are experiencing divorce as a family unit. Moreover, the impact of the interactions between the family and peers, relatives, religious scholars, or society, could also lead to much difficulty in adapting to a post-divorce life. The involvement of religion and duty – as stated in mesosystem - may also have a hand in the family's decision to look for alternative solutions than to file divorce, as it is simply viewed as lack in unity as a family and diversion from religiosity and piety (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Finally, the chronosystem brushes upon the alteration of the cultural perspective of divorce due to modernization in Saudi Arabia, where divorce is being seen as a right and even sometimes defended by religious scholars and practitioners, especially if the partners are not fulfilling their duties rightfully within and toward their family members (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Dogarawa, 2009; Rasheed et al., 2020).

5.2.2 Parental Relationship Before Divorce. In the second theme, participants indicated their perceptions about their parents' relationship before they got divorced, where most of the frequency belonged to the negative relationships between the parents. This is highly expected for divorced parents that the complexity of emotional states within the relationships can influence their marital decision-making which led to divorce. This is also obvious in this study in which participants attracted the most attention to the conflictual, problematic, abusive, and distant relationship between their parents. This finding is in line with previous research, which showed people who got divorced reported less marital satisfaction and trust issues, and more conflict within their pre-divorce relationship (Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Whilst the negative relationship was honed the most frequently, some participants shared their views of their parents' relationship as having a good relationship. According to Amato and Hohmann-Marriot (2007), people who may be in moderately happy relationships before divorce may be tempted to leave their partners if they find a more beneficial and rewarding relationship. In contrast, others viewed it to be neutral, a balance of both good and bad. Only one code in this study attracted attention to the parent's relationships not being observed by a participant.

Marriage satisfaction and longevity can be significantly influenced by marital conflicts and disagreements (Amato & Hohmann-Marriot, 2007). When couples are dissatisfied and contemplating divorce, maladaptive conflict management behaviors frequently surface (Sanders et al., 1999). Moreover, some reported destructive behaviors were criticism, contempt, and defensiveness, which increased the likelihood of conflicts and fights, eventually leading to divorce (Birditt et al., 2010); similar to the following study's participants' reporting. Contrastingly, marriages that were

considered as non-conflictual in nature were also capable of breakdown, especially if matters were not resolved constructively (Kelly et al., 2003). In fact, withdrawal behaviors, which may be seen neutral at times, also predicted the possibility of marriage dissatisfaction and dissolution, ultimately leading to divorce.

According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979), an individual is greatly impacted by the experience of divorce as they are either the child who is in immediate contact with their parents who were most likely to initiate the decision to pursue a divorce, or the parent that has initiated or is the one being divorced with. Some participants in this study claimed that their parents had engaged in conflictual conversations and abuse, which would lead to greater dissatisfaction and hastening of the family's downfall. Other participants had stated that their parents did not experience much conflict, despite their decision to divorce. As seen across the study, the health of the parents' relationship prior to the divorce affects their children's view of romantic relationships in general. Maddox (2010) stated that children could be greatly affected by their parents' form of communication as their relationship may pave the way for how the children would react and behave in their own relationships as adults (Amato & Hohmann-Mariot, 2007), which is an element that is consistently seen across the themes. This can be explained using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) microsystem, wherein people experiencing divorces could face maladjustments to changes in routines and family disruptions, impacting their social functioning. With regards to the mesosystem, children can view the interactions between their parents, and in the circumstances of the involvement of relatives and other family members, in their relationship. Positive family interactions are known to result in resilience and may facilitate the healthy formation of relationships and self-identity (Karela &

Petrogiannis, 2018). As is known, an experience such as divorce can alter the nuclear family as it results in the complete dissolution of the unit itself (Rahman et al., 2013).

5.2.3 Parental Reasoning for Divorce. The third theme is parental reasoning for divorce which explained the reasons behind the decision to commence a divorce. As expected, most of the codes under this theme referred to the problematic issues and difficulties parents experience (e.g., infidelity, not getting along, having strict religious beliefs, abuse, and family interferences). Three participants stated that one of their parents committed infidelity which ultimately led to the decision to divorce. Infidelity has been found to be linked to marital distress, where unhappily married couples reporting that they or their spouses committed infidelity due to marital dissatisfaction (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Birditt et al., 2010; Fincham & May, 2017; Previti & Amato, 2003). Similar to what was found in the study, various studies indicated that specific and commonly experienced factors such as extramarital sex, infidelity, verbal and/or physical aggression, and coercion greatly result in marriage breakdown and, ultimately led to divorce (Fincham & May, 2017; Kitson et al., 1985; Laumann et al., 1994; Previti & Amato, 2004; Noller et al., 2008). Many participants did not indicate the presence of verbal or physical violence, verbal or physical aggression, or coercion, between their parents before the divorce. It is certain that not every couple may need to experience these elements during their relationship to proceed with a divorce (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Birditt et al., 2010; Noller et al., 2008) as indicated by the participants. Moreover, it is important to remember that not every parental divorce starts with acts of verbal and/or physical violence. For instance, some participants indicated that their parents would not get along, probably due to differences in values, religious beliefs, or even levels of religiosity, which

created problems within the relationship before the commencement of the divorce. With regards to this, a study by Knoester and Booth (2000) demonstrated that various barriers such as religious beliefs, individual expectations such as income, social integration, and spousal involvement, as well as differences in thought may provide grounds for divorce, even if the marriage is seemingly 'happy'. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, other factors such as wife's educational level, wife's financial independence, religiosity, and family ties also play a role in whether a couple decides to get a divorce (Amato & Hohmann-Marriott, 2007; Birditt et al., 2010; Knoester and Booth, 2000). The same is usually observed in Middle Eastern cultures such as in Saudi Arabia (Al-Gharaibeh & Bromfield, 2012; Rasheed et al., 2021). This could also explain why in conservative cultures, families play a huge role in the selection process of a spouse for their children (Al-Hakami & McLaughlin, 2016; Almalki & Ganong, 2018; Jaafar-Mohammad & Lehmann, 2011; Rasheed et al., 2021).

Four participants stated that the decision to divorce was not discussed with them when they were children, in which this occurrence has been confirmed by various studies (Amato, 2001; 2010). Accordingly, depending on the child's age, participants stated that their parents had stated that they did not know what was happening and did not know what to tell their children (Butler et al., 2002; Wallerstein, 1984; 1985). This might have stayed unclear because children did not know how to ask for further information to clarify and receive the closure, they needed to properly process the events of the parental divorce (Butler et al., 2002). More democratic parenting styles where children are consulted and involved in family decisions and affairs, including in topics of separation and divorce, have proven to be very beneficial for the child's

very own understanding and in practicing emotional and psychological gratification for the parents (Pryor & Trinder, 2004).

As explained by the participants of the study, there are various reasons behind divorce included infidelity, abuse, restrictive religious beliefs, not getting along, and family interefernces. The exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) explains how external influences such as family members' expectations and opinions may influence one's decision to partake in divorce. What is considered as wrong or immoral by members of the greater society may hasten one's decision to halt what may negatively affect the family and encourage them to plan for the good of all those involved, even if divorce is the 'best solution' despite its demonization (Thornton, 1985). Furthermore, the macrosystem, which involves the values, norms, and beliefs within a society, shuns issues such as infidelity, abuse, and aggression as they are often seen as '*deal breakers*' within a marriage and stated as reasons of divorce in this study. Society deems such issues as preposterous, wherein perpetrators are shunned and often ostracized by members of the society (Buss & Shackelford, 1997; Levitt & Ware, 2006). Additionally, the chronosystem also hosts increasing awareness in these issues, and facilitates in the legislation of rules and laws that protect victims. Additionally, victims are protected and sheltered, even by religious and governmental institutions, and in these circumstances, divorce is encouraged and accepted (Dogarawa, 2009). Despite the current state of victim protection, legislation does require more restructuring and modification as such acts are seldom reported (Umubyeyi et al., 2016). While most participants had continued to live with the parent who had experienced partner infidelity, some reported to have had to continue living with the parent who committed infidelity. In both cases, participants had formed their own perspectives on how such

an experience had affected their beliefs of romantic relationships and thus, had shaped how they view and value important elements such as trust, fidelity, and respect within a relationship, which are known to be vital for a healthy partnership (Eldar-Avidan et al., 2009). Additionally, they reported having some emotional difficulties and disturbances, due to this decision, which could easily have some sort of affect across a child's systems (Johnston, 1994).

5.2.4 Participant Discovery of Parental Divorce. The fourth theme referred to the various ways that participants discovered their parents' divorce. Five participants stated that they anticipated their parents' divorce in advance. Children were found to catch up on verbal and nonverbal cues, such as arguments or emotional distancing between their parents, which was deduced as unhappiness or discontentment within their parents' marriage (Hetherington et al., 1985). This was also quoted by 2 participants when asked about the indications prior to the clarification of their parents' decision to divorce.

Some participants shared that they've experienced a more positive introduction to the decision to divorce by explaining it in easy language. Previous studies (Bryner, 2001; Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018) indicated the importance of parents' explanations regarding their decision to divorce, for the child to easily process and digest parental divorce. Furthermore, Afifi and Schrodt (2003) indicated that how parental conflicts and communication are managed can have a greater impact on children's emotional well-being than divorce. The concept of "triangulation," in which children are caught amid their parents' arguments, can cause distress and confusion in children, even if they are not directly involved in the disputes. This highlighted the significance of precise and appropriate communication between parents during the

divorce process to minimize the negative effects on the children as the participants of this study mentioned the positivity of hearing of divorce in a calm environment with the existence of both parents.

Participants also shared that they discovered their parents had a divorce through one parent's unexplained relocation (one left the country to come back to another household, moved to the grandparent's house, and one parent left with no explanation) which is a common but ineffective way of informing children about the decision of separation and divorce. Previous studies have discovered that, following the decision to divorce, divorcing parents rely on the help of their own parents – the children's grandparents - when relocating or moving out of the family home (Braver et al., 2003; Bryner, 2001; Fabricius & Braver, 2006; Johnson, 1985). One parent may move out with or without the children, which would further indicate the possibility of parental divorce to the children (Fabricius & Braver, 2006).

As seen in the second emerging theme, participants had claimed to discover the decision to divorce in two main settings: 1) after being subjected to parental conflicts and arguments on a day-to-day basis and 2) if they were spoken to by a parent about the decision. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) mesosystem involves the parents' interactions with each other in front of their children, and thus could give an insight on the health of the parents' relationship together. In the event in which a child was to discover their parents' decision to divorce through the escalation of conflicts and disagreements, they could be given the impression that divorce or maladaptive behavior could be the right way to cope (Afifi & Schrodt, 2003). Contrastingly, if a child was to discover divorce after being openly and honestly communicated with, this would, nevertheless, still result in some negative feelings. However, depending on the

way the decision was explained and both parents' involvement with the children post-divorce, children would be able to form a better understanding of the complexities of human nature and romantic relationships (South, 2013). On a larger scale, how the child is brought into the topic and how they cope with their emotions and feelings may affect the rest of their systems, which could be observed in their social relationships, their academic performances, their relationships with family members, and the way they view themselves as individuals (Johnston, 1994). On a much larger scale, this could affect their adulthood (Amato & Hohmann-Mariot, 2007).

5.2.5 Feelings Towards the Decision to Divorce. The fifth theme refers to the participants' feelings about their parents' decision. As expected, 15 participants shared their everyday experiences of negative feelings (feeling betrayed, worried, feeling sad, feeling confused, feeling scared, feeling shocked, feeling numb) after learning about their parents' divorce. Consistently, in a study by Butler et al. (2002), children stated that they had experienced a family breakdown and disruption to their everyday lives in a crisis at the very first steps of divorce. Children may become increasingly aware of the fragility of their parents' relationship through their parents' display of emotions, arguments, and at times, even violent behavior and/or aggression (Butler et al., 2002; Noller et al., 2008). Regardless of a child's age, any sort of involvement in their parents' collective decision to divorce leads to the development of complex emotions and perceptions of the divorce experience (Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008). Moreover, children can be viewed as the constructors of their own experiences, developing perspectives and feelings about their parent's divorce, which may not coincide with those of their parents (Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008).

In the case of emerging adults of parental divorce, 5 participants shared positive feelings (feeling good, feeling excited, feeling comforted, and feeling protected) toward their parent's decision to divorce. The perspectives and emotions of emerging adults regarding their parents' divorce may differ from those of their parents. This optimistic reaction to divorce may be due to a few factors, such as relief at the end of parental conflict or the belief that divorce will result in a more tranquil environment (Cashmore & Parkinson, 2008). According to Coleman et al. (2000), many children feel relieved when their parents choose to divorce since they know their parent's relationship is unhealthy, with one participant stating they felt comforted at the idea. Furthermore, children may observe their parents' dissatisfaction and wait for their parents to separate or divorce (Sweeney, 2010), which could explain why some participants felt optimistic about divorce.

Multiple studies emphasized the heavy impact children face after experiencing parental divorce (Bulduc et al., 2007; Johnston, 1994). A recurring element suggested that children do not experience difficult feeling temporarily but may see the development and prominence of such difficult emotions further into their adulthood (Amato & Hohmann-Mariot, 2007). While some participants reported feeling relieved about the divorce, some stated that it was a negative experience overall. The innermost system in the Bronfenbrenner model (1979), the microsystem, pertains to the individual's interaction with their close environment and its inhabitants. The microsystem causes the greatest impact on the individual involved due to its closeness in proximity. In the context of divorce, it was found that individuals had negative experiences, resulting in various difficulties such as loss of familial relationships, forced change and adjustment to the family's new dynamics and routines, and

disruptions in the development of their self-identity (Amato & Keith, 1991; Cooney et al., 1995; Lansford, 2009). A study by Ebersohn and Bouwer (2015) further explained that a failure to meet the child's needs during this period could greatly impact their social functioning in the long-term. Moreover, emerging adults may feel trapped within parent-instigated conflict, leading to the development of a variety of emotional and behavioral problems (Ebersohn & Bouwer, 2015; Karela & Petrogiannis, 2018).

5.2.6 Thoughts and Behaviors Towards the Decision to Divorce. Delving into the sixth theme, thoughts, and behaviors towards the decision to divorce were described. Participants discussed acceptance of the situation, encouragement of their parent's decision, and a shift between positive to negative thought processes. As mentioned in the other themes, the overlapping point of children accepting their parents' divorce, sometimes even encouraging it, has been observed in multiple studies (Bryner, 2001; Cherlin et al., 1995; Coleman et al., 2000; Sweeney, 2010). Sanders et al., (1999) asserted that parental divorce significantly shapes the cognitive and behavioral tendencies of adolescents and young adults, manifesting frequently as an increased dread of commitment and the emergence of trust issues. This fear may originate from a desire to avoid their parents' relationship pitfalls and a perception of marriage's inherent instability. In addition, the following study's participants displayed responses ranging from acceptance and support of their parents' decision to experiencing a transition from positive to negative thought processes. Having negative thoughts or feelings after any of the parents' remarriage was also indicated by 2 participants. The emotional turmoil and disruption created by divorce can result in reevaluating their beliefs and attitudes concerning relationships. This is consistent with the findings of Amato (2010) who discovered that their parents' divorce influences

emerging adults' beliefs and attitudes regarding marriage and divorce. They may doubt relationships' stability and long-term viability, resulting in a more cautious and occasionally pessimistic perspective, which was also widely observed in literature (Amato & Booth, 1997; Amato & Sobolewski, 2001; Beal, 1979; Bryner, 2001; Pannor & Schild, 1960; Previti & Amato, 2003).

5.2.7 Parent-Child Relationship After Decision to Divorce (Unofficial). The seventh theme referred to the parent-child relationship after the decision to divorce. This theme generated different codes. Some participants stated a friendly relationship (balanced parent-participants relationship, participant and sibling lived with father, father's efforts to mend the relationship, and mother was friendly to participant) with one of the parents. Although fathers are usually seen as the 'villains' of divorce due to the negative stereotypes of fathers abandoning their families soon after divorce (Lowenstein, 2005; Thompson, 1994), some participants in this study addressed their fathers' efforts in mending their relationship. Positive relationships between fathers and children can be fostered after divorce through shared living arrangements and fathers' active involvement in their children's lives. Lee and Son (2018) emphasized the importance of father and child relationships in collectivist societies, as a key factor of child development, especially after divorce. Increased paternal involvement in their children's lives following the divorce, wherein the father-child relationship was significantly improved, even at adulthood (Ahrons, 2007; Spijker et al., 2022). Moreover, in relation to studies conducted in Saudi Arabia, men are usually considered the breadwinners of the family, leaving all the other child-related responsibilities to the women (Al-Khateeb, 1998). Not much research is done about the roles of fathers in their children's lives after divorce, specifically in Saudi Arabia, but it can be

assumed that not all fathers would refrain from being involved or putting effort post-divorce. This contradicts the negative perceptions associated with divorced fathers and suggests that positive parent-child relationships are possible even after divorce like it was addressed by the participants of the study.

Within the study, there were participants who described their relationship with their parents after the divorce as negative. This negative relationship was explained to be caused participant and sibling having limited contact with one parent, one parent being aggressive to the participant, the participant refusing to have a friendly relationship with mother, the father being neglectful to the participant, the participant and the sibling refusing a relationship with the father, and the parent displaying greater care for the sibling over the participant. Four participants sensed feelings of neglect from their father's side. According to a study by Thompson (1994), fathers generally opt out of financially and emotionally supporting their wives and children, going months or years without seeing their families, resulting in the child feeling abandoned and neglected. As stated above, consistent findings from previous literature provided evidence that fathers' neglect after divorce may be observed in the negative experiences and relationship with their father as well as the fathers' side of the family after the divorce. Moreover, while some participants and sibling(s) chose to live with their father, others refused to cultivate or maintain a friendly relationship with their mother. Rasheed et al. (2021) who investigated the impact of divorce on children in Saudi Arabia, found that negative parent-child relationships were linked to factors such as parental conflict, absence of emotional support, and unequal treatment of children. According to the findings, these negative experiences may contribute to disrupted parent-child relationships after a divorce.

The parent-child relationship can be regarded as the most important relationship in one's life and is experienced firsthand within the individual's immediate environment known as the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The family environment serves as the 'practice run' for children to learn and test the reactions and behaviors they have learned or have been taught, before engaging with the world. Children rely on their parents for safety, support, and protection, but also in teaching them how to make decisions, communicate with others, and interact with the world (Popov & Ilesanmi, 2015). Healthy parent-child relationships enable a child to regulate and express their emotions effectively, develop better relationships in adulthood, and form a stronger sense of self (Popov & Ilesanmi, 2015). When a family experiences a divorce, the involved children are greatly impacted (Amato & Keith, 1991; Cooney et al., 1995; Ebersohn and Bouwer, 2015; Lansford, 2009) and as understood from the codes, some of the participants attracted attention to their negative relationships with their parents after divorce.

5.2.8 Changes in Familial Dynamics After Parents Were Separated. The eighth theme referred to the changes in family dynamics after the parents were separated. Changes in different areas of life as well as in family dynamics are highly expected, especially after the decision of parents to divorce (Tschann et al., 1989).

Firstly, participants mentioned negative changes such as one parent being aggressive, parents receiving backlash from their families, one parent being distant, relatives using religion to join parents, and one parent pretending like nothing happened. In a study by Walper et al. (2019) negative changes were overreported by younger children than older ones. According to Morrison and Cherlin (1995), passive-aggressive behaviors may be exhibited by one parent after divorce: if not towards the

child, then towards their spouse. At times, one parent may engage in Parental Alienation Syndrome, a method wherein the custodial parent actively tries to alienate and demonize the other parent from the child (Rand, 1997); usually done as a form of punishment towards their spouse (Walper et al., 2019). The mentioned behavior may stem from unresolved conflict or ongoing animosity between the divorced parents, which, therefore, causes a domino effect and impacts emerging adults through increased stress and strained relationships (Buehler & Gerard, 2002). Furthermore, it is also understood that participants underwent some social changes through differential treatments by family-of-origin and extended relatives (Rasheed et al., 2021). Participants shared that they were judged by their decisions and relatives used religion to join their parents as a commonality which may stem from the perceived meaning of divorce in Middle Eastern countries, as a taboo, and the influential role of religion culture, and tradition (Jaafar-Mohammad & Lehmann, 2011; Rasheed et al., 2021).

Some positive changes were also discovered such as support by mother's family of her decisions and mother being respectful to father's family of her decisions. Women are often looked down upon for initiating the divorce, but there have been many studies that stress on women being supported by friends and family for their decision (Brandwein et al., 1974; Coleman et al., 1997). Additionally, Walper et al. (2019) explored the role of gatekeeping fathers' contact with children, discovering that some mothers happily involved their ex-spouses and their family in their children's lives, allowing fathers and the father's side of the family to actively participate and contribute to their responsibilities pertaining to child-rearing. This, however, depended on certain factors such as the mother's openness and level of education, and the father's consistency and eagerness (Walper et al., 2019). Although it is expected for negative

changes in family dynamics to occur, through destructive elements involving non-effective parental attitudes and tendencies like aggression and being distant (Tschann et al., 1989), post-divorce family dynamics could be understated and oversimplified when there could be difference in case variations (Walper et al., 2019).

The shift in family dynamics can be very stressful for a child (Popov & Ilesanmi, 2015; Tschann et al., 1989). Parents may sometimes expect the child to take sides, act as a mediator, or participate in parent through parental alienation (Mitcham-Smith & Henry, 2007). For children to be able to function properly during this difficult time, they would need to have access to a very supportive microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As children are forming their own opinions and coping with their emotions and difficulties during the divorce, being able to communicate their feelings with their family members, having access to psychological facilities at school and within the community, and being able to socialize with their friends and peers could be very useful and beneficial for their progression and development (Amato; 2001; Hetherington, 1979; Kalmijn, 2003). Participants shared their improvement in their relationship with their parents and friends, in which they developed effective coping strategies and showcased resilience. Children who had supportive relationships with both their parents and friends, were more likely to use adaptive coping strategies, and less likely to use maladaptive coping strategies such as internalizing emotions and externalizing aggression (Amato & Afifi. 2001).

5.2.9 Changes in Participants' Life After Parental Divorce. The ninth theme delves into the changes within the emerging adult life after their parents' divorce. Within this theme, shifts in participant’s school life, social life, and financial situation

were discussed. Participants' residential changes, as well as negative and positive family relationships were also explored.

Following a divorce, the social dynamics of parents may go through shifts relating to social networks, friendships, connections with extended families, and community involvement. As aforementioned in the eighth theme, participants' parents may undergo social changes due to differential treatments by extended relatives. With both positive familial dynamics (mother's family in support of her decisions, mother was respectful to father's family) and negative familial dynamics (one parent was aggressive, parents received backlash from their families, one parent was distant, relatives used religion to join parents, and one parent pretending like nothing happened), the parents of the participants may have felt to make a change and leave the family's initial area altogether. In some cases, as well, it is important to consider the role of society in questioning and criticizing the mother, which could result in relocation across cities and sometimes countries due to backlash.

3 participants had mentioned having to change schools – along with their siblings - after the divorce. This shift is quite common and can be commonly observed after parents complete the divorce process, which could sometimes be related to the custodial parent changing cities, jobs, or locations to start 'fresh' (Bryner, 2001; Emery & Coiro, 1995; Hetherington, 1979; Wallerstein & Kelly, 1979). This can, therefore, result in shifts in the social dynamics of the parent and children as they are subjected to new surroundings and social circles (Kalmijn, 2003; Wagner, 1988). One participant stated having more friends, and one stated they did not want to socialize with friends following the divorce. In this context, children may seek more friendships or completely refrain from doing so to cope with their post parental divorce feelings and

emotions (Hetherington & Elmore, 2003; Moxnes, 2003). The search for emotional support and financial stability may result in dependence on parents (Amato, 2010), reflecting the potential long-term effects of divorce on the well-being of young adults. The theme also delves into post-divorce finances, highlighting the oscillating shifts observed by participants. Divorce is expensive and Gohm et al.'s (1998) research indicated that divorce could precipitate economic disadvantages, negatively influencing the financial foundations of both parents and the family unit. The terms "positive financial shift" and "negative financial shift" reflect the disparities that may be experienced due to the change in family dynamics, as the custodial parent may be required to manage most of the financial responsibilities and obligations. This does, however, depend on the divorce settlement as well, as the father may be expected to provide alimony for his ex-spouse and children (McMullen, 2011).

Other participants had shared negative familial relationships referring to strained, dependent, and distant relationships with a parent after divorce. According to Amato (2001), children who have difficulty adjusting to divorce may become distant from their parents and extended family members, which was reported in this study. Furthermore, some parents may see child-rearing responsibilities as a punishment rather than an opportunity to ‘redeem’ themselves and would only engage with their children to avoid legal retributions (McMullen, 2011). Under the subtheme positive familial relationship such as having an improved and close relationship with the parent which to say is a surprise would be an understatement. The research can agree with the findings since, according to Lansford (2009), some children have an improved relationship with one or both parents and may grow closer to their parents after

divorcing due to a decrease in parental conflicts since they may become more emotionally available (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

5.2.10 Perceived Role in a Romantic Relationship. The tenth theme showcased the participants' perceived role of themselves within a romantic relationship. Five participants had expressed that they would rather have a friendship with their partner, one built on honesty and balance. Similarly, previous studies found the key expectations for a romantic relationship to be friendship, honesty, and balance (Harris et al., 2008; 2016; Smetana, 2010). Being honest with one another and seeking a balanced and equal relationship leads to a strong friendship foundation which are prosocial components leading to a better relationship (Fehr, 1996).

Three male participants had vocalized their masculine, man-related role expectations - which are most often rather than not a desire - to fulfill traditional male roles in their romantic relationships, where they emphasized the importance of taking the initiative for their partner's overall well-being (Johnson & Wiener, 2017). This desire might be highlighting the profound cultural influence of traditional masculine roles in Saudi Arabia. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that female participants in this study also defined themselves as having masculine or manly positions, indicating that gender expectations in Saudi society are evolving (Almalki and Ganong, 2020; Al-Sharif, 2017).

In the Middle East and other conservative cultures, masculinity and femininity are not biologically determined, but socially determined (Al-Khateeb, 1998). One other finding pertains to the caregiver/mother roles which are assigned as gender roles onto females. In conservative societies, such as that of Saudi Arabia, the position of women is complicated. Women must uphold the family's reputation, navigating

through their lives with limited freedom and opportunities, male guardianship rules, and increased gender roles and responsibilities (Alhareth et al., 2015). Women are usually expected to fulfill their duties in childbearing and rearing, the satisfaction of their husband, and the completion of household chores and tasks. In fact, in the context of culture, mothers are expected to 'train' their daughters in caregiving, house chores, and other domestic activities. Moreover, girls learn by practicing how to behave, mostly through the observation of their mothers and other female figure (Almalki, 2020; Beitler & Martinez, 2010). This places men in a much more superior position to women, wherein patriarchal societies may account for the subordination of women and the sexual division of labor (Al-Khateeb, 1998). This may explain the division of labor in family units and on a much larger scale: society.

According to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory model, the macrosystem consists of broad cultural, ideological, and societal norms and values in which the other systems of the model are embedded. Perceived roles are seen as a societal construct, as men and women are given various of roles, responsibilities, and expectations to fulfill (Lorber, 1991). As participants had spoken about their perceived roles in a relationship, this further reinstates the influence of culture and religion in the formation and stabilization of these roles. The roles have been very prominent in history and across time, just as described by the chronosystem, but are changing due to modernization, which has been observed recently in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Afifi et al., 2013). It could be argued that the separation and attachment of gender roles towards men and women are fading, leading to a much more equalized relationship compared to previous generations.

5.2.11 Expectations from a Romantic Partner. Related to the previous theme, the eleventh theme indicated the participants' expectations from a romantic partner. Eight participants stated that their expectations from a romantic partner were that they offer security, a sense of maturity, independence, and openness. These qualities are very important in the maintenance and strengthening of a romantic relationship and can be seen as good attributes of a valid romantic partner (Kochendorfer & Kerns, 2020; Reis, 2018; Szwedo et al., 2022; Zimmer-Gembeck, 2002). Participants also sought transparency, honesty, familiarity, and comfort with their partners. All stated behaviors refer to the characteristics of a healthy relationship as well as necessary behaviors that could facilitate the maintenance of relationships. Herein, one could make a connection between the emerging adults' parents' instability and the participants desire to look for a source or a partner that could offer security which their parents did not give.

According to Hatfield and Rapson (2013), emerging adults value partners who can display openness, promoting effective communication, emotional intimacy, and receptiveness in a romantic relationship. Accordingly, another study stated that emerging adults sought partners who showed maturity and independence, which are characteristics often associated with personal growth and the ability to navigate life challenges (Shimkowski et al., 2018).

These results provided support for the expectations of positive personal and relational characteristics from a romantic partner in this study. The participants' expectations extend to the familial aspect, where they value companions who value family. There is a profoundly rooted family-centered culture in Saudi Arabia, where kinship bonds are paramount (Jaafar-Mohammad & Lehmann, 2011). Not only do

partners who integrate well with the family respect tradition, but they also nurture a sense of belonging and unity—the cornerstone of successful relationships in this context (Chatty, 2000).

5.2.12 Lessons Learned from Parents' Marriage. The twelfth theme covers the lessons emerging adults learned from their parents' marriage. Seven participants stated they had learned the importance of healthy communication and self-expression in marriage which were also stated as expectations from one-self and a partner in a romantic relationship. Whilst viewing their parents' lack of communication, understanding, and vulnerability, participants always learned to attempt to reach a mutual understanding and resolve the matter at hand within a day or two. They have also shared other lessons such as enjoying their partners' company and never committing impulsively without getting to know someone fully, which also address the positive characteristics of a healthy relationship. According to Amato and Booth (1996), emerging adults from divorced families are more likely than not to face communication challenges in their romantic relationships. As explained in the second theme, parents' relationship before the divorce, children observe the maladaptive conflict management behaviors and ineffective communicative methods their parents adopted in their marriage; its peak being experienced right before the decision to divorce. These repeated patterns of behavior, if not addressed, worked, or managed by the child later in life, could reflect in their relationships as adults (Sanders et al, 1999). A study by Birditt et al. (2010), discovered that individuals who come from divorced families displayed greater marital conflict and communicative issues later when married (Sanders et al., 1999; Whitton et al., 2008). The findings of this study reveal an interesting fact that, as participants claimed to have witnessed the effects of

poor communication in their parents' marriage, they are more inclined to demonstrate a greater need for transparency, directness, and conflict-resolution skills within their relationships. However, they may also struggle with trust and vulnerability, making it difficult to communicate their emotions and needs to their romantic partners (Amato & Booth, 1996), thus perhaps resulting in withdrawal behaviors to avoid conflict in the first place (Birditt et al., 2010).

Ten participants had a more positive attitude towards marriage, stating that they viewed their parents' marriage. They wanted to ensure that they excelled in their marriage, this shows a resilient factor. According to Masten & Coatsworth (1998), there is a highlight for the role of resilience in successful children due to their fostering of positive outcomes and well-being, even in the aftermath of parental divorce. As opposed to four participants who had said they had no interest in repeating their parents' marriage, and so they didn't want to get married.

5.2.13 Participant Linking Marriage Decision to Parental Divorce. The thirteenth theme referred to the participants' ability to link their perception of marriage to the possibility of ending in divorce. Emerging adults who have witnessed their parents' divorce frequently draw parallels between their own marriage decisions and those of their parents which was understood by participants' explanations regarding having negative attitudes towards marriages. It could be argued that they may develop attitudes and beliefs regarding the success and stability of marriages, resulting in varying levels of personal divorce risk. Accordingly, in a cross-national study by Kalmijn (2013), participants who have witnessed their parents' divorce relate their own marriage decisions to their parent's divorce, resulting in different attitudes and divorce risk.

Participants also mentioned a lesson regarding avoiding using religion negative tactics. Religious beliefs and practices, particularly within the context of Islam, can influence emerging adults to prioritize the preservation of marriages. Studies further emphasized the role of religion in Muslim families, highlighting how it can be used as a social psychological manipulation tactic to discourage divorce and maintain cultural expectations (Aghajanian & Thompson, 2013; Aghajanian & Moghadas, 1998; Jones, 1981; Rasheed et al., 2019). Using religion as a manipulation tactic highlights the complex interaction between culture, religion, and family dynamics in shaping emerging adults' attitudes toward divorce and marriage which seem to be partners' experience they have learned as a disadvantage in their parents' relationships.

A high frequency of participants stated that they had positive attitudes towards marriage. Keeping in consideration that perhaps some participants had viewed the happiness levels of their parents, post-divorce, they may have formed their own understanding and perspectives of the importance of choosing a good partner to have a much healthier marriage. It is also important to consider the possibility of anomalies of emerging adults that entirely adopt a different approach and perspective than that of their parents, through self-education and learning, and personal regulation.

5.2.14 Similarities Between Participants' and Parental Relationships. The fourteenth theme addressed the similarities between the participants' own romantic relationships and that of their parents'. As children, individuals tend to observe and imitate behaviors. Similarly, children of divorced parents do the same. Children of divorced parents are more likely to experience marital conflict and discontent. The legacy of parental marital discord can manifest as relationship patterns and dynamics resembling those observed during infancy, resulting in similar outcomes in adult

relationships. According to Amato and Booth (2001), emerging adults exhibit and experience similarities between their relationships and parents, affecting their marital quality. Based on the highest frequency and inability to communicate effectively, emerging adults from divorced parents struggled with communicating their needs and emotions due to the behaviors they had observed from their parents. Amato and Keith (1991c) stated that children of divorce frequently struggle to express themselves and communicate clearly since they had previously experienced their parents' dysfunctional communication styles.

Based on the other code under this theme regarding to participants' partner and parent resemblances, we can note that participants are more drawn to behaviors viewed while growing up. This idea found evidence in the literature, and it was stated that emerging adults often seek romantic partners that showcase characteristics that resemble their parents' behavior as these behaviors and cycles are ingrained in their perceptions of relationships (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2002).

The context of themes 10, 11, 12, and 14 brushed upon the participants' beliefs across their romantic relationships and how they were shaped by their relationship with their parents, pre-divorce. Across the findings of the current study, the importance of the parent-child relationship has been highlighted. In the context of the microsystem, families are the immediate surroundings in which a child learns how to interact, communicate, and express their emotions, while being somewhat supervised by their family (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). As children grow, they implement the interactions they had previously been subjected to with their parents onto their own relationships in adulthood (Popov & Ilesanmi, 2015). The health of the parent-child relationship usually predicts the type of attachment formed, which can reflect in the child's adult

relationships in the future (Bowlby, 1973). Moreover, the attachment is believed to be formed by the parent's responsiveness to their children's needs (Popov & Ilesanmi, 2015). The parent-child relationship also presumes the child's psychological functioning and development across their lives (Popov & Ilesanmi, 2015). The majority of these interactions are experienced in the microsystem. With regards to the mesosystem, children view the way their parents interact with each other and may form their own ideas, expectations, and valued characteristics of what they may be looking for in a partner (Brennan & Shaver, 1994; Cui et al., 2011). In some cases, individuals may find themselves in similar relationship patterns as their parents, as they could believe that their parents' problematic relationship is 'norm' (Amato & Booth, 2001).

5.2.15 Coping Mechanisms in Participants' Own Romantic Relationships.

The fifteenth theme is coping mechanisms the participants used in their own romantic relationships when they face conflicts and disputes. Participants fell into two sub-themes: constructive coping behaviors including communicating, coping through humor, coping through hobbies, and destructive coping behaviors like isolating oneself, inability to communicate, self-soothing through medicine and food, as well as refraining from emotional expression. Individuals from divorced families may employ a variety of coping strategies in their own romantic relationships, such as avoiding conflict, seeking external validation, or relying on self-soothing strategies, to manage the potential anxieties and uncertainties associated with their parent's divorce (Baker & McNulty, 2011) which falls in line with the findings of this study. According to Baker and McNulty (2011), because of personal experiences, emerging adults from divorced families may develop specific coping mechanisms in their romantic relationships such as seeking emotional support from their partners, communicating,

and participating in hobbies and activities to strengthen their intrinsic judgment and put the challenges of the relationship into a different perspective (Davila et al., 2017; Reed et al., 2016). In other cases, emerging adults may also employ some destructive coping mechanisms such as self-isolation or distancing as a temporary measure, rumination, and inability to communicate.

Emerging adults from divorced parents may also use multiple coping mechanisms throughout their own romantic relationships to navigate through challenges they've experienced throughout their parents' divorce (Hetherington et al., 1998). Another interesting point to consider is that it can be speculated that those who experienced parental divorce at a much younger age could have adopted different coping mechanisms than from those whose parents had recently separated (Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018).

The exosystem refers to the larger social system in which the individual does not function directly (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It refers to one's social and cultural environment, which can indirectly influence their perceptions regarding topics such as marriage and romantic relationships. Furthermore, it includes external factors such as culture and/or religion which are known to affect an individual by interacting with their microsystem or mesosystem. Across the findings of the current study, there have been observations and claims by participants that religion and culture have a strong influence on their community, leading to the shaping of their perspectives regarding divorce and marriage norms (Afifi et al., 2013; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Karela & Petrogiannis, 2018). Their cultural values, traditions, and social expectations may affect individuals' perspectives on marriage and divorce. Karela and Petrogiannis (2018) further stipulated that a factor such as parental support and emotional capacity

is linked to a child's overall emotional well-being, adaptability, and their ability to cope with divorce. Positive family and peer relationships within the microsystem and mesosystem are known to result in resilience and may assist in protecting the child against potential risks to their development and the formation of their self-identity (Karela & Petrogiannis, 2018), which were reported by some participants in this study. Participants who employed adaptive coping mechanisms were shown to be more resilient in conflictual situations in comparison to those who employed maladaptive forms of coping.

5.3 Conclusions

This study aimed to explore three main questions: (1) the influence of divorce and changes in family dynamics on emerging adults, (2) the emerging adults' perception of romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce, and (3) the influences of culture and religion on perceptions of emerging adults related to romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce.

Through a comprehensive analysis of qualitative data collected through interviews and analyzed using MAXQDA, a total of 15 major themes emerged. These themes shed light on various aspects of the participants' experiences before and after their parents' divorce. The findings revealed that parental divorce has significant implications for emerging adults, influencing their perspectives, thoughts, and behaviors in romantic relationships. The themes identified, such as the perspective of divorce in the culture, parents' reasoning for divorce, participant's discovery of parental divorce, feelings towards the decision to divorce, and thoughts and behaviors towards

divorce, provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics that emerge in the aftermath of parental separation.

The study revealed the intricacies of social and familial interplay, the vicissitudes existence had wrought in the lives of the subjects, and the wisdom gained from the conjugal unions of their progenitors. It was evident that the impact of divorce extends beyond the immediate family unit and influences various aspects of participants' lives, and this includes their expectations from romantic partners and themselves in intimate relationships. Additionally, the study highlighted the coping mechanisms adopted by emerging adults in their own romantic relationships. The identification of constructive and destructive coping strategies offers valuable insights into the ways in which individuals navigate the challenges and emotional complexities.

Recognizing the constraints inherent in this exploration, including the constrained sample size and interpretive disposition of qualitative analysis, is critical to address. However, the rich and nuanced data obtained from the interviews, combined with the rigorous analysis using MAXQDA, provide a valuable contribution to the existing literature on the topic. By delving deeper into how parental divorce manifests itself in the lives of emerging adults, this study offers those supporting individuals and families weathering such a challenging life transition a more nuanced comprehension of its ramifications. By recognizing the diverse experiences and challenges faced by emerging adults, mental health practitioners can develop targeted interventions to help individuals thrive in their own relationships.

5.4 Limitations

This research acknowledges several limitations. The findings and analysis should be interpreted considering these limitations considering the impact they may have on the study's generalizability and breadth.

The first limitation is the imbalance of participants in terms of gender or sexual orientation diversity. The sample primarily consisted of female participants while the representation of male and non-binary participants was relatively lower. Due to this imbalance, the generalizability of the findings may be limited and hinder a comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of emerging adults with divorced parents across different gender identities and sexual orientation.

The second limitation pertains to the geographical focus of the study which was limited to participants within Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the findings may not entirely capture the experiences and perspectives of emerging adults with divorced parents from other cultural backgrounds or countries. This geographical restriction prevents generalizability and transferability of the findings to wider populations.

The third limitation is the imbalance in relationship status among participants. Most of the participants were single, which may limit their insights regarding romantic relationships and marriage. This restriction prevents a comprehensive understanding of the impact of parental divorce on romantic relationships, marriage, and divorce within the marital context.

The data collection process relied on retrospective accounts where participants were asked to reflect on their own experiences viewing their parental divorce in the

past. This approach introduces potential biases as participants' current perspectives and interpretations of their parental divorce may be influenced by intervening factors such as culture and religion as well as personal growth over time. Therefore, the retrospective nature of the data may limit the accuracy and reliability of participants' recollections about parental divorce and understanding of the effects of parental divorce on their romantic relationships, marriage beliefs, and divorce.

5.5 Recommendations

Despite the limitations of the study, the study findings proposed insights that could shed light to further studies and practices. For researchers intending to conduct further research on this topic, it is recommended to ensure a balanced representation of participants from various gender identities and sexual orientation. This approach would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the perspectives of emerging adults with divorced parents considering the potential influence of gender and sexual orientation on their experiences and perception of relationships and divorce.

Furthermore, future studies could narrow the focus to specific relationships statuses, such as married individuals, to explore the unique challenges and dynamics of having divorced parents in their relationships. This targeted approach would enable researchers to delve deeper into the specific experiences and perspectives of individuals who have experienced marriage themselves.

Considering the inclusion of a single religion, Islam, and culture, Saudi Arabia, in this study, it is essential to recognize and acknowledge the differences and nuances that exist across religions and cultures. Understanding the effects of divorce on emerging adults and their families necessitates an exhaustive examination of the

various cultural and religious contexts in which these individuals navigate their lives. Therefore, it is recommended to conduct additional research that investigates the experiences of emerging adults from diverse cultural and religious contexts including Saudi Arabia.

In further studies, researchers can enhance the validity and depth of their findings by interviewing emerging adults and their divorced parents which would provide valuable insights in terms of understanding the dyadic perspectives of parental divorce. Considering the children's and parents' diverse experiences and perspectives, this strategy would provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play. Implementing this methodology would allow for a more nuanced examination of the effects of parental divorce on romantic relationships, marriage beliefs, and divorce.

Future research could explore longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of parental divorce on emerging adults' romantic relationships and delve deeper into specific sub-themes identified in this study. Additionally, quantitative research methods could complement the qualitative findings, providing a broader perspective on the prevalence and generalizability of the themes identified. In conclusion, this study highlights the complex interplay between parental divorce and emerging adults' perceptions of romantic relationships and marriage expectations. The findings underscore the need for continued support and guidance for individuals navigating the aftermath of divorce, both within the family context and broader societal structures. By addressing the challenges and promoting healthy relationship dynamics, we can empower emerging adults to form fulfilling and resilient intimate connections in their lives.

It is recommended that researchers delve deeper into the factors that promote resilience in this population as well as those that contribute to negative outcomes to increase our understanding of the diverse outcomes experienced by emerging adults from divorced parents. By identifying the protective factors that enable some individuals to prosper despite the challenges of parental divorce and comprehending the factors that inhibit resilience in others, one can develop targeted interventions and support systems that promote positive outcomes for all emerging adults.

Even though this research explores the subjective experiences of young adults with divorced parents through qualitative methods, quantitative analysis is essential to complement these findings. Incorporating both subjective and objective data can enhance comprehension of the intricate dynamics at play. Considering the topic's limited richness of existing research, the use of mixed methods can provide a more comprehensive perspective.

Additionally, it is recommended that mental health practitioners who generally work with emerging adults, particularly those working in university settings, give importance to the parental status of their clients if they come from divorced families. Recognizing and addressing any unresolved matters stemming from their parent's divorce may help these emerging adults navigate their own romantic relationships more effectively and mitigate the potential impact of unresolved issues on future romantic and marital relationships.

Overall, these recommendations aim to enhance future research's inclusivity, expand the topic's understanding across diverse contexts, and promote the well-being of emerging adults with divorced parents through targeted support and intervention.

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