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Adult children of divorce: how do attachment insecurity and interparental conflict contribute to romantic relationship satisfaction?

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ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCE:
HOW DO ATTACHMENT INSECURITY AND INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT
CONTRIBUTE TO ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION?

by

Hannah K. Muetzelfeld

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Abstract

Research has shown that children of divorce who are exposed to high levels of interparental conflict tend to have worse adult outcomes than individuals not so exposed (e.g., Gager, Yabiku, & Linver, 2016), including damage to their romantic relationships (Cui, Fincham, & Durtschi, 2011; Feeney, 2006). The present study investigated the contributing role of adult attachment insecurity (i.e., attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety) to the relation between recollections of interparental conflict during childhood and adult romantic relationship satisfaction.

A convenience sample of 678 U.S. participants (319 men, 345 women) whose parents had divorced prior to their reaching age 18 completed the Children’s Perception of Interparental Conflict (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992), the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000), and the Couples Satisfaction Index-4 (CSI-4; Funk & Rogge, 2007). Two theorized models were tested with Avoidance and Anxiety as moderators and mediators using Hayes’s (2017) PROCESS macro.

Results showed that Avoidance, controlling for Anxiety, significantly moderated the relation between CPIC and CSI-4 scores, where highly avoidant participants who recalled high levels of interparental conflict in childhood reported significantly less adult relationship satisfaction. Moreover, a post-hoc analysis showed that Avoidance partially mediated the relation between Threat (a CPIC subscale) and relationship satisfaction. No gender differences were found, and Anxiety was neither a significant moderator nor a mediator.

Contrary to previous studies (e.g., Cusimano & Riggs, 2013), participants’ retrospective reports of interparental conflict were not significantly associated with attachment insecurity, likely due to the narrower sampling of adults whose parents had divorced during their childhood.
This result calls into question the widely held belief that divorce, when paired with high levels of interparental conflict, leads to poor relationship adjustment. Rather, the present findings suggest that this outcome is most likely for adults with high levels of attachment avoidance, which may develop when children feel threatened by interparental conflict.

Taken together, the present results support previous research indicating that avoidance is the more problematic dimension of attachment insecurity in romantic relationships (Li & Chan, 2012) and the more difficult dimension to modify in psychotherapy (Wiseman & Tishby, 2014).
Chapter 1
Introduction and Literature Review

Around half of all marriages in the U.S. end in divorce (Cherlin, 2010). The multigenerational effects of divorce are reflected in numerous studies indicating that compared to adults from two-parent families of origin, individuals whose parents divorced tend to have less satisfying and long-lasting relationships (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cui, Fincham, & Durtschi, 2011; Jacquet & Surra, 2001). For this reason, it is important to identify factors that contribute to troubled romantic relationships for these adults.

One contributing factor has been identified in numerous studies: the extent of conflict in the parental relationship (Cui et al., 2011; Cusimano & Riggs, 2013; Feeney, 2006). Specifically, research has shown that problematic romantic relationships in adulthood are linked to extensive interparental conflict during childhood. Studies on interparental conflict, defined in terms of frequency, intensity, and resolution of the conflict (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992), indicate that adult children from high-conflict families tend to report more attachment insecurity (Cusimano & Riggs, 2013); less happiness (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995); and shorter (Gager, Yabiku, & Linver, 2016), poorer quality (Feeney, 2006), and less committed romantic relationships (Cui et al., 2011).

Notably, the conflict that a person was exposed to between parents during childhood seems to carry over to adult relationships, which tend to be of poor quality (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cui, Fincham, & Pasley, 2008). Supporting this reasoning, a 12-year longitudinal study found that children’s long-term outcomes (i.e., levels of psychological distress and overall happiness) were associated with the extent of interparental conflict occurring prior to parental divorce (Amato et al., 1995). Indeed, the extent of interparental conflict, which is a critical
predictor of the impact of divorce on children (Amato et al., 1995; Gager et al., 2016), may be a more important determinant of adult relationship outcomes than whether or not the parents actually divorced (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998). Cui et al. (2008), for example, found that interparental conflict, but not divorce, was associated with high rates of negative conflict behaviors in young adults’ romantic relationships. In a subsequent study, participants who recalled high pre-divorce conflict reported generally more favorable views about divorce as a relationship outcome, as well as less stability in their own romantic relationships (Cui et al., 2011).

The general aim of the present study was to contribute to the literature on the long-term relationship outcomes of adults whose parents divorced during their childhood, not only in relation to the extent of interparental conflict they recalled, but also in terms of their levels of attachment anxiety and avoidance (i.e., attachment insecurity). Specifically, attachment insecurity, a well-known contributor to romantic relationship quality (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Li & Chan, 2012; Tucker & Anders, 1999), was investigated as a contributing factor to the long-term effects of interparental conflict in childhood. Whereas previous studies have included samples with adult children from both two-parent and divorced families (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cui et al., 2008), this study investigated only adult children of divorce in order to better understand this phenomenon in that particular population, where levels of interparental conflict might be more frequent or intense (Cui et al., 2011).

Numerous studies reported significant associations among attachment insecurity, interparental conflict, and romantic relationship satisfaction (Cusimano & Riggs, 2013; Platt, Nalbone, Casanova, & Wetchler, 2008; Steinberg, Davila, & Fincham, 2006). Generally, results of these studies indicate that adults who were raised in homes with extensive interparental
conflict tend to report high levels of problematic attachment, particularly jealousy and fears of abandonment (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998). The way in which attachment insecurity contributes to poor quality relationships for adults raised in high-conflict divorced families has yet to be clarified, however.

As first described by Bowlby (1958), attachment security was viewed as largely resulting from a strong emotional bond between mothers and children. Later on, Bowlby (1969) postulated that children who experience a warm and loving relationship with their mothers develop positive internal working models of self and others that endure throughout life. Having a favorable view of self allows children to take risks and view themselves as worthy of love (Bartholomew, 1990). In contrast, attachment insecurity, which develops from poor parental relationships, is theorized to result in a negative working model, i.e., seeing the self as unlovable and unworthy of love and support from others (Bartholomew, 1990; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). In sum, the kind of internal working model developed in childhood is theorized to have a longstanding effect on how adults feel and behave long after they have left their families of origin (Bowlby, 1979).

Supporting this theory, Hazan and Shaver (1987) found that attachment behaviors tend to endure over time. Furthermore, a person’s style of attachment, or characteristic way of behaving with close others (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), tends to remain constant into adulthood, particularly affecting the person’s romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). In other words, individuals who did not experience a safe, nurturing environment in childhood are likely to develop a negative internal working model of self and others, which is reflected in high attachment insecurity in their adult romantic relationships (Owen & Cox, 1997).

It was reasoned that although a child’s lack of safety with others can be due to a number of factors, safety is likely to be diminished in high-conflict homes. Negligent parenting may also
result in children developing high attachment anxiety, leading them to constantly seek attention, reassurance, and approval from others. Conversely, these children might develop high attachment avoidance, leading them to distance emotionally from others in order to protect themselves from rejection.

The attachment construct has been conceptualized both categorically, as one of several characteristic styles, or dimensionally along two continua of insecurity, *attachment avoidance* and *attachment anxiety* (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Theoretically, people with high attachment avoidance tend to see others as unreliable and untrustworthy, whereas people with high attachment anxiety tend to see themselves as unlovable (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). As a consequence of these views of self and others, people high in attachment avoidance tend to be emotionally unavailable to others in order to avoid conflict and/or rejection (Feeney & Karantzas, 2017; Hazan & Shaver, 1994), whereas people high in attachment anxiety tend to seek intense emotional closeness and are overly fearful of abandonment (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

The advantage of conceptualizing attachment dimensionally is the ability to measure levels of attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety for each individual. It is possible to develop high levels of both attachment anxiety and avoidance (Brennan et al., 1998); indeed, these two attachment dimensions tend to be moderately associated (Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Fraley, 2012; Woodhouse, Dykas, & Cassidy, 2009). Alternately, a person could develop high attachment avoidance with little anxiety or vice versa. For this reason, the present study investigated the two dimensions as joint contributors to relational outcomes, as well as each dimension considered independently of the other.

In addition to attachment theory, the present study was further informed by Bowen’s
(1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) family systems theory, which explains the quality of family functioning over multiple generations, particularly in response to stress. According to this theory, severe problems, particularly in a family that experiences high parental conflict and/or divorce, invariably affect children into adulthood through what Bowen (1978) termed the nuclear family projection process. That is, in response to repeated strife between parents, children may become “fused” with one parent or cut themselves off emotionally from one or both parents.

Fusion and emotional cutoff are opposing aspects of poor differentiation of self, the major construct in family systems theory that explains adults’ levels of functioning as due to the family projection process experienced in childhood (Bowen, 1978). Poor self-differentiation has repeatedly been associated with adults’ psychological distress and dissatisfying romantic relationships (Lampis, 2016; Skowron, 2000; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). Pertinent to the present study, Priest (2015) found that differentiation of self accounted for the association between experiences of family violence and romantic relationship distress. That is, high family violence predicted lower levels of differentiation, which in turn predicted greater relationship distress. In several studies of couple adjustment, high differentiation of self was associated with greater romantic relationship satisfaction (Ferreira, Narciso, Novo, & Pereira, 2014; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998), whereas the emotional cutoff aspect of differentiation was associated with poor relationship adjustment (Banse, 2004; Peleg, 2008; Simpson 1990; Skowron, 2000).

The conceptual similarity between attachment security and high self-differentiation was supported in an investigation of married adults (Timm & Keiley, 2011). More specifically, fusion, or emotional reactivity, is similar to attachment anxiety (Skowron & Dendy, 2004) in that both constructs refer to an overreliance on the thoughts and feelings of others, particularly romantic partners or other close family members. On the other hand, emotional cutoff, or
reactive distancing, is similar to attachment avoidance (Skowron & Dendy, 2004) in that both of these constructs refer to removing oneself (emotionally or literally) from others, particularly when a close relationship is tense or conflictual (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

This reasoning has been supported in several studies that examined family systems and attachment constructs concurrently. Skowron and Dendy (2004), for example, found that attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety were significantly associated with emotional cutoff and emotional reactivity, respectively. Similarly, Lopez (2001) found that attachment anxiety was associated with greater emotional reactivity (i.e., fusion), and associated with less self-other differentiation. Another study (Wei, Vogel, Ku, & Zakalik, 2005) found that the relation between attachment anxiety and psychological and interpersonal distress was mediated by emotional reactivity, whereas the relation between attachment avoidance and distress was mediated by emotional cutoff.

The Present Study

The present study investigated two ways in which attachment insecurity may contribute to the relation between adult romantic relationship satisfaction and childhood experiences of interparental conflict. Specifically, two hypotheses were tested. First, attachment anxiety and avoidance were hypothesized to mediate the relation between the extent of interparental conflict recalled during childhood and participants’ reported romantic relationship satisfaction. Second, attachment anxiety and avoidance were hypothesized to moderate this relation. The two theorized models are depicted in Figures 1 and 2.

Mediation. First, it was reasoned that as a mediator, attachment insecurity (anxiety and avoidance) would at least partially account for the negative association between interparental conflict and relationship satisfaction. Based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) and family
systems theory (Bowen, 1978), the experience of intense interparental conflict in childhood may lead a child to develop a high level of attachment insecurity, which in adulthood is may compromise the person’s ability to sustain a high quality, satisfying romantic relationship.

The available literature supports the hypothesized relations between attachment insecurity and (a) interparental conflict (Cusimano & Riggs, 2013; Platt et al., 2008) as well as (b) romantic relationship satisfaction (Feeney & Noller, 1990; Stackert & Bursik, 2003). In the present study, both attachment avoidance and anxiety were posited as mediators, since the literature provided no guidance for predicting which dimension of attachment insecurity in adult relationships might be an outcome of interparental conflict. Whereas some studies reported that interparental conflict was only associated with attachment anxiety (Hayashi & Strickland, 1998; Rodrigues & Kitzmann, 2007), other studies indicated significant associations with both dimensions of insecurity (e.g., Cusimano & Riggs, 2013). In a sample of college students, for example, the frequency, intensity, and resolution of interparental conflict were associated with both dimensions (Platt et al., 2008). Additionally, in a study of adolescent girls, both attachment avoidance (e.g., avoidance of intimacy) and anxiety (e.g. fears of abandonment) mediated the association between interparental conflict and participants’ expectations of unhappiness in future relationships (Steinberg et al., 2006).

The association between romantic relationship satisfaction and attachment insecurity has also been repeatedly supported. Overall, insecurely attached individuals are less likely to be satisfied in their romantic relationships than individuals who are securely attached (Banse, 2004; Feeney & Noller, 1990). It seems that the two dimensions of attachment insecurity may operate differently, however. In a meta-analytic review (Li & Chan, 2012), although both dimensions of insecurity had strong relations with relationship quality and satisfaction, the association is
generally stronger for avoidance than for anxiety. On the other hand, compared to avoidance, attachment anxiety tends to be associated with more conflictual romantic relationships. There also may be gender differences, since one study reported that attachment anxiety was associated with less relationship satisfaction for both men and women, whereas attachment avoidance was negatively associated with satisfaction only for the men in the sample (Tucker & Anders, 1999).

**Moderation.** Second, it was hypothesized that as a moderator, attachment insecurity would strengthen the negative association between interparental conflict in childhood and romantic relationship satisfaction in adulthood. In contrast to the mediation model, in this model attachment insecurity is not viewed as temporally linked to interparental conflict. It was reasoned that insecurity might not necessarily be due to having been raised in a high-conflict divorced family, but rather may be due to other experiences in childhood, such as parental neglect, or adulthood, such as trauma. Moreover, adults may develop secure attachments to others even in the face of extreme interparental conflict if their bonds with one or both parents are strong and secure or if, as adults, they are able to develop high quality relationships with others in their lives.

It was reasoned that combined with high interparental conflict in divorced families, high attachment insecurity may be a long-term risk factor for adults’ romantic relationships, whereas low levels of attachment insecurity (i.e., greater attachment security) may buffer the influence of childhood interparental conflict on romantic relationship satisfaction in adulthood. Supporting this reasoning, one study (Hare, Miga, & Allen, 2009) found that high attachment insecurity strengthened the association between interparental aggression and participants’ dating aggression. Additionally, El-Sheikh and Elmore-Staton (2004) reported that that a secure bond between father and child buffered the negative effects of interparental conflict on children’s
externalizing behaviors. Since adult children of divorce tend to have longer lasting relationships if they are securely attached (Crowell, Treboux, & Brockmeyer, 2009), it may be that low attachment insecurity disrupts the multigenerational transmission of poor relationship adjustment.

As in the mediation model, it seemed possible that anxiety and avoidance could operate differently in interaction with interparental conflict. Grych and Kinsfogel (2010), for example, found that in adolescents, both dimensions of attachment insecurity moderated the relation between experiences of family aggression and negative dating behaviors, although a gender difference emerged. Whereas high attachment anxiety in boys strengthened the relation between interparental conflict and dating aggression, high avoidance and anxiety in girls strengthened the relation between interparental conflict and abusive dating behaviors.
Chapter 2

Method

Participants

Volunteers residing in the U.S. were recruited to take part in a web-based study on “individuals who experienced parental divorce in childhood.” Inclusion criteria were (a) being 18 years of age or older, (b) having parents who had divorced when the participant was between the ages of 6 and 17, (c) currently being in a romantic relationship for at least 3 months. The last criterion was used to ensure an established romantic relationship (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005). It was reasoned that children whose parents divorced after age 5 were likely aware of their parents’ conflict, and the age limit of 17 was reasoned to restrict the sample to participants who had experienced divorce in childhood. An a priori power analysis was conducted based on effect sizes calculated from previous relevant literature, a familywise error of $\alpha = .025$, and statistical power of .95. To detect a medium effect size to test 2 hypotheses, at least 280 participants were needed.

Among the 806 participants who completed the research materials, 27 omitted more than 5% of the survey data. An additional 99 participants completed the study despite not meeting the inclusion criteria, and 2 participants responded incorrectly to the validity check questions in the survey. Consequently, all of these 128 participants were excluded from the analyses, following recommendations made by Yeatts & Martin (2015), resulting in a final sample of $N = 678$.

Participant characteristics. As shown in Table 1, the average age of participants in the final data set was 34 years ($M = 33.6$, $SD = 10.5$; range 18-71). Among the 678 participants, 319 (47.1%) identified as men and 345 (50.9%) as women. Participants identified as White ($n = 450$, 66.4%), Asian/Asian American ($n = 73$, 10.8%), Black/African American ($n = 51$, 7.5%), Hispanic/Latin American ($n = 36$, 5.3%), Native American/American Indian ($n = 19$, 2.8%), or
biracial/multiracial \((n = 31, 4.6\%)\). While the birth country of most participants was the U.S. \((n = 595, 87.8\%)\), the remaining participants listed birth countries in every continent. In terms of education, most participants had a bachelor’s degree or higher \((n = 342, 50.4\%)\) and an annual household income under $75,000 \((n = 468, 69\%)\).

Most participants were not married \((n = 363, 53.5\%)\). The length of participants’ current relationships was \(M = 5.4\) years, \(Mdn = 3, SD = 6.9\); range 0.3 to 45.4. On average, participants had one child \((SD = 1.3\); range 0-8\). Most participants identified as heterosexual/straight \((n = 546, 80.5\%)\), while 10.5\% \((n = 71)\) identified as bisexual, 3.4\% \((n = 23)\) as gay or lesbian, and 2.4\% \((n = 16)\) as pansexual.

The average age at which participants’ parents had divorced was 11 years \((M = 10.9, SD = 3.4\); range 6-17\). The majority of participants reported that their mother had legal custody of them following divorce \((n = 398, 58.7\%\); 23.7\% \((n = 161)\) reported that their parents had joint custody, and 11.2\% \((n = 76)\) reported that their father was their legal guardian. Furthermore, most participants lived primarily with their mother after the divorce \((n = 474, 69.9\%\); 15\% \((n = 102)\) lived with their fathers.

**Instruments**

**Children’s Perception of Intergenerational Conflict.** The Conflict Properties (CP) scale in the Children’s Perception of Intergenerational Conflict scale (CPIC; Grych et al., 1992; see Appendix A) measured the frequency, intensity, and resolution of intergenerational conflict recalled in childhood. The 48-item CPIC assesses 8 conflict dimensions: frequency, intensity, resolution, content, perceived threat, coping efficacy, self-blame, and triangulation. These dimensions comprise three broader domains of intergenerational conflict: Conflict Properties (19 items;
Frequency, Intensity, and Resolution), Threat (12 items; Perceived Threat and Coping Efficacy), and Self-Blame (9 items; Content and Self-Blame).

Since the present study examined retrospective reports of interparental conflict, the verb tense was changed from present tense to past tense. Retrospective reports on the CPIC have previously been used, with adequate reliability (α = .88, Bickham & Fiese, 1997). CP items include, “I never saw my parents arguing or disagreeing” (Frequency), “My parents have broken or thrown things during an argument” (Intensity), and “When my parents had an argument they usually worked it out” (Resolution) (Bickham & Fiese, 1997; Grych et al., 1992, p. 570).

Items are rated on a 3-point Likert-type scale (0 = true, 1 = sort of or sometimes true, 2 = false) in relation to the experience of interparental conflict in childhood. After 8 items are reverse scored, the raw CP scores are averaged to range from 0 to 2. High CP scores indicate more extensive interparental conflict. Although the entire scale was administered, initially only the total Conflict Properties scale was used in the major analyses, since its three subscales (Frequency, Intensity, and Resolution) were shown to measure a single underlying construct (Grych et al., 1992). Subsequently, the Threat scale was used in a post hoc mediation analysis.

In terms of validity, the CPIC was significantly correlated with parent-rated measures of marital conflict and aggression (Grych et al., 1992), including the O’Leary-Porter Scale (Porter & O’Leary, 1980), r = .30, and the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979), r = .39. The CPIC demonstrated factor invariance among adolescents and emerging adults (Moura, dos Santos, Rocha, & Matos, 2010), and evidenced high two-week test-retest reliability (r = .95; Bickham & Fiese, 1997). The authors of the measure (Grych et al., 1992) reported internal consistency reliabilities, αs = .90 and .89, for the Conflict Properties scale, comparable to values obtained by Moura et al. (2010), α = .92. In the present sample, the internal consistency estimate for CP was
Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised. The Anxiety and Avoidance scales in the 36-item Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (ECR-R; Fraley et al., 2000; see Appendix B) assessed participants’ self-reported levels of each dimension of attachment insecurity. The ECR-R is a revision of the Experiences in Close Relationships scale (ECR; Brennan et al., 1998) using Item Response Theory (Fraley et al., 2000).

Respondents are directed to respond to the ECR-R items with respect to their general experiences with romantic partners. The Anxiety scale measures respondents’ level of security about the availability of romantic partners, with higher scores indicating more anxiety about partners’ availability and responsiveness, as well as a greater fear of abandonment. Sample items include, “I worry that romantic partners won’t care about me as much as I care about them” and “I worry a lot about my relationships.” The Avoidance scale measures comfort depending on or being emotionally intimate with partners, with high scores indicating greater discomfort. Sample items include, “I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners” and “I get uncomfortable when romantic partners want to be very close.” The 18 items on each scale are rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). After several items are reverse keyed, the raw scores are averaged, resulting in scores ranging from 1 – 7 for each attachment dimension.

In terms of construct validity, the ECR-R scales were significantly correlated with the Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991), a different measure of attachment, in a college sample: Anxiety $r = .60$, Avoidance $r = .62$ (Sibley et al., 2005). In another study, Anxiety was associated with feelings of loneliness ($r = .53$) and worry ($r = .39$; Fairchild & Finney, 2006), whereas Avoidance was significantly correlated with avoidance of
touching in the context of romantic relationships \( r = .51 \), and using touch to show affection \( r = -.51 \); Fairchild & Finney, 2006).

Fraley et al. (2000) reported test-retest reliability estimates for the Anxiety and Avoidance scales as \( rs = .94 \) and .95, respectively. Internal consistency reliabilities were reported as \( \alpha = .91 \) (Anxiety) and .95 (Avoidance) by Cusimano and Riggs (2013); .92 (Anxiety) and .93 (Avoidance) by Fairchild and Finney (2006). Previous research has shown that the Anxious and Avoidance scales are moderately correlated, with \( rs \) ranging from .41 to .58 (Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011; Sibley, Fischer, & Liu, 2005; Sibley & Liu, 2004). In the present sample, the internal consistency estimate for the Anxiety scale was \( \alpha = .94 \), while the internal consistency for the Avoidance scale was \( \alpha = .92 \).

**Couples Satisfaction Index-4.** The Couples Satisfaction Index-4 (CSI-4; Funk & Rogge, 2007; see Appendix C) was used to measure participants’ satisfaction with their current romantic relationships. The CSI-4 is a shortened version of the 32-item Couples Satisfaction Index (Funk & Rogge, 2007). Funk and Rogge used Item Response Theory to create the CSI-4, a more parsimonious scale that assesses levels of warmth, happiness, and general satisfaction within a romantic relationship.

One CSI-4 item is rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale, from 0 (extremely unhappy) to 6 (perfect); a second item is rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale, from 0 (not at all true) to 5 (completely true); and the two remaining items are rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale, from 0 (not at all) to 5 (completely). Scores on the 4 items are summed to create a total score that ranges from 0 – 21, with higher scores indicating greater relationship satisfaction.

In terms of convergent validity, in an online community sample the CSI-4 was highly correlated with three other relationship satisfaction measures (Funk and Rogge, 2007): the
Marital Adjustment Test \( (r = .87; \text{Locke & Wallace, 1959}) \), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale \( (r = .88; \text{Spanier, 1976}) \), and the Relationship Assessment Scale \( (r = .94; \text{Hendrick, 1988}) \).

Funk and Rogge reported the CSI-4’s internal consistency reliability as \( \alpha = .94 \). A more recent estimate was \( \alpha = .93 \) (Cui & Fincham, 2010). In the present sample, the internal consistency estimate was \( \alpha = .93 \).

**Screening and demographic questionnaires.** Volunteers were screened for inclusion using four questions related to the inclusion criteria (see Appendix D). At the end of the survey, participants were asked to respond to a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E), with questions about their age, gender, partner’s gender, race/ethnicity, country of origin, household income, education level, sexual orientation, relationship status, length of current romantic relationship, age at which parents divorced, and primary custody and living arrangements following the parents’ divorce.

Additionally, four items used by Bickham and Fiese (1997) were included to assess the clarity of participants’ childhood memories of parental conflict, e.g., “I have clear memories about my parents’ arguments.” Each item was rated on a scale from 1 to 3, with a possible range of 4 to 12. Lower scores indicate clearer memories. Total memory scores were correlated with scores on Conflict Properties scale in a preliminary analysis.

**Procedure**

After approval by the university’s Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk, an online crowdsourcing service that other researchers found to provide valid community data (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Peer, Samat, Brandimarte, & Acquisti, 2015). In order to ensure that roughly equal numbers of men and women were collected for analyses, two gender-specific samples of roughly 350 participants
were collected and then combined for analysis. Since it seemed that a sample of gender-nonconforming participants would likely not be large enough for separate analyses, only men and women were recruited for participation.

Volunteers were recruited to participate in a study on “childhood parental conflict and adult romantic relationships.” Potential participants were directed to psychdata.com to review the informed consent (see Appendix F), in which volunteers were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and confidential, and that they had the right to withdraw at any point.

Volunteers consented to participate by clicking “continue” on the informed consent page, after which they were directed to four screening questions (i.e., age, parental divorce status, relationship status, and U.S. residency status). Participants who did not meet these four inclusion criteria were directed to the end of the study and thanked for their time. Participants received $0.25 for completion of the survey.

The ECR-R and CSI-4 were counterbalanced, followed by the CPIC and demographic questionnaire. The CPIC was administered in the third position to avoid priming.

Several open-ended attention-check questions were added throughout the research materials to identify possible cases of random responding. These items included, “In which direction does the sun rise?” and “What color is the sky?”
Chapter 3

Results

Preliminary Analyses

DFBETA values, a measure of the degree to which an observation influences the regression line, were examined along with Cook’s distance, leverage, and external studentized deleted residuals (SDRES) to determine outliers. No outliers or influential cases were identified based on these criteria.

To assess for order effects, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted. No significant differences were found, Wilks’s $\lambda = .99$, $F(4, 673) = .33$.

All of the assumptions for multiple regression (multicollinearity, linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, and independence of errors) were met. All skewness and kurtosis values were within normal limits.

Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations on the study variables, as well as their intercorrelations, are reported in Table 2. The bivariate correlations indicated a direct relation between Anxiety and Avoidance, $r(676) = .54$, $p < .001$, and inverse relations between each attachment dimension and relationship satisfaction (CSI-4) $rs(676) = -.34$ and -.56, respectively.

As shown in the table, gender was not significantly associated with either attachment dimension or with CSI-4, $rs(664) = -.04$ to .07. For this reason, gender was not included in the tests of the moderation and mediation models.

Total Memory scores, which indicated fairly clear memories ($M = 7.00$, $SD = 1.92$, range 4-12), were significantly correlated with scores on the Conflict Properties scale, $r(676) = -.30$, $p < .001$ and with age at the time of parental divorce, $r(676) = -.20$, $p < .001$, although its
reliability was modest, $\alpha = .49$. This result indicated that participants who were younger at the time of the divorce and recalled more conflict between their parents had clearer memories of the events. Consequently, Memory was included as a potential covariate in the major analyses.

**Comparisons of the Study Variables with Previous Samples**

Comparisons of the mean CP score in the present sample with the means from other samples that completed the measure retrospectively indicated significant differences. Specifically, the present sample’s CP scores were significantly lower ($M = 1.27, SD = 0.44$) than the scores reported by Moura et al. (2010), $M = 2.83, SD = 0.94$, and by Reese-Weber and Hesson-McInnis (2008), $M = 1.79, SD = 0.59$, both $ps < .001$. Additionally, CSI-4 scores in the present sample ($M = 17.81, SD = 4.60$) were significantly lower, $p < .001$, than those reported by Cui et al. (2008) ($M = 20.44, SD = 4.30$), who examined the association between interparental conflict and romantic relationship satisfaction.

**Major Analyses**

The two hypothesized models were tested independently. To ensure maximum statistical power, the familywise error rate was .05, with each model tested at $\alpha_{pc} = .025$.

Memory was not found to be a significant covariate in either the moderation, $b = .09, SE = .08, t = 1.08, 95\%$ BCa CI [-.07, .25] or the mediation, $b = .08, SE = .10, t = .80, 95\%$ BCa CI [-.11, .26] model. For this reason, Memory was eliminated from the subsequent analyses.

**Test of mediation (Model 1).** Due to the inclusion of two mediators, a parallel multiple mediator model (Hayes, 2017) was used. The analysis was conducted with CP scores as the predictor variable, Avoidance and Anxiety scores as two parallel mediators, and CSI-4 scores as the criterion variable. The model was tested in SPSS using Hayes’s (2017) PROCESS macro.
Bootstrapped 95% bias-corrected and accelerated (BCa) confidence intervals with 10,000 resamples were calculated to assess the significance of the indirect effects (Hayes, 2017). In this approach, the difference between the two indirect effects is calculated, and a bootstrap confidence interval for the difference is created.

Neither the overall model, $F(2, 675) = 0.22$, nor the indirect effects of Avoidance $Z = -.65, 95\% \text{ BCa CI } [-.71, .34]$ and Anxiety $Z = -.47, 95\% \text{ BCa CI } [-.12, .02]$, was significant. These results indicated that neither dimension of attachment insecurity mediated the relation between interparental conflict and romantic relationship satisfaction.

It was reasoned that because CP scores did not significantly predict Avoidance or Anxiety, it seemed possible that the development of attachment avoidance could be due to one aspect of interparental conflict, perceived threat. That is, how threatened or unsafe a child feels by the interparental conflict may account for the development of attachment insecurity, resulting in poor relationship outcomes in adulthood.

For this reason, the mediating effect of attachment insecurity was tested in a post-hoc analysis between Threat (a CPIC subscale) and relationship satisfaction. In order to minimize Type I error, bootstrapped 99\% BCa confidence intervals were calculated with 10,000 resamples (Hayes, 2017). In the CPIC, Threat assesses the extent to which participants felt threatened by their parents’ conflict and unable to cope with the experience (Grych et al., 1992). Results of this PROCESS analysis indicated a significant standardized indirect effect for Avoidance, $b = -.06$, BCa CI $[-.13, -.004]$, but not for Anxiety. In other words, only Avoidance partially accounted for the relation between perceptions of threat of the interparental conflict in childhood and romantic relationship satisfaction in adulthood.
Test of moderation (Model 2). Due to the inclusion of two moderators, an additive multiple moderation model was tested (Hayes, 2017), with CP scores as the predictor variable, Avoidance and Anxiety scores as the moderators, and CSI-4 scores as the criterion variable. As with the mediation model, the moderation model was analyzed in SPSS using PROCESS (Hayes, 2017).

Although the overall moderation model was significant, $F(8, 669) = 47.77, p < .001$, the interaction terms were not (CP X Avoidance, $b = -.34, SE = .43, t = -1.02, 95\% $ BCa CI [-1.2, .37]; CP X Anxiety, $b = -.02, SE = .31, t = -.06, 95\% $ BCa CI [-.62, .59]). Due to the moderate, significant correlation. $r(676) = .54, p < .001$, between Anxiety and Avoidance, the moderating effects of each attachment dimension were re-analyzed, with each moderator controlling for the other.

First, the model with Avoidance as the moderator (controlling for Anxiety) indicated a significant overall effect, $F(4, 673) = 90.04, p < .001$. The interaction term accounted for a significant portion of variance in romantic relationship satisfaction, CP X Avoidance $b = -.60, SE = .27, t = -2.2, p > .05, 95\% $ BCa CI [-1.1, -.07]. Second, the moderation test with Anxiety (controlling for Avoidance) was not significant, CP X Anxiety $b = -.17, SE = .15, t = -1.2, 95\% $ BCa CI [-.45, .11].

Due to the nonsignificant correlation between CP and CSI-4, $r(676) = -.04$, the significant moderation effect for Avoidance was closely examined. Specifically, the Johnson-Neyman technique was used to identify the point(s) along the continuous moderators at which the relation between CP and CSI-4 transitioned from nonsignificant to significant at $\alpha = .05$. Results showed that the moderation of CP by Avoidance was in the hypothesized direction at higher levels of Avoidance (see Table 3). Specifically, the conditional effect transitioned to
statistical significance at an Avoidance score of 5.06, $b = -1.36$, $SE = .69$, $t = -1.96$, $p < .05$, 95% BCa CI [-2.72, .00], which was at the 94th percentile of the distribution. In other words, controlling for Anxiety, high Avoidance (above 5.06 on a 7-point scale) significantly strengthened the inverse relation between interparental conflict and romantic relationship satisfaction.
Chapter 4

Discussion

Previous research has not clearly explicated how attachment difficulties play a role in the romantic relationships of adults whose parents divorced during childhood. The present study contributes to this literature by elucidating for whom and how, (i.e., with self-reported attachment avoidance and anxiety as moderators and mediators) the childhood experience of interparental conflict prior to divorce contributes to relationship dissatisfaction in adulthood.

Results suggest that attachment avoidance, rather than attachment anxiety, is the greater risk factor. First, as a moderator, high levels of avoidance (controlling for anxiety), combined with memories of high interparental conflict during childhood, significantly predicted relationship dissatisfaction. In contrast, the moderation analysis with high attachment anxiety (controlling for avoidance) was not significant. Second, while neither attachment dimension significantly mediated the relation between interparental conflict and relationship satisfaction, a post-hoc analysis showed that when feeling threatened and unable to cope (i.e., a consequence of interparental conflict) was the predictor, attachment avoidance (but not attachment anxiety) had a significant indirect effect on relationship satisfaction. This finding is in line with previous research, where attachment avoidance was found to mediate the relation between experiences of childhood abuse and poor adult relationships (McCarthy & Taylor, 1999).

Taken together, these findings suggest that high attachment avoidance is a notable contributor to poor quality relationships among adults whose parents divorced during childhood, whether the avoidance developed as a result of feeling threatened during the parents’ arguments or originated in some other way. Moreover, results of the mediation analyses suggest that a distinction should be made between recalling interparental conflict and feeling threatened by the
experience. In other words, it is not merely the presence of interparental conflict, but rather its impact on the child that seems to account for the development of attachment avoidance in adulthood and its consequent influence on relationship adjustment.

One explanation for the difference between these results and some previous research in which interparental conflict was associated with relationship dissatisfaction (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cui et al., 2008) may be due in part to the narrower criteria for inclusion in the present sample. In the studies by Cui and colleagues, participants included adult children from two-parent as well as divorced families, whereas the present study only sampled adult children whose parents divorced before they reached age 18. Notably, in a later study Cui et al. (2011) found that interparental conflict experienced by adult children of divorce was not associated with relationship commitment, a construct closely related to satisfaction (Cui & Fincham, 2010; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988).

One distinctive aspect of this study was the analysis of each attachment dimension controlling for the other. The finding that attachment avoidance was a uniquely significant moderator is consistent with a meta-analysis (Li & Chan, 2012), in which romantic relationship satisfaction was more strongly linked with attachment avoidance than with attachment anxiety. Consideration of the unique contribution of each attachment insecurity dimension may explain some mixed findings in the literature. Whereas one previous study found that both attachment avoidance and anxiety strengthened associations between experiences of interparental conflict and adolescent girls’ abusive dating behaviors (Grych & Kinsfogel, 2010), another study found that attachment avoidance (but not anxiety) strengthened the association of experiences of child abuse and adults’ symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Busuito, Huth-Bocks, & Puro, 2014).
The bivariate associations between each dimension of attachment and relationship satisfaction were significant in the predicted direction, Anxiety = -.34, Avoidance = -.56. These results are consistent with numerous previous studies in which both avoidance (Li & Chan, 2012; Tucker & Anders, 1999) and anxiety (Birnbaum, 2007; Li & Chan, 2012) were associated with poor romantic relationship satisfaction. These results also support theorizing (Hazan & Shaver, 1994) that individuals’ characteristic attachment insecurity, especially attachment avoidance, is likely to compromise the ability to develop and sustain satisfying romantic relationships in adulthood.

In contrast to previous research (Cusimano & Riggs, 2013; Platt et al., 2008), however, the frequency, intensity, and resolution of interparental conflict occurring during participants’ childhood was not significantly associated with either attachment avoidance or attachment anxiety. This result is in opposition to the widespread notion that exposure to interparental conflict in childhood contributes to poor relationship adjustment in adulthood. Instead, the present results indicate that poor relationship satisfaction may be more closely tied to the development of attachment avoidance, which may result from feeling threatened by interparental conflict.

In addition to attachment theory, the present study was informed by Bowen’s (1978) family systems theory, in which the concept of multigenerational transmission refers to family dysfunction being repeated over generations. This projection process is said to occur when adults who had witnessed significant interparental conflict as children become emotionally cut off or fused with their romantic partners; both responses are considered to reflect dysfunction. The post-hoc results partially support this theoretical assertion in that recall of a highly conflictual
relationship between parents who divorced only contributed to participants’ poor relationship adjustment if they had felt threatened and unable to cope.

The present study was designed to improve on research in this area in two ways. First, in contrast to a categorical measurement of attachment (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1990; Steinberg et al., 2006), which restricts the sample to participants who report being either avoidant or anxious, a dimensional approach allows for the inclusion of participants who reported being both highly anxious and highly avoidant or neither (i.e., highly secure) in the analyses. Reflecting the importance of this methodological distinction, the present results indicated a significant difference in the unique moderating contribution of each attachment dimension.

Second, most studies on relations between interparental conflict, attachment insecurity, and romantic relationship satisfaction were conducted with non-diverse college samples or fairly homogeneous adult samples (Camisasca, Miragoli, Di Blasio, & Grych, 2017; Cui & Fincham, 2010; Cusimano & Riggs, 2013; Hayashi & Strickland, 1998; Platt et al., 2008; Rodrigues & Kitzmann, 2007; Steinberg et al., 2006). In contrast, the present sample was more heterogeneous in terms of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and age, thereby maximizing the generalizability of the study’s findings. On the other hand, the sample only included adult children of divorce, which restricted the external validity of the results while increasing its internal validity.

With respect to age, many studies of interparental conflict only surveyed adolescents and young adults (Bickham & Fiese, 1997; Moura et al., 2010; Reese-Weber & Hesson-McInnis, 2008). Participants in these studies had conflict scores that were significantly higher than those of the present participants, who had an average age of 33.6 (range 18 to 71) and were thus more distant from their childhood experiences. The present participants also reported significantly less
relationship satisfaction than the notably younger participants in Cui et al. (2018), possibly due to the length of the romantic relationships reported by the present sample ($M = 5.4$ years).

**Practical Implications**

In terms of implications for clinical practice, understanding the importance of attachment avoidance in adults from high-conflict divorced families suggests an additional avenue for exploration when working individually with adults and youth whose romantic relationships are in distress. Focusing on developing greater attachment security (e.g., reducing attachment avoidance) may lessen the negative long-lasting impact of interparental conflict, improve a client’s ability to develop satisfying relationships in adulthood, and increase general well being.

Additionally, the present results suggest that therapists who work with couples should directly target attachment avoidance, which is manifested in emotional unavailability and an avoidance of conflict (Feeney & Karantzas, 2017; Hazan & Shaver, 1994), or what Gottman (1994) called *stonewalling* (cf. Fowler & Dillow, 2011). Since emotionally focused couple therapy (Johnson, 2008) uses attachment to conceptualize couples’ interactions, this model of treatment seems particularly suitable for treating clients who demonstrate high levels of attachment avoidance.

Furthermore, the results of this study have implications for prevention. That is, group psychoeducation for adolescents whose parents are separated or divorced could focus on healthy relationship communication, emotion regulation, and attachment security. By working to buffer the effects of interparental conflict on attachment avoidance, children of high-conflict divorce may experience greater relationship satisfaction in adulthood.

**Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**
The use of Mechanical Turk to collect data required all participants needed to have computer access, as well as a reasonable amount of computer literacy, affecting the external validity of the present results. Furthermore, all measures were self-report, introducing mono-method bias and common method variance. Due to the voluntary nature of the study and the resulting convenience sample, self-selection bias may have threatened internal validity. Perhaps individuals who recalled a great deal of conflict between their parents chose not to participate due to the trauma experienced as a result of the conflict.

Additionally, the directions on the CPIC asked participants to report their retrospective perceptions of interparental conflict. It is possible that these reports were not accurate. Future studies should consider including the reports from both self and parents in order to obtain a more accurate picture of interparental conflict. Alternate self-report data can be collected longitudinally, from adolescence to adulthood.

With respect to gender, an attempt was made to recruit roughly equal numbers of men and women participants. The nonsignificant gender difference in satisfaction is consistent with results from several studies (Cui et al., 2008, 2010; Gleeson & Fitzgerald, 2014), whereas the nonsignificant gender differences in attachment avoidance and anxiety are consistent with some (Shi, 2003; Stackert & Bursik, 2003) but not other studies (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan et al., 1998; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Scharfe & Bartholomew, 1994), in which women reported greater attachment anxiety and men reported greater attachment avoidance. Future research on attachment and relationship satisfaction should be extended to non-binary and genderqueer individuals well, to improve our understanding of how attachment insecurity operates in this population.
Furthermore, much of the theorizing for this study involved a consideration of the conceptual similarities between family systems constructs from attachment theory, such as describing attachment anxiety and avoidance as reflective of poor differentiation of self (Bowen, 1978). Future researchers may consider exploring differentiation of self as a mediator of the relation between interparental conflict and romantic relationship satisfaction, since a previous study found that self-differentiation mediated the relation between experiences of family abuse and difficulties in romantic relationships (Priest, 2015). Additionally, future research should include constructs such as emotional cutoff, an aspect of self-differentiation in Bowen theory, which has shown a strong association with attachment avoidance (Skowron & Dendy, 2004).

Future researchers should continue to study these constructs, replicating this study with other, more diverse samples. In doing so, researchers could also examine the unique contribution of each attachment dimension, since the present results and those from some previous studies found that the dimensions operate differently in relation to couple satisfaction.

Ultimately, results of the present study suggest that for adult children of divorce, interparental conflict is particularly harmful for adults who are high in attachment avoidance. Future studies should also examine recall of interparental conflict from childhood in relation to other aspects of couples’ relationships, such as level of commitment, conflict, and distress. With an increased understanding of the experiences of adult children of high-conflict divorce, researchers may turn their attention to testing psychotherapeutic strategies for buffering or attenuating the long-term effects of this adverse childhood experience.
References


Table 1

Participant Characteristics

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<tr>
<td>$100,000 to $149,999</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 to $199,999</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$200,000 or more</td>
<td>2.2</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Some percentages do not total to 100 due to missing data.
Table 2

Descriptive Statistics on the Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. CP</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. CSI-4</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17.81</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ECR-R Anxiety</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.34***</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ECR-R Avoidance</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.56***</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. CP = Conflict Properties from the Children’s Perception of Interparental Conflict scale (Grych et al., 1992); CSI-4 = Couples Satisfaction Index-4 (Funk & Rogge, 2007); ECR-R = Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised (Fraley et al., 2000).

***p < .001.
Table 3

*Conditional Effects of Interparental Conflict on Romantic Relationship Satisfaction at Different Levels of Attachment Avoidance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoidance</th>
<th>%ile</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>50th</td>
<td>-.33</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>-.95</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>[-1.01, .34]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>84th</td>
<td>-1.01</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>-1.82</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>[-2.11, .08]</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>94th</td>
<td>-1.36</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>-1.96</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>[-2.72, .00]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. N = 678. CI = 95%.*
Figure 1. Hypothesized Mediation Model.
Figure 2. Hypothesized Moderation Model.
Appendix A

Children's Perception of Inteparental Conflict Scale
(Grych Seid & Fincham, 1992; Bickham & Fiese, 1997)

In every family there are times when the parents are in conflict. Please respond to the following statements with respect to how you recall your parents’ relationship when you were a child. Specifically, think about the arguments or disagreements you might have witnessed before your parents divorced or separated.

T = TRUE
ST = SORT OF OR SOMETIMES TRUE
F = FALSE

1. T   ST   F I never saw my parents arguing or disagreeing*
2. T   ST   F When my parents had an argument they usually worked it out*
3. T   ST   F My parents often got into arguments about things I did at school
4. T   ST   F When my parents argued I ended up getting involved somehow
5. T   ST   F My parents got really mad when they argued*
6. T   ST   F When my parents argued I could do something to make myself feel better**
7. T   ST   F I got scared when my parents argued**
8. T   ST   F I felt caught in the middle when my parents argued
9. T   ST   F I was not to blame when my parents had arguments
10. T   ST   F They may not have thought I knew it, but my parents argued or disagreed a lot*
11. T   ST   F Even after my parents would stop arguing, they stayed mad at each other*
12. T   ST   F When my parents argued I tried to do something to stop them
13. T   ST   F When my parents had a disagreement they discussed it quietly*
14. T   ST   F I didn't know what to do when my parents had arguments**
15. T   ST   F My parents were often mean to each other even when I was around*
16. T   ST   F When my parents argued I worried about what would happen to me**
17. T   ST   F  I didn't feel like I had to take sides when my parents had a disagreement
18. T   ST   F  It was usually my fault when my parents argued
19. T   ST   F  I often saw or heard my parents arguing*
20. T   ST   F  When my parents disagreed about something, they usually came up with a solution*
21. T   ST   F  My parents’ arguments were usually about me
22. T   ST   F  When my parents had an argument they said mean things to each other*
23. T   ST   F  When my parents argued or disagreed I could usually help make things better**
24. T   ST   F  When my parents argued I was afraid that something bad would happen**
25. T   ST   F  My mom wanted me to be on her side when she and my dad argued
26. T   ST   F  Even if they didn't say it, I knew I was to blame when my parents argued
27. T   ST   F  My parents hardly ever argued*
28. T   ST   F  When my parents argued they usually made up right away*
29. T   ST   F  My parents usually argued or disagreed because of things that I did
30. T   ST   F  I didn't get involved when my parents argued
31. T   ST   F  When my parents had an argument they yelled at each other*
32. T   ST   F  When my parents argued there was nothing I could do to stop them**
33. T   ST   F  When my parents argued I worried that one of them would get hurt**
34. T   ST   F  I felt like I had to take sides when my parents had a disagreement
35. T   ST   F  My parents often nagged and complained about each other around the house*
36. T   ST   F  My parents hardly ever yelled when they had a disagreement*
37. T   ST   F  My parents often got into arguments when I did something wrong
38. T   ST   F  My parents broke or threw things during an argument*
39. T  ST  F  After my parents stopped arguing, they were friendly towards each other*

40. T  ST  F  When my parents argued I was afraid that they would yell at me too**

41. T  ST  F  My parents blamed me when they had arguments

42. T  ST  F  My dad wanted me to be on his side when he and my mom argued

43. T  ST  F  My parents pushed or shoved each other during an argument*

44. T  ST  F  When my parents argued or disagreed there was nothing I could do to make myself feel better**

45. T  ST  F  When my parents argued I worried that they might get divorced**

46. T  ST  F  My parents still acted mean after they had an argument*

47. T  ST  F  Usually it was not my fault when my parents had arguments

48. T  ST  F  When my parents argued they didn't listen to anything I said**

49. T  ST  F  I have a good memory of the time when my parents were still together

50. T  ST  F  I don’t remember much about the time when my parents were still together

51. T  ST  F  I have clear memories of my parents’ arguments

52. T  ST  F  I have few memories of my parents’ arguments

*Items on the Conflict Properties subscale of the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale

**Items on the Threat subscale of the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale
Appendix B

Experiences in Close Relationships – Revised
(Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000)

The statements below concern how you feel in **emotionally intimate relationships**. We are interested in how you **generally** experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a current relationship. Respond to each statement by circling a number to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement.

1. I'm afraid that once a romantic partner gets to know me, he or she won't like who I really am. (ANX)
2. I prefer not to be too close to romantic partners. (AV)
3. My partner really understands me and my needs.* (AV)
4. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like. (ANX)
5. My partner only seems to notice me when I’m angry. (ANX)
6. It makes me mad that I don't get the affection and support I need from my partner. (ANX)
7. It's easy for me to be affectionate with my partner.* (AV)
8. When my partner is out of sight, I worry that he or she might become interested in someone else. (ANX)
9. I feel comfortable depending on romantic partners.* (AV)
10. I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down. (AV)
11. I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners. (AV)
12. I rarely worry about my partner leaving me.* (ANX)
13. I get uncomfortable when a romantic partner wants to be very close. (AV)
14. I do not often worry about being abandoned.* (ANX)
15. I'm afraid that I will lose my partner's love. (ANX)
16. I often worry that my partner doesn't really love me. (ANX)

17. I worry that romantic partners won’t care about me as much as I care about them. (ANX)

18. I find it easy to depend on romantic partners.* (AV)

19. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.* (AV)

20. I worry that I won't measure up to other people. (ANX)

21. I often worry that my partner will not want to stay with me. (ANX)

22. I tell my partner just about everything.* (AV)

23. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.* (AV)

24. It's not difficult for me to get close to my partner.* (AV)

25. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.* (AV)

26. I talk things over with my partner.* (AV)

27. I often wish that my partner's feelings for me were as strong as my feelings for him or her. (ANX)

28. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away. (ANX)

29. Sometimes romantic partners change their feelings about me for no apparent reason. (ANX)

30. I am very comfortable being close to romantic partners.* (AV)

31. I find it relatively easy to get close to my partner.* (AV)

32. I worry a lot about my relationships. (ANX)

33. I don't feel comfortable opening up to romantic partners. (AV)

34. My romantic partner makes me doubt myself. (ANX)

35. I feel comfortable sharing my private thoughts and feelings with my partner.* (AV)

36. When I show my feelings for romantic partners, I'm afraid they will not feel the same about me. (ANX)

*Reverse scored items
Appendix C

**Couples Satisfaction Index-4 (CSI-4; Funk & Rogge, 2007)**

*Directions*: Please select the responses that best describe your current romantic relationship.

1. Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.
   - 0 = Extremely unhappy
   - 1 = Fairly unhappy
   - 2 = A little unhappy
   - 3 = Happy
   - 4 = Very happy
   - 5 = Extremely happy
   - 6 = Perfect

2. I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner
   - 0 = Not at all true
   - 1 = A little true
   - 2 = Somewhat true
   - 3 = Mostly true
   - 4 = Almost completely true
   - 5 = Completely true

3. How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?
   - 0 = Not at all
   - 1 = A little
   - 2 = Somewhat
   - 3 = Mostly
   - 4 = Almost completely
   - 5 = Completely

4. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
   - 0 = Not at all
   - 1 = A little
   - 2 = Somewhat
   - 3 = Mostly
   - 4 = Almost completely
   - 5 = Completely
Appendix D

Screening Questions

1. Are you a resident of the United States?
   Yes
   No

2. Are you 18 years of age or older?
   Yes
   No

3. Did your parents divorce when you were between the ages of 6 to 17?
   Yes
   No

4. Are you currently in a romantic relationship that has lasted at least 3 months?
   Yes
   No
Appendix E

Demographic Questionnaire

Please respond to the following demographic questions.

1. Age:_____

2. Your gender:
   Man
   Woman
   Transgender Man
   Transgender Woman
   Nonbinary/Gender nonconforming
   Other (please specify)________________
   Choose not to answer

3. The gender of your current romantic partner:
   Man
   Woman
   Transgender Man
   Transgender Woman
   Nonbinary/Gender nonconforming
   Other (please specify)________________
   Choose not to answer

4. What is your current relationship status?
   In a romantic relationship, but not married
   Married
   Married, but separated
   Remarried
   Other (please specify)________________
   Choose not to answer

5. How long have you been in your current romantic relationship?
   _____years   _____months

6. Race: Choose all that apply
   Asian/Asian American
   Black/African American
   Hispanic/Latin American
   Native American/American Indian/First Nation
   Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   White/Caucasian, not Latino/a/x
   Other (please specify)________________
   Choose not to answer
7. What is your country of origin (where you were born)_____________
   7a. How long did you live there?_______

8. Which region of the U.S. do you currently live in?
   - Northeast
   - Midwest
   - Southeast
   - Northwest
   - Southwest

9. Sexual orientation:
   - Heterosexual/straight
   - Gay/Lesbian
   - Bisexual
   - Pansexual
   - Other (please specify)_____________________
   - Choose not to answer

10. How old were you when your parents divorced?:
    ________years old

11. Who had legal custody of you following your parents’ divorce?
    - Mother
    - Father
    - Joint custody (both parents)
    - Don’t know
    - Other (please specify)_____________________

12. Who did you live with most often after your parents’ divorce?
    - Mother
    - Father
    - Both parents
    - Other (please specify)____________________

13. How many children do you have?________

14. Your highest education level:
    - Some high school, no diploma
    - High school graduate, diploma or GED
    - Some college credit, no degree
    - Trade/technical/vocational training
    - Associate’s degree
    - Bachelor’s degree
    - Master’s degree
    - Doctoral degree
15. Your approximate household income
   Less than $25,000
   $25,000 to $34,999
   $35,000 to $49,999
   $50,000 to $74,999
   $75,000 to $99,999
   $100,000 to $149,999
   $150,000 to $199,999
   $200,000 or more
   Choose not to answer
Appendix F

**Informed Consent Document**

**Informed Consent:** Experiences of Adults Whose Parents Divorced During Childhood

This is a dissertation research study conducted by Hannah Muetzelfeld, M.Ed. (Counseling Psychology PhD student at the University at Albany/SUNY), conducted under the supervision of Myrna L. Friedlander, PhD (Professor of Counseling Psychology at the University at Albany/State University of New York). This project has been approved by the University at Albany’s Institutional Review Board. Approval of this project only signifies that the procedures adequately protect the rights and welfare of the participants. Please note that absolute confidentiality and anonymity cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access.

Thank you for considering participating in this study. If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to answer questions about your current romantic relationship, your parents’ levels of conflict when you were a child, and some aspects of your personality. I hope to use the knowledge gained from a large sample of adults who experienced parental divorce in childhood.

Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential. It involves completing an online survey that should take you 25-30 minutes to complete. To thank you for taking the time to fill out the survey, you will receive $0.25 via Mechanical Turk. Here is an overview of the study to help you decide if you would like to continue!

To participate in this study, you must be
- 18 years or older,
- have parents who divorced when you were between the ages 6-17,
- be in a romantic relationship that has lasted 3 months or longer, and
- a resident of the United States

Even after you provide your informed consent to participate in this research, you may leave the study at any time; however, only participants who complete the entire questionnaire will be eligible to receive payment through MTurk. I will retain and analyze the information you have provided up until the point you have left the study. Please note that I will be collecting IP addresses to ensure that only participants from the U.S. are completing the questionnaires.

I anticipate that you will experience minimal risk by participating in the study. The main risk of the research is the potential for inadvertent disclosure of personal information. Although you will not receive any personal benefit from filling out this survey, I hope that others may ultimately benefit from the knowledge obtained from this research.
Due to the online nature of this study, the University at Albany’s Institutional Review Board has waived the requirement to sign a consent form. Rather, by clicking on "Continue" below and then proceeding to the survey on the next page, you are giving your consent to participate in this research. You may print this page for your own records. If you do not wish to participate, simply close out of the web browser at this time.

Please contact the principal investigator Hannah Muetzelfeld (hmuetzelfeld@albany.edu) or her faculty advisor, Myrna Friedlander (mfriedlander@albany.edu), if you have any questions regarding the study or consent.

**Your Rights as a Research Participant:** Research at the University Albany involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject or if you wish to report any concerns about the study, you may contact University at Albany Office of Regulatory & Research Compliance at 1-866-857-5459 or hsconcerns@albany.edu.

Please click “continue” to consent to participate in the study.