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Katie Maureen Conrad
University of Dayton

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"TILL DEATH DO US PART": DIVORCE AND MARITAL PORTRAYALS
ON TELEVISION AND THEIR INFLUENCE
ON ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE

Thesis

Submitted to

The College of Arts and Sciences of the
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree

Master of Arts in Communication

by

Katie Maureen Conrad

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

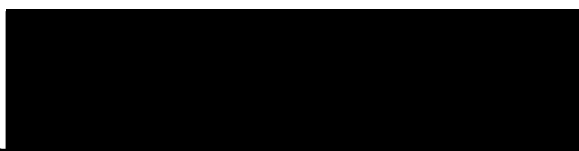
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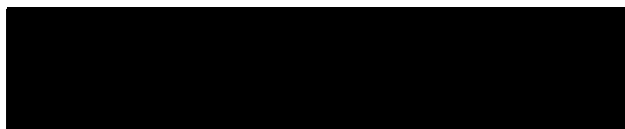
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ABSTRACT

TILL DEATH DO US PART: DIVORCE AND MARITAL PORTRAYALS ON TELEVISION AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON ATTITUDES TOWARD MARRIAGE

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The purpose of the present study was to examine media portrayals of divorce and marital interaction as well as explore the role they may play in adolescents' formation of attitudes toward marriage. This study was completed in two parts. Study one employed content analytic methods to examine the messages that were presented surrounding divorce and marital interaction on 42 prime-time television programs aired during April and May of 2004. Variables of interest in the content analysis of divorce portrayals were: situational setting of portrayal, type of portrayal, source of portrayal, receiver of the portrayal, and contribution of the portrayal to the overall storyline. Variables of interest in the analysis of marital interactions included topic of discussion and affect of character responses. Results of study one revealed differences in the way both divorce and marital interactions are portrayed depending on the target age of the audience. Adolescent and young adult audiences were exposed more frequently

to divorce messages in their programming, the portrayals more often involved main characters, and the message was often a central part of the overall storyline. Marital interactions were seen more frequently in mature adult programming, although the emotional tone of discussions in both mature adult programming and adolescent and young adult programming was most often conflictual in nature.

Study 2 explored potential relationships between divorce and marital messages on television, the connectedness that an individual felt toward these messages and media characters, and an individual's attitude toward marriage. One of the programs analyzed in study one and found to contain the most divorce portrayals was *The O.C.*, a drama directed at adolescents and young adults. A survey was constructed which measured the participants attitudes toward marriage and their connectedness (i.e., a construct measuring identification) with the *The O.C.*. Results from study two indicated that there was no difference in attitude toward marriage between those who watched *The O.C.* versus those who did not; however, the results did suggest that individuals who connected to *The O.C.* in some form held positive attitudes toward remaining single and negative attitudes toward the idea of marriage. The implications of study one and study two findings are discussed within a social cognitive framework.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Media models can provide a significant source of information for viewers about social norms, including norms surrounding family life. Family experience is one area of life in which viewers may be looking for direction. Models on television may exemplify what is considered “normal” and offer guidance on how to develop solutions and deal with problems (Douglas, 2003). One such family experience that has increased in frequency is divorce. The National Center for Health Statistics indicates that the current divorce rate is 4.9 in every 1,000 people (2004). This means that about 43% of marriages end in divorce. Although this rate may be stabilizing, it has grown steadily since the 1960's (Galvin, Bylund, & Brommel, 2004). Because a significant number of marriages now end in divorce, researchers continue to explore the potential effects on children and adolescents who are members of divorced families.

The purpose of the present study is to examine media portrayals of divorce and marital interaction as well as explore adolescents' attitudes toward marriage. This study is completed in two parts. Study 1 employs content analytic methods to examine the messages that are presented surrounding

divorce and marital interaction on prime-time television. Study 2 explores potential relationships between divorce and marital messages on television, the connectedness that an individual feels toward these messages and media characters, and an individual's attitude toward marriage.

Divorce and Its Influences on Attitudes toward Marriage

Studies about divorce often focus on the negative effects that divorce can have on young children including, but not limited to, emotional and behavioral issues due to the absence of one parent or another (e.g., Cowan & Cowan, 1997; Seltzer, 1991). One particular area of research that is often neglected, however, is exploration of the impact of divorce on adolescents' and young adults' perceptions of marriage. Researchers have examined children's attitudes toward marriage when they come from a family that is divorced and have found diverse and at times conflicting results. Amato (1988) conducted over two thousand interviews with individuals ranging in age from eighteen to thirty-four to assess whether individuals from divorced families held more negative attitudes toward their family of origin and toward the concept of marriage. He questioned respondents on whether their families were still intact or not and then used a traditional family values scale to assess their feelings toward marriage. He found that, while children of divorced families may see marriage as a valuable lifestyle, they are "more aware of its limitations and tolerant toward its alternatives" (Amato, 1988, p. 460).

Tasker and Richard's (1994) review of adolescents' attitudes towards

marriage found that many researchers support the idea that children of divorced families tend to be apprehensive and doubtful about entering into marriage.

They also found that these children saw divorce as a favorable option if there was a conflict in their marital relationship. They assert that "certain reasons for divorce and the experience of parental divorce in a context where there is a high divorce rate and less social pressures to marry may be associated with a more negative view of marriage as an institution" (Tasker & Richards, 1994, p. 357). The reason for this is that young adults often learn about marital life from their parents. Parents act as a primary example of what a marriage can look like. If the parent's marriage ends in divorce, therefore, a child may begin to form a schema which leads them to believe that marriage does not always equal happiness and more satisfaction may be found in alternatives.

Divorce does not have homogeneous effects on all family members. Researchers indicate that divorce and its subsequent change in family life influences females differently than males (Long, 2001; Tasker, 1992; Wallerstein & Corbin, 1989). One finding indicates that young women's viewpoints on marriage are connected to their economic status and education levels. Often young women from lower socioeconomic groups cannot afford higher education and therefore may marry young in order to escape the turmoil that has been caused by a divorce (Tasker & Richards, 1994). These women may only be furthering the divorce cycle as they enter into marriage as a means of escape and consequently become divorced later in life. In contrast, young women from higher socioeconomic groups may pursue higher education, prolonging the time

before they become married (Tasker & Richards, 1994). The young women who choose marriage as a means of escaping a negative atmosphere at home may not hold positive opinions about the sanctity of marriage, but instead see it as a means to an end. In contrast, women who pursue higher education do not necessarily hold a negative attitude toward marriage but rather delay getting married in favor of other goals in their lives. Socioeconomic status and education level, therefore, are two important variables to consider in divorce research. Continual research on the effects of divorce is important because, as divorce rates rise and divorce becomes more frequent, society may be desensitizing adolescents to the devastation that can at times be caused by divorce. As Burgess and Cottrell (1939) suggested, "today our mores condone, if they do not approve, divorce as one solution to the problem of marital unhappiness" (p. 2). Although this adage was written over sixty years ago, it continues to be relevant today. If divorce is seen as an easy way to release oneself from the commitment of marriage, individuals may choose not to take the commitment seriously.

Media messages may further reinforce the idea that divorce is an attractive alternative to marriage, particularly because the media have become prominent in an people's daily routines and interactions (Wilson, 2004). As discussed previously, one model of divorce for young adults comes from their families of origin; young people learn about marital and family interactions from their parents. A second model is presented in the media. For instance, an adolescent whose parents are married may only gain perspective about divorced families from the media or vice versa with adolescents whose parents are

divorced. Often media models can be very persuasive and facilitate a change in an individual's attitudes or behaviors.

Principles of Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's social cognitive theory provides an appropriate framework for examining the relationship between individual behaviors and the influence of media models on those behaviors. It is an extension of social learning theory, which suggests that the primary determinant of an individual's behavior is the model to which he or she is exposed to (Bandura, 1977). According to Bandura (1977) if these models are similar to the individual and competent in their behaviors, then the individual will imitate them. Social cognitive theory, however, suggests that there are other determinants that affect a person's decision to behave in a certain way. Specifically, three factors influence an individual's decision making: his or her cognition, his or her environment, and his or her behavior. According to Bandura (1994), the influence of these three factors is referred to as reciprocal determinism and all three factors affect and are affected by one another. For example, if an individual decides to behave in a certain way, such as screaming loudly, it will affect those in the environment who will in turn react negatively. The negative reactions will then affect an individual's decision about screaming loudly in the future.

The underlying principles of social cognitive theory are distilled here from Bandura (1994) and Hergenhahn (1988). The first determinant, individual cognition, refers to an individual's ability to self-regulate his or her behavior

(Hergenhahn, 1988). Individuals set standards for themselves against which they measure their behavior. These standards are realized through either direct experience or through the observation of others (Bandura, 1994). Individuals then use these standards when making decisions about how to behave. Two important components add to an individual's ability to self-regulate: self-efficacy and moral justification.

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief about his or her ability to do something (Hergenhahn, 1988). It is not dependent upon actual physical ability to perform the behavior, but rather the individual's belief that he or she can or cannot do something. Individuals with a high sense of self-efficacy believe that they have the ability to perform more behaviors and so will consider a variety of options in their decision making. Alternatively, an individual with a low sense of self-efficacy may doubt his or her ability and so narrow the number of options available when deciding how to behave.

The other component that is important to self-regulation is moral justification. People can and do have a sense of morality that helps guide or govern their behavior. This sense of morality comes in part from their interactions with others. Social cognitive theory also suggests that people are able to anticipate the consequences of their behavior without actually enacting the behavior. This allows people the opportunity to decide if a given behavior will yield the desired outcome. In addition, individuals are able to control their behavior through the reinforcing and punishing of themselves. This allows people

to follow their sense of morality even when the social world encourages behavior that is not consistent with their moral codes.

When individuals self-regulate in decision making, they are attempting to avoid faulty cognitive processes. One tool that individuals use during this process is verification. According to Bandura (1994), there are four different sources of information that an individual uses for verification: enactive, vicarious, social, and logical. Enactive verification occurs in an individual's ability to consider the consequences of his or her behavior before actually acting it out. When the behavior's consequences agree with the individual's standards, then he or she will choose the behavior or vice versa. Vicarious verification refers to an individual's observation of others and the agreement between other's actions and the individual's standards. Again agreement or disagreement between the action and standards will affect whether or not the individual verifies that the behavior is useful. Social verification refers to individuals comparing their sets of standards and beliefs to those of individuals around them. Individuals feel more assured in their standards when they coincide with those in their social surroundings. Finally, logical verification is when individuals compare their beliefs to facts or truths. Using these forms of verification allows an individual to decide what behaviors they believe would allow them to avoid faulty cognitive processing.

In addition to an individual's cognitive processing, reciprocal determinism also suggests that the environment is an important factor in decision making (Bandura, 1994). One way that the environment influences individual decision-

making is through the reinforcement of societal norms. These are suggested standards created by an individual's culture. One arena in which societal norms are exemplified is in the media. Individuals can use messages portrayed in the media in order to construct their own personal set of standards used in decision making. For example, Hofschire and Greenberg's (2002) research on body image found that adolescents often accept body types seen in the media as the standard. Additionally, Brown's (2002) research on sexuality in the media found that sexually explicit material in the media frequently does create a norm for adolescents to follow in their own sexual behavior.

Much of the understanding concerning the environment, and specifically the media, as a determinant stems from social learning theory. According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, models in the media present different behaviors that an individual can imitate. Individuals will be more likely to imitate a model if four processes occur while the behaviors are being presented by the media models (Bandura, 1977). First, an individual must attend to the model, meaning that they pay attention to it without distraction. Second, an individual must retain the information and store the information for future use. Third, an individual must have the ability to physically carry out the behavior. Finally, an individual must feel motivated to use the behavior. Often motivation resides in an individual's belief that the model is similar to oneself and that the model is competent in his or her decision making.

Media Effects and Social Cognitive Theory

Researchers have used social cognitive theory as a framework for understanding the effects that media messages can have on viewers' decision making processes. Two important areas of research include adolescents' understanding of sexuality and body image (Brown, 2002; Hofschire & Greenberg, 2002; Ward, 2003). Brown (2002) found that sexual messages in the media can affect adolescents' beliefs about what is appropriate behavior and can also affect the sexual behaviors in which they choose to engage. Her research suggests that the increasing amount of sexual content found in media today is likely influencing these beliefs. Ward (2003) also found that media portrayals can have this effect but suggests that the effects are even stronger when genre specific viewing is considered. "The potential impact of media exposure on sexual behavior is likely to be indirect, working through the media's effects on viewers' attitudes, schemas, and belief systems" (Ward, 2003, p. 369). Moreover, she found that adolescents who view programs with prevalent sexual messages will be those that are affected the most.

Hofschire and Greenberg (2002) applied social cognitive theory in their investigation of messages of body image in the media, and found similar results to those of Ward (2003) and Brown (2002). Their results indicated that the types (genres) of programming viewed by adolescents partially determine the impact that media images have on adolescents' satisfaction with their own body image. In addition, they found that identification with a media model plays an important role in this process. As suggested above, individuals will feel motivated to imitate

a model if the model seems similar to them; therefore, identification with media characters is an important variable to consider when exploring how viewers use media messages in their decision-making. Social cognitive theory does not suggest that models in the media act directly to change an individual's behavior, but rather they serve as social prompts that individuals choose to consider in their decision to act. Media models can provide an important source of information for viewers about social norms, including divorce. In order to assess the behaviors that individuals may be learning from divorce models on television, it is important to first examine the portrayals as they occur on screen.

Portrayals of Divorce in the Media

A content analysis conducted by Greenberg, Hines, Buerkel-Rothfuss, and Atkin (1980) during the 1975-1976 television season found that only eight out of the one hundred and thirty-seven adults portrayed on television were divorced. A missing parent was often explained away through the use of widowing. This underexposure to divorce in television programming may be explained by societal attitudes toward divorce during the decade in which this content analysis was conducted. The stigma of divorce during this time period perhaps deterred producers from incorporating divorce into their story lines. Today, however, divorce has become much more prevalent and less stigma is associated with it (Galvin, Bylund, & Brommel, 2004). A content analysis conducted by Robinson and Skill (2001) found that the number of divorced head of households had changed dramatically from nearly three percent in the 1970's to fifteen percent in

the 1990's. This finding indicates that portrayals of divorce have become more prevalent in the media over time.

In addition to divorce portrayals, researching marital interactions is equally important in understanding adolescent attitudes toward marriage. A content analysis conducted by Greenberg, Hines, Buerkel-Rothfuss and Atkin (1980) explored family roles and interactions on television. Their results indicated that the majority of interactions were initiated by the husband or father. In addition, most interactions concerning the husband and wife were information seeking or sharing. Interestingly, more marital interactions depicted opposition rather than support. Further examination of marital interaction is important in order to assess whether the marital portrayals are complimentary or contradictory to the divorce messages being presented.

Genre Specific Portrayals and Influences on Attitudes

Buerkel-Rothfuss and Mayes (1981) and Alexander (1985) conducted content analyses of soap operas examining the messages that this genre presents to adolescents and adults. These researchers have focused on how the messages portrayed in soap operas may influence viewers' interpersonal relationships, and more specifically, intimate relationships. Buerkel-Rothfuss and Mayes (1981) and Alexander (1985) found that soap operas often cultivate beliefs of what to expect in an intimate relationship, including a high expectation of sexual satisfaction as well as an expectation of intimate conversation. They

also found that heavy soap opera viewers tend to believe that there are more affairs, illegitimate children, and divorces than there actually are in real life.

In the most recent work-to-date, Segrin and Nabi (2002) took a cultivation perspective in their examination of number of hours of television watched within a particular genre and its relationship to expectations about future marriages. They hypothesized that individuals who spent more time watching television would be more likely to have idealized images of marriage, including expectations of "a great deal of romance, physical intimacy, passion, celebration, happiness...physical beauty, empathy and open communication" (Segrin & Nabi, 2002, p. 249). Participants within the study were asked to discuss their "hypothetical" marriage (i.e., no participants were married before or during the study). The researchers also asked participants to report the total amount of time spent watching television as well as the time they spent watching genre specific programming, including the romance genre. Segrin and Nabi (2002) found that individuals who held idealized assumptions about marriage were also those who spent the most time watching romance specific programs. The study also examined participants' intentions to get married and found that most of the individuals were confident that they would not get divorced in future relationships.

In contrast to day-time soap operas and romance genres, Signorielli (1991) examined prime-time and weekend network dramatic television, suggesting these offerings may provide adolescents with an ambivalent view toward marriage. Using a cultivation perspective, she investigated the presentation of marriage on television as well as subjects' attitudes toward future

marital behavior. She found that over eighty-five percent of prime-time programs contained themes of home, family and marriage, and over half of these themes were part of a major plot within the storyline (Signorielli, 1991). Her content analysis also indicated that approximately eight percent of men and fourteen percent of women in these programs were divorced, but the depictions of divorced individuals did not differ greatly from those who were depicted as being single or widowed. She did discover, however, that married women were classified more often as "good" and the divorced and widowed individuals were often the least successful. Overall, her work indicated that family themes on television programming tended to depict more married and single individuals than divorced individuals; divorced characters were also depicted differently in that they were "likely to be good yet not successful, and they are less likely to be involved in violence" (Signorielli, 1991, p. 133).

Signorielli (1991) then examined high school students and their attitudes towards becoming married. She compared the students' answers to the amount of time they spent watching television. In most cases, there was a positive relationship between the amount of time the students watched television and their response that they would probably become married someday and have children. The results, however, also showed a significant relationship between amount of television viewing and beliefs that "one sees so few good or happy marriages that one questions it as a way of life" (Signorielli, 1991, p. 145).

The Youth Market: TV Programs for the Young Audience

The increase in number of divorce portrayals in the media is accompanied by an increase in the number of television programs directed at teenagers and young adults. For the purpose of the present study, teenagers and young adults are defined as those individuals who are between the ages of twelve and twenty-five. This age range was used to adhere to the Nielson data breakdowns of television programming (Media Rating Council, 2004). Furthermore, because the present study intends to examine pre-marital attitudes, this age range was set because research shows that the median age for women entering their first marriage is twenty-five while the median for men is nearly twenty-seven (Galvin, Bylund, & Brommel, 2004). Increasingly, however, many individuals are waiting until their thirties to consider marriage (National Center for Health Statistics, 2004).

Just as the depictions of divorce and marriage have changed in the media, American viewers' tastes have changed since the 1950's and 60's (Blum & Lindheim, 1987). Today, more network executives are attempting to appeal to younger generations by producing programs that concentrate on controversial topics and occur in realistic settings. Examples would include: *The O.C.*, a drama depicting the lives of teenagers living in the wealthy area of Orange County, California; *One Tree Hill*, a drama revolving around a high school in a rural town in the U.S.; and *Everwood*, a program in which a widowed father moves his teenage son and young daughter to a small town in Colorado in order to provide them with a more secure life. As Ward's (2003) research suggests,

the media's "sole purpose is to draw an audience" and therefore they "are more likely to turn out what they believe adolescents want in order to make a profit" (p. 349). The younger generation, therefore, is becoming a key target group for producers within the major networks. Research suggests that prime-time television stations have found difficulty in maintaining a relationship with this important viewer demographic (The Programmer Insider, 2004). Marketers have also become interested in the amount of profit that can be made from teenagers and adolescents as consumers and have begun to concentrate on this age group in their campaigns (Carlton & Musselman, 2004). As network interest in the younger audience grows, so do the number of programs that are produced specifically for them.

In order to assess whether or not adolescents and young adults are tuning in to these targeted messages, Nielson data (Media Rating Council, 2004) were examined to determine what young audiences were watching. Storylines surrounding divorce are now more prevalent in television programming. The messages that viewers receive about divorce, however, may differ depending on the age of the target audience. This leads to the first two research questions that will be examined using a content analysis of programming on the five major networks:

RQ1: Are the characters on adolescent and young adult programming more likely to be divorced or discuss divorce than those on mature adult programming?

RQ2: Are the portrayals of divorce on adolescent and young adult programming different than portrayals of divorce on mature adult programming?

In addition to examining portrayals of divorce, the way in which marital

interactions are portrayed is also important to consider when evaluating adolescent and young adult attitudes toward marriage. This leads to the third research question:

RQ3: Are the marital interactions portrayed in adolescent and young adult programming different than those portrayed in mature adult programming?

The Mass Media and Family Values

Family experience is one area of life in which viewers may be looking for guidance. Models on television may exemplify what is considered "normal" and offer guidance on how to develop solutions and deal with problems (Douglas, 2003). Although there is much speculation about why television influences families, Douglas's (2003) work related to media's influence on family cognition is particularly relevant to this study. First, it is often difficult for families to receive guidance from families around them in society because there is often discrepancy between their public and private behaviors. Often boundaries are set dictating which behaviors and issues are appropriate to discuss only among family members and which issues can be discussed with individuals outside the family (Galvin, Bylund, & Brommel, 2004). This common pattern likely occurs because families who openly exhibit their personal conflicts are often labeled as dysfunctional.

The second reason that television families may influence viewers is because television scenarios are often perceived as real (Douglas, 2003). Programs try to portray issues in a realistic setting so that it will become easier for viewers to suspend their disbelief. When programs are perceived as more

realistic, it is easier for a viewer to imitate the model. The final reason that television may influence families is the increased expectations it sets concerning what makes a family "normal". Even if a family perceives the programming as "fake," they may allow media content to serve as a model illustrating what a perfect family should look like.

Connectedness and *The O.C.*

The O.C., standing for Orange County, is an increasingly popular program among teenagers and young adults. The program revolves around the lives of upper-class, Caucasian families as they attempt to deal with volatile issues, such as drugs, drinking, sexuality, and, specifically, *divorce*. Based on the program's popularity with young viewers and its focus on the above mentioned topics, it is important to consider the types of messages this show may be sending and the effects it may be having on adolescents and young adults. Because divorce is a relevant topic on the program, young viewers may be gaining a perspective that marriages often end in divorce. This viewpoint may deter adolescents and young adults from taking the commitment of marriage seriously or entering into marital life at all.

As discussed previously in this review, social cognitive theory suggests that media messages are the most effective in influencing a viewer when he or she identifies with that messages or is similar to characters in the program. Therefore, viewers who chose to watch a particular program because they identify with the characters, perspectives, etc. should internalize the messages

more than those who watch for other reasons. Recently Russell, Norman, and Heckler (2004) studied the identification that can form between a viewer and his or her chosen television program. "Connectedness" refers to the relationship that an individual has with a television program and the subsequent way in which the program influences the viewer's personal and social identification (Russell, Norman, & Heckler, 2004; Russell, Norman, & Heckler, 2003).

Russell, Norman, and Heckler (2004) created and then provided reliability for their connectedness scale through a series of focus groups and surveys. They found that individuals can be connected to a program in six different ways: escape, paraphernalia, fashion, imitation, modeling, and aspiration. Escape means that individuals use the program in order to release themselves from problems in their reality. Paraphernalia refers to the items that an individual collects that relate to the show, such as posters or books. Fashion refers to the influence that the character's appearance has on viewers. Imitation is the inclination for an individual to use gestures, sayings, and the like in their own lives. Modeling is drawn from the concepts within social cognitive theory and refers to the behaviors that viewers use that are modeled for them in the program. Finally, aspiration refers to the degree that a viewer wants to be on the show or meet the characters in real life.

Russell, Norman, and Heckler (2003) have found that fashion, imitation, modeling, and aspiration are the strongest predictors of an individual being connected with a program. Moreover, they found that individuals who are highly connected with a program will be more consumed by portrayals offered in the

program and will find the information more essential to their lives. The researchers found this especially important among teenagers, since they are at an influential age in finding their identity. The more connected that an individual is within the program the more likely they are to identify with it and the messages that it portrays. If programs are portraying divorce in a particular manner and the individuals watching these programs are highly connected to the show, then they may be identifying with the messages and allowing those media messages to influence their lives. In order to assess the specific effects of these messages and their strength the following two hypotheses were formed:

H1: Adolescent and young adults viewers who watch The O.C. will have a more negative attitude toward marriage than those who do not watch the program.

H2: Adolescents and young adults who are highly connected to The O.C. will have a more negative attitude toward marriage than those who are weakly connected.

These research questions and hypotheses will be investigated in order to examine how divorce is portrayed to adolescents and young adults, as well as investigating how young viewers may be internalizing and identifying with these messages.

CHAPTER II

METHOD AND RESULTS: STUDY ONE

Method

A content analysis was conducted to examine portrayals of divorce and marital interaction on television. It is essential to understand the way that divorce and marriage is portrayed on television before assessing how this information may or may not influence adolescents in society.

Program Sample

Prime-time programming (6:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m. EST) was recorded for every day of the week during a four week period from April 2004 to May 2004. Programs were obtained from all five of the major networks: ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX and WB. Using the tapes in conjunction with the television guide for the corresponding weeks, a list of all prime-time shows that were considered to be situational or fictional (rather than reality-based) was created. The sample frame included only those programs that were regularly scheduled to appear during prime-time. Any programs that were listed as a special or that aired only once, due to a random change in scheduling, were removed from the list.

Using Nielson (2004) data, the programs were separated into young adult and adolescent or mature adult programming. Those programs that listed the highest ratings for the 12 – 34 age group were considered young adult programming and those that rated highest among the 35 + age group were considered mature adult programming. These age groups were chosen in order to adhere to the breakdown that the Nielson (2004) data provide. In addition, individuals are choosing to get married later in life. The United States census (Krieder & Simmons, 2003) shows that less than half of men and women are actually married at age twenty-five and a considerable number are waiting until they reach their thirties. Therefore, these individual's attitudes toward future marital behavior can still be affected by the portrayals of divorce on television. Programs that differed by 6,000 viewers or less in comparison of the two age groups were considered neutral and therefore were not included in the sampling frame. The final sampling frame included six programs and twenty-one specific episodes that were considered young adult and adolescent programming. All twenty-one of these programs were coded. The programs that were considered mature adult programming included thirty-five separate programs. Every tenth program from the mature adult programming list was chosen until twenty-one programs had been chosen. The final list of programs included for both age groups in the sample can be seen in Appendix A.

The rationale for the sample make up was based upon three criteria. First, shows were chosen if they appeared in the current season of the program so that the sample would be representative of portrayals that are being offered

today, rather than syndicated or repeated television representative of past portrayals and ideals. Secondly, reality-based television shows were not included in the analysis because of their competitive nature. The content on these shows often focuses around the personality characteristics of independent individuals participating in a game of sort, therefore not representing the family interactions and ideals being presented on television. Finally, the sample was stratified so that comparisons could be made between those shows that are popular among adolescents and young adults and those popular among mature adults.

Operational Definition of Divorce

Kolbe and Burnett (1991) discuss the importance of being objective within the content analysis process. They claim that "precise operational definitions and detailed rules and procedures for coding are needed to facilitate an accurate and reliable coding process" (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991, p. 245). For this reason a precise definition of what this study considers a portrayal of divorce to be is necessary. Since this is the first content analysis done specifically on prime-time television portrayals of divorce an operational definition did not already exist. Therefore the coding process had to be first defined and then re-evaluated as it progressed. Before the coding measurement was created a pre-analysis was completed by watching five television programs and taking note of the kinds of actions that could be considered a divorce portrayal. After these notes were

compared with the literature on divorce as discussed above, a definition was created to account for portrayals of divorce within the programming.

The operational definition for divorce that was created is as follows: a behavior or action that revolved around the dissolution of a union between two individuals who were previously married. This definition was formed from Galvin, Bylund, and Brommel's (2004) suggestion that divorce is the dissolution of a marriage. This operational definition was offered in order to objectify the coding so that coders would have the ability to easily focus on only particular portrayals that fit into the definition pertaining to divorce. The portrayals were considered within two contexts: first any action which seemed to display divorce and the situations pertaining to divorce, and second, verbal comments which contained messages about divorce. Divorce portrayals were not limited to those individuals who were actually divorced but rather included any character who was involved in the divorce discussion or action, including family, friends, co-workers or strangers. Additionally, divorce portrayals were each coded as an individual unit meaning that there could exist many within one program. Each unit of analysis began when a character behaved in a manner or verbalized a message related to divorce and ended when the character or characters moved onto a different subject in their action or discussion.

Operational Definition of Marital Interaction

In order to assess marital interaction Gottman's (1994) research was applied. Gottman (1994) has conducted extensive research on the interactions

and subsequent success of married couples. He has studied couples as they discuss issues one-on-one within a closed setting and has coded their behavior according to the specific affect coding system (SPAFF) (Gottman, 1994). The SPAFF is used as an assessment of emotional expression used in marital interaction. The system codes the verbal content, voice tone and context of a married couples' interaction. Gottman (1994) has found the expression of affect within a marriage to be an important determinant in their satisfaction and ultimately a predictor of dissolution. The current research has applied this scale to marital interactions of married couples on television.

In Gottman's (1994) research married couples engaged in three conversations concerning three areas of discussion: information sharing, a source of conflict, and a neutral topic. During each conversation Gottman (1994) coded the responses that were used as one of the following: neutral, humor, affection/caring, interest/curiosity, joy, anger, disgust/scorn/contempt, whining, sadness, and fear. These responses are defined as the following:

Neutral exchanges are those that are recognized as being non-emotional in content and voice tone; the tone should have an even quality as opposed to either extreme.

Humor is a relaxed, good-natured expression of intimacy. This includes joking or good-natured teasing that is seen as humorous by both participants.

Affection/Caring is a direct expression of affection. Voice is slow, with a drop in amplitude, but with a definite intensity of affect.

Interest/Curiosity refers to participants communicating with an active interest and curiosity. A positive energy is used including an increased amplitude, tempo, rhythm, less pause time between people's utterances, pitch changes, and people interrupting or finishing each other's sentences.

Joy refers to positive energy level increased from interest/curiosity characterized by rapid fluctuations in pitch, volume, exaggerated emphasis on certain words, stress, and rate of speech.

Anger includes words that are abrupt, biting, and often with a key word or syllable highly stressed. A sudden release of built-up tension, and increase in volume or rate of speech.

Disgust/Scorn/Contempt sounds fed-up, sickened, repulsed, exasperated, disdained or communicating that the other person is absurd or incompetent. Includes hostile humor, mockery, and sarcasm.

Whining is a high-pitched, fluid fluctuation of the voice, generally with one syllable stressed toward the end of the sentence. Reflects dissatisfaction in a very childish way, almost often with an innocent victim posture behind it.

Sadness is a low volume of speech and slowness of syllables, often even stress of monotones and a kind of monotony, or a dropping of amplitude at the end of the statement.

Fear includes stress, worry or tension. Tightness and tension in the voice. Speech disturbances, such as ah or uh, that are negative in tone.

Gottman's (1994) research has found that these responses can be categorized into neutral affects, positive affects (humor, affection/caring,

interest/curiosity, and joy) and negative affects (anger, disgust/scorn/contempt, whining, sadness, and fear). Couples who engage in more neutral or positive affects have more marital satisfaction and are less likely to divorce (Gottman, 1994).

The current study used Gottman's (1994) coding scheme as a template for the content analysis of marital interaction in television couples. Couples that were married and main characters of the show were coded during their marital interaction. Only main characters were used because it is often difficult to know the marital status of individuals who are minor or supporting characters on television. A marital interaction was defined as a verbal exchange that occurs when two individuals who are married interact with one another without the presence and/or inclusion of others. If there were others present they could not participate in the interaction in any way, including listening (i.e. if a couple was in a crowded restaurant but speaking with only one another, no one else is listening to them then they would be coded as participating in a marital interaction). Each time a couple was alone the coding began and as soon as the couple departed or someone else entered the scene the interaction stopped. Marital interactions were defined in this way in order to conform to the situational settings studied by Gottman (1994) in reality.

Each marital interaction was coded according to the topic that it pertained to: information-sharing, conflict, or neutral. Interactions were then coded in terms of their responses. Separate responses made by each character during the interaction were not coded individually, as this would be overwhelmingly time

consuming. Rather the interaction was considered as a whole and the type of response that was used for the majority of the interaction was chosen, coding the overall tone of the interaction.

Instrumentation

The template for coding marital interaction as described above included the two areas of which Gottman (1994) concentrated on and can be seen in Appendix B. The coding instrument did not include any demographic information about the couples, as a variety of research exists that has studies married couples in the media and their demographics (i.e. Greenberg et. al., 1980). It existed to gather only information pertaining to the types of interactions that they have.

There exists, however, no concise template for coding divorce as a separate entity in prime-time programming before this study. The instrument created for coding divorce within the present study, therefore, had no previous reliability information available. Aspects of the instrument, however, were taken from other content analyses that were tailored in order to capture the portrayal of divorce. The programs were coded using the instrument in order to depict particular components of the portrayal that would be important in answering the research questions above. These included: what shows or programs were portraying divorce, what network were these programs appearing on, what characters were discussing or acting out divorce most prevalently, with whom (if anyone) were they sharing these portrayals, what type of consequence or

response was given to the portrayal and what contribution was the portrayal making to the overall storyline within the program. In order to further understand the portrayals, the instrument was broken down into seven main elements:

Program Type. Each unit was recorded as to the name of the program, the network that aired that program and the type of program: either dramatic/action, humorous/comedy or other (labeled if able to do so). Dramatic programs were those which contained primarily material pertaining to serious circumstances. Situational comedy programs contained material and content which made light of the circumstances, containing more comedy and laughter than dramatic programming.

Portrayal. Each portrayal was first categorized as being either an action or a verbal message or both. An action was characterized as being a behavior performed by a character. The behavior could contain utterances or discussion but the action actually carried out by the individual was the representation of the definition of divorce. A verbal message performed by a character would be content specific and pertain only to the discourse that the character used. Some portrayals could be considered an action and a message, if so they were coded as being both and still coded as one unit of portrayal. The following portion of the instrument was open-ended and allowed the coder to describe precisely was said or done in the portrayal being as complete as possible in terms of capturing the actual content of the portrayal. Due to that fact that the coding of divorce is new, allowing the portrayals to first be captured and then later categorized was

important. This recording process then allowed the results to be sorted into reoccurring themes within divorce portrayal.

Situational Setting. In addition to categorizing the type of show that contained the portrayal the instrument also categorized the setting or situation surrounding the portrayal itself. The unit was coded as either dramatic/action, humorous/comedy or other (which could include both). The actual situational setting refers only to the mood of the show during the portrayal, not before or after. The reasoning for breaking down the instrument beyond just show type and into specific situations is so that assumptions are not made about the portrayal based solely on the type of show in which it occurs in (i.e. that a dramatic show would only have dramatic portrayals). Understanding the situational setting will allow examination of how divorce is being portrayed most often - - with drama or humor.

Source. This refers to the characters who initiated the conversation or action about divorce. As mentioned above the unit of analysis began as soon as an action or message made reference to the operational definition of divorce. The character who introduced this definitional portrayal of divorce was coded as the source.

Receiver. When the divorce portrayal contained an action or message that included more than one individual the subsequent character receiving the message was coded as the receiver. There response the message was also coded and is described here:

Receiver: This refers to the characters who were receiving the action or message sent by the source. There could be multiple receivers and if so they were coded as such, making sure to capture any additional character that was interacting and responding to the portrayal. Some divorce portrayals were conducted by a source only and did not involved other characters, if this was the circumstance this portion of the instrument only included a notation that there were no other characters involved.

Response: This element corresponded to the action or message given by the receiver(s) in retaliation or in concurrence with what the source had originally said. Responses were coded simply as being positive, negative, or neutral. Positive responses included any message or action which did not demean the original divorce message displayed including, but not limited to, laughing, agreeing or supporting behaviors. Negative messages were those which demeaned the original message including, but not limited to, becoming angered or disagreeing with the message. Neutral responses were characterized as those that did not seem to correlate with the original message at all, such as changing the subject or being silent. They did not overtly portray support or not for the original message. Although there could be multiple responses given by the receiver that would appear to exist outside of this coding scheme, the importance of this coding component was only to capture a distinction that may exist between positive and negative responses.

Contribution to Story. The final element was whether or not the divorce portrayal was central or incidental to the overall storyline for the unit of

programming. Coding a portrayal as central indicates that the portrayal was necessary to the main storyline and coding it as incidental indicates it was not. This feature was added to the coding in order to assess the stress that was placed by the program on the actual divorce portrayal. Whether the portrayal was more overt or more covert could have implications for the impact that it has on individual attending to it. If a coder was unsure, they were able to list the portrayal in such a way.

Character Descriptions

Descriptive data for the source and receivers of the messages were collected and coded according to role, gender, race, apparent age, and socioeconomic status.

Role. Each unit was coded with respect to the regularity and importance of the character within the program. A character could be coded into five separate categories: 1. *Main Character*, those characters which are reoccurring on the program, with repeating existence in the main storylines and major impact on the program overall. 2. *Supporting Character (Regular)*, those characters which appear in the program with a high occurrence of frequency, interacting with the main characters on regularity over the period of the programs existence but who are not the focus of the program or its main storylines. 3. *Supporting Character (Guest)*, those characters who act as supporting characters in the manner described previously but who do not appear on the program for an extended period of time, rather they exist within the program for a short duration.

Often this character will be a guest spot containing a celebrity from another arena of entertainment. 4. *Supporting Character (Unsure)*, this category was for those supporting characters, described previously, whom the coder could not identify. Often it is unclear whether a supporting character is making their first appearance, making them a guest, or if they have been included in the program for a segment of time, a regular. This category allowed coders an option for unclear characters rather than coding them incorrectly. 5. *Minor Character*, these characters are all the other individuals who exist in the setting, however, they do not play any significant role in the makeup of the storyline or the program overall, often they have no pre-existing relationship with the characters in the show and will not have future encounters. An example would be a waitress in a dinner scene.

Gender. Each character was coded as to whether they were male or female in order to assess the likelihood of each gender discussing or making reference to divorce. This is important because models may have more of an impact when they are the same gender as the audience member.

Race. Each character was also coded for their racial background. The four most representative categories were Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic and Asian. There was also a category for other, which would include any characters that had unidentifiable racial backgrounds. The inclusion of race allows the study to investigate relationships between the individuals watching the programs and their identification with the characters shown.

Apparent Age. Each character was categorized based on their estimated age: 1. *Child*, which included any character under the age of twelve. 2. *Teen*, characters between the ages of twelve and twenty. 3. *Young Adult*, which included those characters between the ages of twenty and twenty five. 4. *Mature Adult*, which included characters between the ages of twenty-five and forty. 5. *Older Adult*, character between the ages of forty and sixty and 6. *Senior*, any character appearing to be over the age of sixty. The categorization of characters and their age was dependent upon their appearance as well as their daily activities, such as their participation in school or work and their role as a father, daughter, grandparent, etc. Age was coded only to further solidify the identification process with viewers.

Socioeconomic Status. The final character descriptive coded was socioeconomic status within the community. This could be coded into one of five different categories: 1. *Poverty/Poor*, those characters who appeared to make less than sufficient funds to fully support a family. 2. *Low Income/Working Class*, characters who made enough money to support a family, however were not able to afford luxury in their lifestyles. 3. *Middle Class*, characters who were able to comfortably afford their lifestyles and small luxuries but not extravagance. 4. *Wealthy*, those characters who were able to live a lifestyle that afforded comfort, luxuries and extravagance. 5. *Unclear*, any individual whose lifestyle was not disclosed and therefore it was difficult to assess their income or socioeconomic status. In combination with gender, race and age, the socioeconomic status is used to examine viewers' identification with the

characters. However, in addition to this use, socioeconomic status can represent an ideal existence and therefore a positive consequence for a model. A complete template for the coding scheme used for divorce portrayals is displayed in Appendix C.

Intercoder Reliability

There were two adults primarily responsible for coding the data for this study. After the sample was collected, ten shows were chosen in order to assess intercoder reliability for divorce portrayals and five for marital interaction portrayals. A training session was conducted between the two coders in order to discuss the operational definitions and the coding instruments. For the divorce portrayals the coders watched the ten assigned programs separately and recorded their findings on the instrument described above. The completed instruments were then compared on each of the seven elements discussed above and the following reliability was found: 1.00 on the reliability scales was found for coding of source and receiver and their corresponding character descriptives. Intercoder reliability of .75 to 1 was reached for the remainder of the units of coding.

Five marital portrayals were used to assess intercoder reliability for the marital interactions. A training session was also conducted between the two coders in order to establish that they agreed on and understood the coding frame used by Gottman (1994). Each coder watched the five assigned marital interaction separately and filled in their coding frame accordingly. The completed

instrument was then compared and a reliability of .80 was found for coding of both the type of interaction occurring as well as the overall response used in the interaction. A smaller number of portrayals were used in providing reliability for marital interaction because the coding instrument contained less items.

Results

A content analysis was used in order to assess how divorce and marital interactions are portrayed in fictional storylines presented on television. Forty-two programs were coded in order to answer three primary research questions, the first of which is the following:

RQ1: Are the characters on adolescent and young adult programming more likely to be divorced or discuss divorce than those on mature adult programming?

The purpose of this research question was to examine the number of portrayals of divorce in adolescent and young adult programming when compared to the number of portrayals in mature adult programming. The frequency of divorce portrayals appearing in each individual program was recorded, indicating a total of forty-five portrayals of divorce for all forty-two program. Of those portrayals, thirty (66.7%, $N = 45$) appeared in adolescent and young adult programming, while fifteen (33.3%, $N = 45$) portrayals appeared in mature adult programming. The number of portrayals per program for adolescent and young adult programming ranged from zero to six with a mean of 1.43. The number of portrayals per program for mature adult programming ranged from zero to four with a mean of .71. Table 1 displays results for all programming.

Table 1

Frequency of Divorce Portrayals per Program

Programs	Divorce Portrayals	
	N	%
Adolescent and Young Adult		
One Tree Hill	12	26.7
Smallville	2	4.4
That 70's Show	2	4.4
The O.C.	14	31.1
Total	30	66.6
Mature Adult		
Frasier	2	4.4
Joan of Arcadia	1	2.2
Judging Amy	2	4.4
Navy NCIS	2	4.4
NYPD Blue	4	8.9
Third Watch	1	2.2
Without a Trace	3	6.7
Total	15	33.2
Total	45	100

Table 2 displays results for the number of portrayals found per episode for adolescent and young adult programming as well as mature adult programming. In an analysis of the number of portrayals in adolescent and young adult programs, twelve (57.1%, $N = 21$) programs had no portrayals, three (14.3%, $N = 21$) programs had one portrayal, one (4.8%, $N = 21$) program had two portrayals, no programs had three portrayals, one (4.8%, $N = 21$) program had four portrayals, three (14.3%, $N = 21$) programs had five portrayals and one (4.8%, $N = 21$) program had six portrayals. In an analysis of mature adult programming, thirteen (61.9%, $N = 21$) programs had no portrayals, four (19%, $N = 21$) had one portrayal, two (9.5%, $N = 21$) programs had two portrayals, one (4.8%, $N = 21$) program had three portrayals, one (4.8%, $N = 21$) program had four portrayals and no mature adult programs had five or more portrayals. Chi-square analysis revealed that the number of divorce portrayals per episode were not significantly different, *chi-square* (6, $N = 42$) = 5.516, $p > .05$.

Although the chi-square analyses performed on this data was not significant these results still indicate that (1) there were more portrayals of divorce in adolescent and young adult programming than in mature adult programming, (2) adolescent and young adult programs portrayed divorce more often, and (3) divorce portrayals are more likely to appear multiple times in adolescent and young adult programs than in mature adult programs.

Table 2

Number of Divorce Portrayals per Episode

Number of Portrayals	Adolescent and Young Adult Programs			Mature Adult Programs		
	N	Instances	%	N	Instances	%
No Portrayals	12	0	40.0	13	0	61.9
One Portrayal	3	3	14.3	4	4	19.0
Two Portrayals	1	2	4.8	2	4	9.5
Three Portrayals	0	0	0	1	3	4.8
Four Portrayals	1	4	4.8	1	4	4.8
Five Portrayals	3	15	14.8	0	0	0
Six Portrayals	1	6	4.8	0	0	0
Total	21	30	100	21	15	100

RQ2: Are the portrayals of divorce on adolescent and young adult programming different than portrayals of divorce on mature adult programming?

In order to answer the second research question, individual portrayals (rather than entire programs) were analyzed to determine (1) whether they contained a verbal message or an action, (2) what type of situational setting the portrayals occurred in, (3) the source and receiver's role in the program as well as their characteristics, (4) the responses that receivers had to the divorce message or action, and (5) the divorce portrayals contribution to the storyline in the program.

Message versus Action

Thirty (66.7%, N = 45) of the forty-five divorce portrayals were delivered as verbal messages, twelve (26.7%, N = 45) were actions and only three (6.7%, N = 45) of the portrayals contained both a verbal message and an action. It is apparent within both audience age groups that the programs contained more verbal messages of divorce than actions. Adolescent and young adult programming, however, may be reinforcing those verbal messages more often with actions when compared to mature adult programs. Within adolescent and young adult programming, sixteen (53.3%, N = 30) of the divorce portrayals were verbal messages, eleven (36.7%, N = 30) of the portrayals contained an action and three (10%, N = 30) of portrayals contained both. In the mature adult programming, fourteen (93.3%, N = 15) of the portrayals were verbal messages while only one (6.7%, N = 15) portrayal contained an action. There were no

portrayals found in the mature adult programming which contained both a verbal message and an action.

Situational Setting

As discussed within the methods section, situational settings were considered separate from the overall type of program. The majority of the programs that contained divorce portrayals were dramas (93.3%, $N = 45$); moreover, the majority of the divorce portrayals (84.4%, $N = 45$) were placed in dramatic settings. These findings remained consistent when portrayals were considered by age of audience. In adolescent and young adult programming, 83.3% ($N = 30$) took place in dramatic settings, 13.3% ($N = 30$) took place in a humorous setting, and only 3.3% ($N = 30$) took place in a setting considered "other" which means that the overall situational setting could not be determined. Similarly, in mature adult programming, 86.7% ($N = 15$) of portrayals took place in dramatic settings and 13.3% ($N = 15$) of portrayals took place in humorous settings. Mature adult programming did not contain any portrayals coded as "other". These findings indicate that although there are differences in the frequency of divorce portrayals according to age of the target audience, there does not seem to be much variation in the situational settings that these portrayals occur in.

Source and Receiver

Descriptive data were collected to determine what types of characters were delivering and receiving the divorce portrayals and to determine whether

these characters differed in programs directed toward adolescents or mature adults. The analyses indicate that the majority of characters acting as the source of a portrayal were main characters (80%, $N = 45$). Of those main characters, 66.7% ($N = 45$) were male, 97.8% ($N = 45$) were Caucasian, 82.2% ($N = 45$) were between the ages of twenty-five and forty, and 64.4% ($N = 45$) were wealthy. The majority of the portrayals also involved a receiver (91.1%, $N = 45$). These receivers were primarily main characters (97.6%, $N = 45$) whom were male (56.1%, $N = 45$), Caucasian (90.2%, $N = 45$), between the ages of twenty-five and forty (70.7%, $N = 45$), wealthy (56.1%, $N = 45$) and had some form of family relationship to the source (43.9%, $N = 45$).

Although the overall analysis found the sources and receivers to be very similar in their demographic characteristics, a chi-square analysis performed on this data revealed that there were significant differences in the role of the source according to age group, *chi-square* (4, $N = 45$) = 19.625, $p = .001$. In the adolescent and young adult programming, 96.7% ($N = 30$) of the sources of the divorce portrayals were main characters in the programs and 3.3% ($N = 30$) were minor characters. Furthermore, no supporting characters delivered any divorce messages in the adolescent and young adult programming. In the mature adult programming, however, 46.7% ($N = 15$) of the sources were main characters while 53.3% ($N = 15$) were supporting characters; no minor characters acted as a source within this age group. These findings illustrate that divorce portrayals in adolescent and young adult programming are more often attributed to main

characters of the program, while portrayals in mature adult programming are more often delivered by supporting characters.

Further analysis of programming directed toward adolescents and young adults found that 67.7% (N = 30) were male and 100% (N = 30) were Caucasian. Similarly, 67.7% (N = 15) of sources were male, 93.3% (N = 15) were Caucasian, and 6.7% (N = 15) were African American in mature adult programming. When considering the source's age, adolescent and young adult programs are using more teenage characters to deliver their messages of divorce, which is important because it is often teenagers who are watching these programs. Specifically, 76.7% (N = 30) of sources were between the ages of twenty-five and forty in adolescent and young adult programming and 93.3% (N = 15) of sources were within this same age range for mature adult programming. In mature adult programming, however, the 6.7% (N = 15) of sources that were not within the above age range were only slightly younger, falling between the ages of twenty and twenty-five. For adolescent and young adult programming, more of the sources were teens (13.3%, N = 30) between the ages of twelve and twenty while only 6.7% (N = 30) of the sources were between the ages of twenty and twenty-five.

Findings also show that, just as the sources differed in age according to the target audience, they also differ in economic status. In adolescent and young adult programming, the sources of the divorce messages were overwhelmingly wealthy (86.7%, N = 30) with only 6.7% (N = 30) identified as middle class, 3.3% (N = 30) identified as low income or working class, and 3.3% (N = 30) coded as

unclear. In mature adult programming, however, 33.3% (N = 15) of sources had unclear economic status, 20% (N = 15) were wealthy, 26.7% (N = 30) were middle class, and 20% (N = 15) were low income or working class. These findings suggest that adolescent and young adult programming is more likely to send messages about divorce through wealthy characters than is mature adult programming. In contrast, divorce portrayals in mature adult programming are delivered by characters from a wide range of economic statuses.

Messages about divorce not only involve a source, but often a receiver as well. Descriptive analyses reveal that, unlike the differences found in the roles of source characters, the majority of receivers were main characters for both adolescent and young adult (100%, N = 27) and mature adult (92.9%, N = 14) programming. Interestingly, only one receiver in the mature adult programming was not a main character and he was identified as a regular supporting character meaning that he had a reoccurring role on the program. Another interesting finding surrounds gender of the receiver. Receivers in the mature adult programming were still primarily male (71.4%, N = 14), however, receivers in the adolescent and young adult programming were more often female (51.9%, N = 27).

Examination of the receiver's age, race and economic status indicated that in adolescent and young adult programming receivers were most often Caucasian (92.6%, N = 27), between the ages of twenty-five and forty (59.3%, N = 27), and wealthy (77.8%, N = 27). In mature adult programming, receivers were most often Caucasian (85.7%, N = 14) and between the ages of twenty-five

and forty (92.9%, $N = 14$). In contrast to adolescent programming, however, receivers in mature adult programming were middle class 50% ($N = 14$) of the time and wealthy only 14.3% ($N = 14$) of the time. Finally, in adolescent and young adult programming 33.3% ($N = 27$) of the receivers were considered teenagers while no receivers in the mature adult programming were teenagers.

One possible explanation for the differences found in receiver gender and age by target audience age is perhaps revealed by the relationship between source and receiver. A chi-square analysis performed on this data revealed that there was a significant difference in the relationship between source and receiver according to audience age, *chi-square* (4, $N = 41$) = 18.419, $p = .001$. In mature adult programming, 7.1% ($N = 14$) of receivers had a family relationship to the source, 28.6% ($N = 14$) of receivers were friends, 14.3% ($N = 14$) were strangers, 21.4% ($N = 14$) were co-workers and 28.6% ($N = 14$) of receivers were considered 'other' (i.e. they did not have a decipherable relationship with the source). In adolescent and young adult programming, however, 63% ($N = 27$) of receivers had a family relationship to the source, 29.6% ($N = 27$) were friends, 3.7% ($N = 27$) were strangers, no receivers were co-workers, and only 3.7% ($N = 27$) were considered 'other'. These findings illustrate that divorce portrayals are overwhelmingly more likely to occur between family members in adolescent and young adult programming when compared to relationships present in mature adult programming.

Response of Receiver

In addition to the descriptive analyses characterizing the receivers, the receivers' responses to the divorce messages or actions delivered to them by the source were also examined. A chi-square analysis of this data revealed that there was a marginally significant difference in the response given when the two audience age groups were compared, *chi-square* (2, $N = 41$) = 5.651, $p = .059$. The receiver was more likely to respond negatively to the divorce message in adolescent and young adult programming, 74.1% ($N = 27$) of the time, than in mature adult programs, 42.9% ($N = 14$) of the time. Receivers were also more likely to respond in a neutral manner in mature adult programs, 42.9% ($N = 14$) of the time, than in adolescent and young adult programming, only 11.1% ($N = 27$) of the time. Receivers in programming for both age categories responded positively with approximately the same frequency, 14.8% ($N = 27$) of the time in adolescent and young adult programs and 14.3% ($N = 14$) of the time in mature adult programs. These findings indicate that receiver responses are more often negative in adolescent and young adult programs.

Contribution to Storyline

The final set of analyses related to the second research question address whether the divorce portrayal was central or incidental to the storyline of the program. A chi-square analysis of this data also revealed a significant difference in contribution according to audience age, *chi-square* (1, $N = 45$) = 21.635, $p < .001$. Overwhelmingly, 93.3% ($N = 30$) of the time, the divorce portrayals

found in adolescent and young adult programming were central to the program storyline. In contrast, portrayals found in mature adult programming were central to the story only 26.7% (N = 15) of the time and incidental 73.3% (N = 15) of the time. This finding reiterates the differences that exist in the way in which divorce is portrayed in adolescent and young adult programming versus mature adult programming.

RQ3: Are the marital interactions portrayed in adolescent and young adult programming different than those portrayed in mature adult programming?

In addition to the analyses examining divorce portrayals, analyses also explored the marital interactions that occurred within the television programs. Based on the forty-two programs in the sample, marital interactions were more prevalent (N = 54) than divorce portrayals (N = 45). There were twenty instances of marital interaction in adolescent and young adult programming and thirty-four instances in mature adult programming. In the adolescent and young adult programming, 80% (N = 20) of the interactions occurred in dramas while only 15% (N = 20) occurred in humorous programs. In mature adult programming, 20.6% (N = 34) of the interactions occurred in dramatic programs while 79.4% (N = 34) of the interactions occurred in humorous programs.

The occurrence of a marital interaction within the program was also coded according to the type of conversation present within the interaction and the overwhelming response (s) given by the individuals involved. The majority of the conversations were conflictual in nature for both adolescent and young adult programming (60%, N = 20) and mature adult programming (76.5%, N = 34). In

adolescent and young adult programs, the conversations were considered information sharing 15% (N = 20) of the time and neutral in type 25% (N = 20) of the time. In mature adult programming, the conversations were considered information sharing only 8.8% (N = 34) of the time and were neutral 14.7% (N = 34) of the time.

The affective component of the marital interactions was also very similar between the two audience categories. For adolescent and young adult programming, 30% (N = 20) of the time the responses were "angry" and 25% (N = 20) of the time the responses were "affectionate". In addition, neutral, humorous, sarcasm or disgust, and sadness each represented 10% (N = 20) of the portrayals and whining represented 5% (N = 20). Interestingly, no marital interactions included responses of joy. In mature adult programming, anger was also the most commonly used response, occurring 29.4% (N = 34) of the time. Neutral and disgusted or sarcastic responses accounted for 14.7% (N = 34) each, humor and affection accounted for 11.8% (N = 34) each, joy and sadness accounted for 5.9% (N = 34) each, and whining and fear each accounted for 2.9% (N = 34). Although responses containing anger were most common in both audience categories, the type of marital affect in mature adult programming was more varied than the affect present in adolescent and young adult programming. Table 3 displays these results.

The results of the first study indicated that television programming portrayed divorce differently in programs intended for adolescents and young adults when compared to programs intended for mature adults. In particular,

Table 3

Marital Interaction Responses Given Within Each Audience Age Group

	Adolescent and Young Adult Programming		Mature Adult Programming	
	N	%	N	%
Neutral	2	10	5	14.7
Humorous	2	10	4	11.8
Affectionate/Caring	5	25	4	11.8
Joy/Excitement	0	0	2	5.9
Anger	6	30	10	29.4
Disgust/Contempt/Sarcasm	2	10	5	14.7
Whining	1	5	1	2.9
Sadness	2	10	2	5.9
Fear	0	5	1	2.9
Total	20	100	34	100

these findings also revealed that divorce portrayals were quite prevalent in one specific television program directed toward a young audience, *The O.C.*. This television program accounted for fourteen of the thirty divorce portrayals that were represented in the sample of adolescent and young adult programs. In addition, *The O.C.*'s portrayals of divorce included main characters in the program and portrayals that were central to the overall storylines. Therefore, the goal of Study 2 is to investigate this program further.

CHAPTER III

METHOD AND RESULTS: STUDY TWO

Method

The purpose of Study 2 is to examine viewer connectedness to the television program *The O.C.* and explore whether connectedness to this program influences adolescents' and young adults' attitudes about divorce and marriage.

Sample

The participants for this study were obtained using convenience sampling. The students were undergraduates (N = 143) between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four enrolled in communication courses at a Midwestern university. Of those 143 participants, 64 were female (44%) and 79 were male (56%). The majority of the participants were Caucasian (88.1%, N = 126) and had parents who were married (76.9%, N = 110). Only 13.3% (N = 19) of the participants had parents who were divorced and 9.8% (N = 2) of those divorced parents had subsequently remarried.

Instrument

A questionnaire was developed to assess attitudes toward marriage, participant viewing of *The O.C.*, and connectedness to *The O.C.* The entire survey is displayed in Appendix D. First, participants were asked to answer twenty-three questions measuring their attitudes toward being married or remaining single. The questions were drawn from three separate questionnaires used in previous studies measuring attitudes toward marriage. Three items were chosen from the Signorielli (1991) survey, which assessed perceptions toward marriage. They included items such as "one sees so few happy marriages that one questions it as a way of life" (Signorielli, 1991, p. 127). Seventeen items were chosen from the Amato (1988) survey, which examined advantages and disadvantages of marriage, single hood and de facto relationships. They included statements such as "marriage gives you economic security" and "being single allows you freedom to come and go" (Amato, 1988, p. 455). Three items were chosen from the Wallin (1954) survey, which measured marital happiness of parents and their children's attitudes toward marriage. Only three questions from the nine question survey were chosen, as many of the statements were redundant with items selected from the previous studies. They included statements such as "I have doubts of ever having a successful marriage" and "I think it would be advisable for me to remain single" (Wallin, 1954, p. 21). After the statements were compiled some of their wording was rearranged in order to make the assembled twenty-three questions sound similar. All of the statements

were measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

In the second section of the survey, participants were asked to report descriptive information including their age, race and gender. Additionally, they were asked to answer whether or not their parents of origin were divorced, and, if so, were they subsequently remarried. The survey also asked participants to report whether or not they had ever watched *The O.C.*, by circling yes or no. If the participants circled yes, they were subsequently asked to report how many episodes they watched in the last year by circling the appropriate number (i.e., 1-3, 3-5, 6-8, 9-11, more than 11). In addition, participants were asked to report in an open ended question why they watched the show. A series of follow-up questions then asked participants to choose their level of agreement with several statements measuring their connectedness with the program, such as "Watching *The O.C.* is an escape for me", "I like the clothes they wear on *The O.C.*," and "I learn how to handle real life situations by watching *The O.C.*". After reading each statement, participants were asked to give their agreement or disagreement to each statement on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). All of the statements used in the section of the questionnaire were derived from the original scale created by Russell, Norman and Heckler (2004) substituting only the program name.

Reliability

Signorielli (1991) and Wallin (1954) did not report reliability coefficients for the items selected from their surveys. However, Amato (1988) reported an alpha of .83 for his items. In order to assess a reliability coefficient overall with the combination and rewording of the items, a reliability check was performed consisting of a survey containing only the twenty-three items selected to measure attitudes toward marriage. The reliability check was completed by twenty-three undergraduate students. The reliability coefficient for the 23-item survey was .7252. Therefore, all twenty-three items were included on the final survey. There was no reliability check performed for the connectedness scale. Russell, Norman, and Heckler (2004) reported reliability of .716 or higher for all of the items on the scale

Results

The second study addressed a potential relationship between watching *The O.C.* and being "connected" to the program and attitudes toward marriage. Demographic information collected from the 143 participants indicated that 62.9% (N = 90) of them had watched *The O.C.*. Of those 90 *O.C.* viewers, 45.6% had watched the program more than 11 times in the last year, 23.3% had watched the program only one to two times, 16.7% had watched the program three to five times, 6.7% had watched the program six to eight times, and 7.8% had watched the program nine to eleven times in the past year. The reasons that participants offered for why they watched the program varied. Responses

ranged from "curious to see why everyone watched" to "It's enjoyable to see characters that I can relate to. I can feel for what some of the characters have gone through, good or bad".

H1: Adolescent and young adults viewers who watch The O.C. will have a more negative attitude toward marriage than those who do not watch the program.

The data collected concerning participants' attitudes toward marriage was transformed in order to formulate one score for each individual. Lower scores indicated a more positive view of marriage while higher scores indicated a more positive view toward remaining single. These composite scores were then used in the analysis to determine whether there was a difference in attitudes toward marriage between those who did watch *The O.C.* and those who did not.

The results from an independent samples t-test found that those who watched *The O.C.* did not have significantly different attitudes concerning marriage than those who did not watch the program, $t(131) = .338, p > .05$. Hypothesis one was not supported. In order to investigate the relationship between marital attitudes and *The O.C.* further, hypothesis two proposed that viewers' connectedness to the program would influence their attitude toward marriage.

H2: Adolescents and young adults who are highly connected to The O.C. will have a more negative attitude toward marriage than those who are weakly connected.

The responses assessing participants' connectedness to *The O.C.* were also transformed from 16 items into one overall score (i.e., containing all 16

items) and six different sub-scores representing different areas of connectedness (i.e., escape, paraphernalia, fashion, imitation, modeling, and aspiration). A higher score indicated a higher level of connectedness to the program. An analysis of the overall connectedness score and the composite marital attitude score found no significant correlation between viewers' overall connection to the program and their attitudes toward marriage, $r(84) = .141, p > .05$.

The Pearson correlations among the overall connectedness score, individual dimensions of connectedness, and individual marital attitude items are shown in Table 4. Overall these results suggest that there are slight relationships between particular ways of being connected to television programming and attitudes toward getting married or remaining single. However, according to Cohen (2001) correlations that are below .30 are considered weak, correlations between .30 and .50 are considered moderate, and correlations at or above .50 are considered strong. This would indicate that the correlations found here are weak correlations. The implications of these findings will be discussed further in the next chapter.

A positive correlation was found for viewers' overall connectedness score and their agreement with the statement, "I have doubts of my chance of ever having a successful marriage," $r(86) = .198, p < .05$. An individual who felt more connected to the program did not feel that he or she would have a successful marriage in his or her future.

Table 4

Correlations of Statements Measuring Attitudes Toward Marriage with Dimensions of Connectedness Scale

Measures of ATM	Dimensions of Connectedness Scale						
	Overall	Modeling	Imitation	Fashion	Aspiration	Escape	Paraphernalia
Statement 1	-.162	-.180*	-.135	-.203*	-.157	-.050	-.018
Statement 2	-.122	-.075	-.039	-.103	-.130	-.087	-.123
Statement 3	.094	.082	-.014	-.125	.153	.071	.175
Statement 4	-.001	.002	-.007	-.045	.015	-.001	-.050
Statement 5	.074	.115	.083	.045	.026	.052	.137
Statement 6	.102	.180*	.101	.049	-.004	.054	.069
Statement 7	.037	.064	.080	-.054	-.007	.045	.013
Statement 8	.149	.131	.114	-.023	.121	.120	.185*
Statement 9	.053	.183*	.068	-.137	-.003	.090	.056

(Table 4 continues)

Table 4 (continued)

Correlations of Statements Measuring Attitudes Toward Marriage with Dimensions of Connectedness Scale

Measures of ATM	Dimensions of Connectedness Scale						
	Overall	Modeling	Imitation	Fashion	Aspiration	Escape	Paraphernalia
Statement 10	.198*	.230*	.151	.136	.084	.080	.196*
Statement 11	-.042	-.040	-.016	.016	.033	-.035	-.005
Statement 12	.074	.019	.052	.026	.040	.069	.137
Statement 13	.093	.055	.214*	.035	.112	.018	.019
Statement 14	.083	.113	.119	.031	.094	.002	.004
Statement 15	.093	-.010	-.057	.028	.084	.089	.185*
Statement 16	.125	.184*	.055	.058	.024	.118	.141
Statement 17	-.103	-.015	.016	-.034	-.084	-.174	-.154

(Table 4 continues)

Table 4 (continued)

Correlations of Statements Measuring Attitudes Toward Marriage with Dimensions of Connectedness Scale

Measures of ATM	Dimensions of Connectedness Scale						
	Overall	Modeling	Imitation	Fashion	Aspiration	Escape	Paraphernalia
Statement 18	-.082	-.084	.066	.018	-.177	-.165	-.017
Statement 19	-.004	-.058	-.031	-.005	.033	-.035	.035
Statement 20	.050	-.001	.113	.152	.062	.044	-.026
Statement 21	.042	-.028	.195*	-.115	-.032	.123	.010
Statement 22	.084	.213*	.244*	-.136	.029	.068	-.032
Statement 23	.109	.041	.069	.155	.211*	.033	.073

Note. ATM = Attitudes Toward Marriage. See Appendix B for complete list of Statements 1 – 23.

*p < .05, **p < .01

In addition to a total score for connectedness, six separate scores were computed using the particular questions within the survey which concerned each of the six ways that an individual can be connected to a program, as noted above. This created six separate scores for each individual viewer. Pearson correlations were used to examine relationships between each category of connectedness and marital attitudes. These scores were then analyzed in order to examine relationships between each level of connectedness and marital attitudes. Viewers can be connected to television programs in a number of ways.

One of those ways includes connection to a program through modeling information provided in the show. Pearson correlations indicated a marginal relationship between connectedness to the program through modeling and attitude toward marriage, $r(84) = .142, p < .099$. Interestingly, analyses of the individual statements within the marital attitude scale revealed several significant relationships. There were significant positive correlations between the modeling connectedness score and the statements "It would be advisable for me to remain single," $r(87) = .213, p < .05$, and "I have doubts of ever having a successful marriage," $r(87) = .230, p < .05$. These relationships suggest that individuals who tend to model their lives after *The O.C.* also tend to have more negative attitudes toward marriage. Positive relationships were also found between the modeling connectedness score and the following statements: "Not being married means you can spend more time at work getting ahead," $r(86) = .184, p < .05$, "Marriage gives you children," $r(86) = .180, p < .05$, and "Marriage gives you love, warmth, and happiness," $r(87) = .183, p < .05$. The modeling connectedness score was

also negatively correlated with the statement, "Being married gives you economic security," $r(87) = -.180, p < .05$.

A second avenue of connectedness refers to an individual's imitation of a program's gestures and sayings within his or her own life. This category of connectedness was significantly positively correlated with viewers' attitudes toward marriage, $r(84) = .189, p < .05$ such that individuals who felt connected to a program through imitation of it also had a negative attitude toward getting married in the future. Imitation of *The O.C.*'s sayings and gestures was also significantly positively correlated with the statements, "It would advisable for me to remain single," $r(87) = .244, p < .05$, "Being married gives you a sense of responsibility that you would not have otherwise," $r(87) = .214, p < .05$, and "You miss having close relationships when single," $r(87) = .195, p < .05$.

The next score that was computed concerned viewers' connections to the program through use of the program as a fashion guide. There was no significant relationship between those who felt connected to a program's fashion and their attitude toward marriage, $r(84) = .013, p > .05$. However, there was a significant negative correlation between viewers that were connected to a program's fashion and the statement, "Marriage gives you economic security," $r(86) = -.203, p < .05$. This finding indicates that individuals who felt connected to the fashion presented on *The O.C.* did not feel that they would find economic security in marriage.

The next score computed contained statements that measured whether or not an individual was connected to a program through his or her aspiration to

appear on the program or to meet the characters that were on the program.

Analysis found that this measure of connectedness was not significantly correlated with viewers' overall attitudes toward marriage, $r(84) = .087, p > .05$. However, this measure of connectedness was significantly positively correlated with the statement, "Being single allows more time to experience life and find out about myself," $r(87) = .211, p < .05$.

Another way that a viewer can be connected to a program is through the use of the program as escape. Analyses indicated, however, that there was not a relationship between individuals' connection to a program through escape and their attitude toward marriage, $r(85) = .074, p > .05$. There were also no significant relationships found between any of the marital statements and viewers' connection to a program through escape.

Finally, viewers' use of paraphernalia that is connected to the program was not correlated with viewers' overall attitudes toward marriage, $r(84) = .119, p > .05$. This measure was, however, significantly positively correlated with several of the individual statements measuring attitudes toward marriage including, "Being single allows you freedom to come and go as you please," $r(86) = .185, p < .05$, "I have doubts of my chance of ever having a successful marriage," $r(86) = .196, p < .05$, and "Being married guarantees regular intimacy," $r(86) = .185, p < .05$.

In addition to the analyses performed with all participants, additional analyses were performed on just the female participants. The Pearson correlations for the data examining the relationships between connectedness and

marital attitudes for females can be seen in Table 5. Overall, there were significant positive correlations between females who were highly connected to *The O.C.* and their agreement with the statements, "Being single allows you the freedom to come and go as you please", $r(57) = .258, p < .05$, and "Not being married means you can spend more time at work getting ahead", $r(57) = .263, p < .05$.

For the modeling component of the connectedness scale, there was a significant relationship between females who were connected to *The O.C.* through modeling and their agreement with the statements, "Marriage has no advantages", $r(57) = .263, p < .05$, "Being single allows you the freedom to come and go as you please", $r(57) = .230, p < .05$, "I have doubts of my chance of ever having a successful marriage", $r(57) = .243, p < .05$, "Not being married means you can spend more time at work getting ahead", $r(57) = .319, p < .01$, and "I think it would be advisable for me to remain single", $r(57) = .273, p < .05$. This component was also negatively correlated with females agreement with the statement, "Being married gives you economic security", $r(57) = -.281, p < .05$.

For the imitation component of connectedness, there were significant positive correlations found for females who were highly connected with the program and their agreement with the statements, "You miss having close relationships when single", $r(57) = .334, p < .01$, and "I think it would be advisable for me to remain single", $r(57) = .331, p < .01$.

An analysis of the fashion component for connectedness with female participants found one positive correlation between females who were connected

Table 5

Correlations of Statements Measuring Attitudes Toward Marriage with Dimensions of Connectedness Scale (Females)

Measures of ATM	Dimensions of Connectedness Scale						
	Overall	Modeling	Imitation	Fashion	Aspiration	Escape	Paraphernalia
Statement 1	-.083	-.281*	-.091	-.165	-.024	.071	.095
Statement 2	-.019	.026	.019	-.029	-.078	.011	-.060
Statement 3	.148	.165	.049	-.182	.174	.089	.215
Statement 4	.097	.093	.066	.003	.050	.102	-.005
Statement 5	.108	.263*	.160	-.016	-.027	.032	.161
Statement 6	-.077	.075	.005	-.202	-.139	-.121	.006
Statement 7	.077	.158	.203	-.165	-.043	.080	.024
Statement 8	.258*	.230*	.182	.030	.206	.204	.233*
Statement 9	.053	.184	.019	-.220	.011	.178	.031

(Table 5 continues) 83

Table 5 (continued)

Correlations of Statements Measuring Attitudes Toward Marriage with Dimensions of Connectedness Scale (Females)

Measures of ATM	Dimensions of Connectedness Scale						
	Overall	Modeling	Imitation	Fashion	Aspiration	Escape	Paraphernalia
Statement 10	.159	.243*	.149	.030	.062	.011	.142
Statement 11	.039	.078	.088	.083	.030	.006	.054
Statement 12	.199	.129	.182	.043	.143	.153	.191
Statement 13	-.065	-.030	.205	-.013	-.111	-.149	-.117
Statement 14	.181	.152	.178	.195	.182	.062	.038
Statement 15	-.011	-.151	-.188	-.118	-.045	.150	.105
Statement 16	.263*	.319**	.143	.069	.196	.194	.217
Statement 17	.036	.141	.054	.086	.069	-.109	-.048

(Table 5 continues)

Table 5 (continued)

Correlations of Statements Measuring Attitudes Toward Marriage with Dimensions of Connectedness Scale (Females)

Measures of ATM	Dimensions of Connectedness Scale						
	Overall	Modeling	Imitation	Fashion	Aspiration	Escape	Paraphernalia
Statement 18	-.185	-.145	.071	-.065	-.279*	-.274*	-.056
Statement 19	.216	.120	.091	.052	.107	.217	.206
Statement 20	.206	.092	.173	.225*	.267*	.210	.062
Statement 21	.092	.004	.334**	-.102	-.069	.170	-.008
Statement 22	.127	.273*	.331**	-.207	.003	.142	-.030
Statement 23	.014	-.020	-.014	.015	.184	.003	-.005

Note. ATM = Attitudes Toward Marriage. See Appendix B for complete list of Statements 1 – 23.

*p < .05, **p < .01

to *The O.C.* through fashion and their agreement with the statement, "If your not married you have fewer worries or responsibilities", $r(57) = .225, p < .05$.

An analysis of the aspiration component of connectedness found one significant positive correlation between females' connectedness through their aspiration and their agreement with the statement, "If you're not married you have fewer worries or responsibilities," $r(57) = .267, p < .05$. One significant negative correlation was also found between females who connected to the program through aspiration and their agreement with the statement, "You miss having children when you are single," $r(57) = -.279, p < .05$.

For the escape component of connectedness, there was one significant negative correlation found for females and their agreement with the statement, "You miss having children when you are single", $r(57) = -.274, p < .05$. For the paraphernalia component of connectedness there was one significant positive correlation found for females and agreement with the statement, "Being single allows you the freedom to come and go as you please", $r(57) = .233, p < .05$.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Study One

The purpose of study one was to examine portrayals of divorce and marital interactions on television programming. One issue of particular interest focused on investigating whether or not viewers in different age groups are receiving different messages. As the results revealed there are apparent differences in how divorce is portrayed to young versus mature audiences.

Divorce Portrayals for Adolescents and Young Adults

The content analysis performed in this study found that there are more divorce portrayals in adolescent and young adult programming than in mature adult programming. It is also clear that divorce is depicted differently in adolescent and young adult programming when compared to mature adult programming.

When divorce messages appeared in television programs directed toward adolescent and young adult audience they usually involved main characters in the program. These main characters acted as the source and receiver of the divorce messages in the majority of the portrayals. Moreover, messages about divorce were often central to the storyline. These findings are in sharp contrast

to the characteristics of divorce portrayals in mature adult programming (i.e., supporting characters delivering the message and portrayals incidental to the storyline).

The importance of these portrayals of divorce in adolescent and young adult programming is not just that they are occurring but that they may be having an impact on the young viewers' decision-making and behaviors. As was discussed previously within this study, social cognitive theory suggests that the media can act as a determinant in one's decision making process. It is important, therefore, to have a complete understanding of what messages the media are sending. Because the divorce portrayals in adolescent and young adult programs involve main characters and are central to the storyline, viewers may be more likely to identify with and internalize the messages delivered to them. Social cognitive theory suggests that viewers identify more with characters that are similar to themselves. When viewers identify with characters, they are more likely to internalize the message and use it in their decision making processes. Young viewers internalizing the divorce messages found in this content analysis are more likely to see divorce as a common occurrence and therefore decide against marital behavior in the future.

In addition to the prevalence of divorce in adolescent and young adult programming, it is also important to examine the reactions that are given in response to divorce portrayals. In adolescent and young adult programming, the majority of the time the reaction is positive. Positive reactions included laughing, smiling, and even congratulating one another for finalizing a divorce. This may

be sending an important message to viewers concerning the sanctity of marriage. Adolescent and young adult programs appear to be portraying divorce as a common and positive occurrence, and consequently young viewers may be internalizing the message that it is healthy and normal to get divorced. This research does not pass judgment on an individual's decision to get divorced; however, it does suggest that presenting divorce as a healthy and happy alternative may be creating an unrealistic or even false image in young viewers' minds which may in turn influence their decisions concerning marriage. This viewpoint may be considered unrealistic because in reality divorce is both a lengthy and at times painful experience that is not portrayed that way on television.

Marital Portrayals for Adolescents and Young Adults

In contrast to the number of divorce portrayals in adolescent and young adult programs, there are fewer marital interactions in these programs when compared to mature adult programming. When marital interactions are present, they often involve conflict and characters use anger when communicating with one another. Although this is also true of marital interactions in mature adult programming, these interactions may have greater impact when placed within adolescent and young adult programming because young audiences are exposed more frequently to messages about divorce. Divorce portrayals and marital interactions on television are creating models for marriage. When the two models are considered together, it appears that the message they are sending is

that marriage is a difficult lifestyle to maintain and divorce is an attractive or beneficial alternative. These models then are reinforcing the message sent by the divorce portrayals found in adolescent and young adult programming and are further influencing the cognitive processes of young viewers' decisions concerning marriage.

Limitations

The present content analysis provides a snapshot of the portrayals of divorce and marriage in current prime-time programming. There are limitations, however, when selecting a program sample from a particular period in time. The sample used in this content analysis was collected during a one-month period and included only programs that were regularly scheduled. Therefore, it is possible that the episodes used in this sample are not completely representative of storylines and portrayals that occur in prime-time programming aired throughout the entire year.

An additional limitation concerns the operational definition of divorce portrayals on television. Because this content analysis was the first to explore divorce portrayals in prime-time programming from a social cognitive perspective, there are few examples in the literature of best practices related to coding media portrayals of divorce. The operational definition for the study was derived from research that assessed divorce relationships in real-life situations. Is divorce in real life similar to how it is portrayed on television and can one assess these two contexts in similar ways? With this in mind, one may question whether the

definition is appropriate when examining divorce on television. Related to the above concern, marital interactions were coded according to Gottman's (1994) assessment of marital interaction, a coding scheme that had not previously been applied to models in the media. It is possible that applying Gottman's (1994) coding scheme does not completely capture the nuances of marital interactions within television programming. The use of these parameters in coding divorce portrayals and marital interactions assumes that divorce and marital interactions appear the same way in reality as they do on television. There is constant debate, however, regarding whether television is an accurate portrayal of reality.

To create a manageable study, particular parameters were necessarily set related to coding divorce portrayals (e.g., sources and receivers, contribution to storyline). Therefore, many other categories of information (e.g., length of portrayal, emotions displayed) which could provide useful descriptions of divorce on television were likely omitted.

Finally, because the focus of this study was to explore differences in divorce portrayals within programs targeting adolescent and young adult audiences versus mature adult audiences, other program categories were not considered. Future studies might include analyzing divorce portrayals according to show genre or program length, any of which may provide insight into how divorce is being portrayed on television.

Implications for Future Research

As noted in the discussion of the limitations, divorce portrayals on television could be examined in multiple ways, many of which are beyond the scope of the present study. For instance, one interesting observation made during the coding of mature adult programming is the context in which divorce messages occurred. Divorce seemed to be a reoccurring theme within adult dramas that surrounded stressful occupations, such as detectives, medical practitioners, and attorneys. Often these programs were dramas and often the divorce portrayals appeared to be incidental to the storyline. Careful analyses of such portrayals may provide insightful information regarding the types of messages (e.g., divorce, marriage, family life) being delivered to viewers surrounding these stressful occupations.

The present research provides a foundation for future investigations of divorce portrayals on television. As noted within the limitations section, the program sample collected for this research is not exhaustive of all programming that is available. Future content analyses examining divorce portrayals in other genres of programming, such as reality programs or children's programs, would deepen our understanding of how the media portray divorce and marital interactions.

In addition to research on divorce, future researchers should consider the use of Gottman's (1994) analysis of marital couples. One observation within this research is that there existed a number of marital interactions which used contempt or sarcasm in their responses. One reason for this finding may be that

the use of sarcasm in marital interaction is not to demoralize one's partner but rather to create a humorous situation for the audience. Future research using Gottman's (1994) marital interaction coding scheme should consider different genres of programming (i.e., dramas versus situation-comedies). In doing so, future research may reveal more intricacies concerning marital life on television.

Study Two

The purpose of the second study was to go beyond the content analysis in study one and explore the potential effects of watching *The O.C.*, a popular program in which messages about divorce and relationships are prevalent. Furthermore, these portrayals are often central themes of the program. Is watching a program like *The O.C.* related to how young audience members think about the prospect of marriage?

While there was no difference in attitudes toward marriage between those who chose to watch *The O.C.* and those who did not, merely assessing overall viewership does not tell the whole story. It is not simply the existence or absence of the program, but rather the connectedness that individuals felt to the program and the characters that seems to be important. There was a significant, albeit weak, correlation between viewers' overall connectedness to the program and their attitudes toward ever getting married. Those who were highly connected to the program also tended to be those who did not foresee themselves having a successful marriage in the future. This relationship is important because it suggests that individuals who develop personal identities

from watching *The O.C.* also feel that it is not consistent with their identity to be able to sustain a marriage. Of course it is impossible to determine from correlational data whether this identity evolved as a result of watching *The O.C.* or whether it existed prior to viewing and led to an interest in watching the show.

While there was a marginal relationship between the modeling component of connectedness and overall attitude toward marriage, the individual relationships between modeling and particular beliefs about marriage have important implications. Social cognitive theorists would suggest that characters, situations, relationships, etc. presented in *The O.C.* can serve as models for viewers. Consequently, the prevalence of divorce portrayals found within the program mean that viewers have more opportunities to be exposed to these messages and this exposure could potentially influence viewers' choices and decisions. If divorce messages similar to those described in this study continue to be modeled by characters on television, viewers may begin to avoid marriage in the future. Findings from the present study appear to support this interpretation in that those who modeled themselves after the program also agreed that it would be advisable for them to remain single and they have doubts of having a successful marriage.

The final analysis which investigated the imitation component of the connectedness scale found that those who imitated the program in their lives also had a negative attitude toward marriage according to the marital scale used in the survey. Additionally, these individuals felt that it would be advisable for them to remain single. These findings further support the interpretations made

above, in that they indicate that those who are connected to *The O.C.* through imitation are also more likely to hold a negative attitude toward marriage. This may be due to the fact that individuals who mimic the program in their lives may see divorce as a modeled action for them and therefore it decreases their belief that marriages can endure.

Interestingly, there was a significant correlation between individuals who were connected to the program through their use of O.C. paraphernalia and their doubts of ever having a successful marriage. Again, this weak relationship indicates that those who incorporate aspects of the program beyond just watching the show may have stronger tendencies to either remain single or do not believe that if they do get married it will be forever. Incorporating ideals, behaviors, style, and other aspects of a program into one's life may influence the viewer by reinforcing the media messages.

In addition to the findings that related to both male and female participants, analyses performed on only the female participants indicated that females who were highly connected to *The O.C.* may have more negative attitudes toward marriage than male participants. The relationships found for the female participants were at times moderate correlations indicating a stronger relationship between their connectedness to the program and their attitudes toward marriage. This finding is important because it may mean that females become more highly connected to programming that they watch, especially those who connect to *The O.C.* through modeling and imitation. Additionally, females who do watch *The O.C.* may be internalizing and identifying with the divorce

messages portrayed. This can have important implications in that it may become another deterrent in females choosing to get married. As was discussed previously, females from divorced families of origin often choose to wait to get married later due to educational achievement. Divorce portrayals provided by television characters and internalized by female viewers may only reinforce this decision to delay marriage into their future.

An important finding overall is that different aspects of the connectedness scale had relationships with the participants' attitudes toward divorce. A likely reason for this finding is that the way in which individuals connect with a program may have an influence on whether or not the individual internalizes the messages sent. The escape, fashion, and aspiration components of the connectedness scale were not related to participants' feelings about getting a divorce. Perhaps these findings are indicative of individuals using programs and the media for different reasons. Some individuals chose only to use it to escape, find fashion sense, or create fantasies, while others use the media as a tool in their decision processes, therefore, allowing the program to affect them differently.

Limitations

An obvious limitation to this study is that the data are correlational in nature, and it is inherently impossible to establish cause and effect. These findings, therefore, can not say conclusively that individuals who held negative attitudes toward marriage developed those attitudes from watching *The O.C.*. It

is just as likely that these attitudes existed before they viewed the program and perhaps were even the reason that they chose to attend to it at all.

Another limitation may have been the decision to use college students to participate in the survey. As Russell, Norman, and Heckler (2003) suggest in their work, connectedness may be especially relevant among teenagers, since they are at an influential age in finding their identity. A more appropriate sample would have been younger participants (i.e., middle school and high school aged participants). Using college students as participants could have contributed to weak relationships (1) because the program *The O.C.* centers around teenagers in high school and therefore college students may have difficulties identifying with the characters or situations in the program, and (2) because college students tend to express skepticism about the ways in which the media can actually influence their behaviors and attitudes. Perhaps they were less likely to reveal their true attachments to the program.

An additional limitation was discovered when the open-ended section of the survey was examined. The open-ended portion of the survey allowed the participants to provide a reason for watching *The O.C.*. On numerous occasions the participants responded that they "were forced" to watch it by roommates or friends or "there was nothing else on". Due to the fact that these individuals may not have attended to the program at all while viewing it, their measures of connectedness may have skewed results.

Implications for Future Research

The findings from this study suggest that relationships may exist between one's connectedness to a program and his or her attitudes toward marriage. Future research should carefully explore these relationships and determine if and how these messages may influence viewers. If, indeed, adolescents and young adults are acquiring information from media portrayals, which in turn influence their decisions to get married, researchers from multiple disciplines (e.g., communication, family studies, psychology) must better understand this process. Young viewers in particular are of interest as their identities are more easily shaped by the media. The connectedness scale is clearly an important assessment tool and should be used in future studies pertaining to media effects. Researchers are continually searching for different ways to examine how the media influence us and this scale may lead to greater understanding surrounding media effects.

While the purpose of study two was to explore connectedness to *The O.C.* in particular, future research on a variety of programs directed toward young audiences would enhance our understanding of the "connectedness" phenomenon. It is likely that many viewers have no interest, and therefore no connectedness, to *The O.C.* but perhaps do feel connected to other programs with divorce messages in their storylines.

General Discussion

These two studies have been conducted in conjunction with one another to more fully understand (1) characteristics of divorce portrayals on television and (2) connectedness to adolescent and young adult programming. Until recently, divorce was not widely discussed and research investigating its presence on television was limited. However, as divorce becomes less stigmatized and a common occurrence in society, media researchers can play a role in encouraging discussions necessary to better understand how portrayals of divorce and marriage on television influence subsequent attitudes and behaviors.

APPENDIX A

Program List

Program	Network	Date (2004)	Time (Eastern, PM)	Length (Minutes)
Adolescent and Young Adult				
Angel	WB	Apr. 21	9:00	60
Angel	WB	May 5	9:00	60
Angel	WB	May 12	9:00	60
Everwood	WB	Apr. 19	9:00	60
Everwood	WB	Apr. 26	9:00	60
Everwood	WB	May 3	9:00	60
Everwood	WB	May 10	9:00	60
One Tree Hill	WB	Apr. 20	9:00	60
One Tree Hill	WB	Apr. 27	9:00	60
One Tree Hill	WB	May 4	9:00	60
One Tree Hill	WB	May 11	9:00	60
Smallville	WB	Apr. 21	8:00	60
Smallville	WB	May 5	8:00	60
Smallville	WB	May 12	8:00	60
That 70's Show	FOX	Apr. 21	8:00	30
That 70's Show	FOX	Apr. 28	8:00	30

Adolescent and Young Adult Cont.

That 70's Show	FOX	May 5	8:00	30
That 70's Show	FOX	May 12	8:00	30
The O.C.	FOX	Apr. 21	9:00	60
The O.C.	FOX	Apr. 28	9:00	60
The O.C.	FOX	May 5	9:00	60

Mature Adult

24	FOX	Apr. 20	9:00	60
8 Simple Rules	ABC	Apr. 20	8:00	30
CSI: Miami	CBS	Apr. 26	10:00	60
Frasier	NBC	Apr. 27	8:30	30
Frasier	NBC	May 4	8:00	30
George Lopez	ABC	May 14	8:30	30
Joan of Arcadia	CBS	Apr. 23	8:00	60
Judging Amy	CBS	Apr. 20	10:00	60
Law & Order	NBC	May 12	10:00	60
My Wife and Kids	ABC	Apr. 28	8:00	30
Navy NCIS	CBS	May 4	8:00	60
NYPD Blue	ABC	Apr. 20	10:00	60
NYPD Blue	ABC	Apr. 27	10:00	60
Still Standing	CBS	Apr. 19	8:30	30

Mature Adult Cont.

Bernie Mac Show	FOX	Apr. 26	8:30	30
The Guardian	CBS	Apr. 27	9:00	60
The King of Queens	CBS	Apr. 28	9:00	30
Third Watch	NBC	Apr. 30	10:00	60
Tru Calling	FOX	Apr. 22	8:00	60
Without a Trace	CBS	Apr. 23	10:00	60
Yes Dear	CBS	Apr. 19	8:00	30

APPENDIX B

Coding Frame for Marital Interactions

Interaction of Married Couples:

INTERACTION 1

Description: _____**Type of Conversation:** Information Sharing Conflict Neutral**Affect of Responses:** Neutral Humor Affectionate/Caring

Joy/Excitement Anger Disgust/Scorn Whining Sadness Fear

INTERACTION 2

Description: _____**Type of Conversation:** Information Sharing Conflict Neutral**Affect of Responses:** Neutral Humor Affectionate/Caring

Joy/Excitement Anger Disgust/Scorn Whining Sadness Fear

INTERACTION 3

Description: _____**Type of Conversation:** Information Sharing Conflict Neutral**Affect of Responses:** Neutral Humor Affectionate/Caring

Joy/Excitement Anger Disgust/Scorn Whining Sadness Fear

APPENDIX C

CODING FRAME FOR DIVORCE PORTRAYALS

Coding Frame:

Show Name: _____ **Channel:** _____ **Day:** _____ **Time:** _____

Show Type: Humorous/Comedy Drama/Action Other: _____

Divorce Portrayal: Verbal Message Action

Describe: _____

Situational Setting:

Humorous/Comedy Dramatic/Action Other: _____

Character delivering message or action (Source):

ROLE: Main Character Supporting Character (Regular)

Supporting Character (Guest) Supporting Character (Unsure) Minor Character

GENDER: Male Female

RACE: White Black Hispanic Asian Other: _____

APPARENT AGE: Child Teen Young Adult Mature Adult

Older Adult Senior

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: Poor/Poverty Low Income/Working Class

Middle Class Wealthy Unsure

Interaction/Reaction of Other Characters (Receiver):

Were other characters involved in the portrayal: Yes No

ROLE: Main Character Supporting Character (Regular)

Supporting Character (Guest) Supporting Character (Unsure) Minor
Character

GENDER: Male Female

RACE: White Black Hispanic Asian Other: _____

APPARENT AGE: Child Teen Young Adult Mature Adult

Older Adult Senior

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: Poor/Poverty Low Income/Working Class

Middle Class Wealthy Unsure

RESONDENT RELATION TO SOURCE:

Family Friend Stranger Co-Worker Unknown

RESPONSE TO MESSAGE/ACTION: Positive Negative Neutral

Importance of Portrayal to Show: Minor Major Unknown

APPENDIX D

Connectedness Survey

The media and its messages is an area that has been widely studied in the communication field, and is of continual importance as the media changes today. I am currently conducting research on this topic for my graduate thesis. I am seeking your help by asking that you to respond to the following questions honestly and accurately. All of your answers will be kept completely confidential and anonymous. If you have further questions please feel free to contact me, Kate Conrad (conradkm@notes.udayton.edu). Thank you in advance for your participation.

Please fill out this questionnaire indicating your level of agreement with each of the following statements. After each statement circle the appropriate level of agreement: 1 – Strongly Agree (SA), 2- Agree (A), 3- Neutral (N), 4- Disagree (D) and 5-Strongly Disagree (SD). Thanks in advance for your help.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Being married gives you economic security.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Being single allows you to save more money.	1	2	3	4	5
3. One sees so few happy marriages that one questions it as a way of life.	1	2	3	4	5
4. It is lonely being single.	1	2	3	4	5
5. There are no advantages to being married.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Marriage gives you children.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I think I will be more happy if I marry.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Being single allows you the freedom to come and go as you please.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Marriage gives you love, warmth and happiness.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I have doubts of my chance of ever having a successful marriage.	1	2	3	4	5

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. Having a close intimate relationship with only one partner is too restrictive for the average person. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. People take one another for granted after they marry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Being married allows you a sense of responsibility that you would not have otherwise. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. It is usually a good idea for a couple to live together before getting married in order to find out whether they really get along. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Being married guarantees regular intimacy. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Not being married means you can spend more time at work getting ahead. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. You do not have much independence or personal freedom when you marry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. You miss having children when you are single. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Being single allows you freedom to mix with the opposite sex. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. If you are not married you have fewer worries or responsibilities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. You miss having close relationships when single. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. I think it would be advisable for me to remain single. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Being single allows more time to experience life and find out about myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

The following questions pertain to your demographics. Please fill out the following by circling the appropriate choice or filling in the corresponding answer:

24. Age: Under 18 18-20 20-22 22-24

25. Gender: Male Female

26. With what racial group do you identify?

Caucasian African-American Hispanic Native American

Asian American Other: _____

27. Please identify the marital status of your parents:

Married Divorced Deceased Never Married

IF YOU ANSWERED THAT YOUR PARENTS ARE DIVORCED PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS 28 & 29, IF YOUR PARENTS ARE NOT DIVORCED PLEASE PROCEED TO QUESTION 30.

28. If divorced, are your parents currently or have they ever been subsequently remarried:

Yes No

• If yes, which parent: Father Mother Both

29. If divorced, have your parents been divorced or remarried more than once:

Yes No

• If yes, which parent: Father Mother Both

The following questions are used to identify your use of television. Please fill in the appropriate answer to each by either circling a corresponding choice or filling in the blank:

30. Have you ever watched "The O.C."? Yes No

IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO QUESTION 30 PLEASE CONTINUE TO QUESTION 31. IF NO THEN YOU HAVE COMPLETED THE SURVEY.

31. How many episodes of The O.C. have you watched in the last year?

1 – 3 3 – 5 6 – 8 9 – 11 More than 11

32. If you have watched The O.C., please describe the reasons why you watch this program.

If you have watched The O.C., please circle how strongly you agree or disagree with each of the following statements concerning the program (SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree).

- | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 33. Watching the O.C. is an escape for me. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 34. The O.C. helps me forget about the day's problems. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 35. If I am in a bad mood, watching the O.C. puts me in a better mood. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 36. I like the clothes they wear on the O.C. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 37. I often buy clothing styles that I've seen on the O.C. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 38. I imitate the gestures and facial expressions from the characters in the O.C. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 39. I find myself saying phrases from the O.C. when I interact with other people. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 40. I try to speak like the characters in the O.C. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 41. I learn how to handle real life situations by watching the O.C. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 42. I get ideas from the O.C. about how to interact in my own life. | SD | D | N | A | SA |

- | | | | | | |
|---|----|---|---|---|----|
| 43. I relate what happens in the O.C. to my own life. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 44. I would love to be an actor in the O.C. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 45. I would love to meet the characters of the O.C. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 46. I have objects that relate to the O.C. (book, picture, etc.). | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 47. I read books/magazines if they are related to the O.C. | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| 48. Who is your favorite character from the O.C.? | | | | | |

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY!

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R002S92202

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