

**Generational Drama: The Legacy of Parental Conflict on Attachment Style and Conflict**

**Management Skills in Adult Children of Divorce**

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## Abstract

Divorce has been a longstanding topic of research, specifically focusing on the children affected. A modest portion of this research has focused more on these children as they age and enter their own relationships, usually finding maladjustment in their development and attachment (Amato, 2001; Amato, 2010; Amato & Anthony, 2014; Kelly & Emery, 2003). However, the conflict styles of adult children of divorce have been largely unexplored. The current study addressed this disparity by comparing the conflict management skills of adult children of divorce (ACD) and adult children of intact families (non-ACD) to better understand how parental conflict could impact conflict management skills in interpersonal relationships. Results indicated that, while ACD did report greater parental conflict, triangulation in parental conflict was the most detrimental factor in both ACD and non-ACD. Additionally, ACD reported greater anxiety, ambivalence, and negative and active conflict styles. Hierarchical regressions found that ACD who were older at the time of divorce and who experienced higher parental triangulation engaged in more negative active conflict. Future studies and therapeutic interventions should consider the role of triangulation in guiding the adoption of healthier familial interactions and generational cycles of conflict.

*Keywords:* attachment, divorce, conflict management, parental conflict, interpersonal relationships

## **Generational Drama: The Legacy of Parental Conflict on Attachment Style and Conflict Management Skills in Adult Children of Divorce**

Growing up with divorced parents complicates the challenges of navigating childhood and adolescent development, which may eventually impact how individuals establish and maintain their future romantic relationships. Many studies have examined how divorce can both positively (Kelly & Emery, 2003) and negatively (Amato, 2001; Amato, 2010; Amato & Anthony, 2014; Kelly & Emery, 2003) affect the development of adult children of divorce (ACD), but there remains a gap in research on the conflict management styles of ACD. The present study aims to bridge this gap by considering how an ACD's age at the time of divorce and their perception of parental conflict contextualizes the development of their attachment style and conflict management styles within their own romantic relationships. In this online survey study, it is hypothesized that (1) frequent and intense parental conflict will predict anxious and avoidant attachment, (2) frequent and intense parental conflict will predict negative conflict orientations in ACD, and (3) experiencing parental divorce in late adolescence (13-18 years old; Ciccarelli & White, 2016) will exacerbate these effects compared to younger age groups. By exploring the long-term effects of divorce on ACD, this research not only aims to access a better understanding of how divorce may impact the romantic relationships of ACD, but also hopes to reveal valuable insight on the relationship between family systems and adult development that could inform counseling and therapeutic interventions for individuals affected by divorce.

Meta-analyses consistently find that ACD have more adjustment problems than do children of intact families (Amato, 2001; Amato, 2010; Amato & Anthony, 2014; Kelly & Emery, 2003). The short-term and long-term stresses and strains that precede and succeed marital dissolution can predict emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal issues among children

(Amato, 2010), such as increased vulnerability to internalizing, externalizing, and social problems (Harold & Sellers, 2018). However, the event of divorce alone is not the ultimate basis of emotional distress, and it is essential to take the nature of parental conflict into account. Negative consequences of divorce are more common in hostile and high parental conflict (e.g., verbal and physical attacks, avoidance) environments, regardless of marital status (Amato, 2010; Ayoub et al., 1999; Whiteside, 1998).

Alternatively, research finds that low parental conflict amidst and after legal divorce is a protective factor against psychological (Johnston et al., 1989; Kelly & Emery, 2003) and interpersonal dysfunction (Amato, 2001; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Kelly, 1998) in children. The perceived role of low parental conflict is limited to when parents were able to successfully co-parent and cooperate around issues of visitation, routines, and meeting the child's needs (Cox et al., 2021; Camara & Resnick, 1989; Karberg, & Cabrera, 2020). Kelly and Emery (2003) suggest that ACD may even develop adaptive conflict management skills, such as negotiation and compromise because of parental divorce. Children in these environments may have learned to navigate complex family dynamics and develop effective communication and problem-solving as a result of their parents' divorce.

A child's age at the time of divorce can also impact their perception of divorce. Hetherington and Stanley-Hagan (1999) assert that younger children (12 and under) struggle more with emotional regulation, separation anxiety, fear of abandonment, and understanding the divorce. However, Amato (2001) disagrees by claiming that older children (13-18) are more emotionally affected by their parents' divorce than younger children. Individuals whose parents divorced when they were older tended to engage in more risky behaviors, perform worse in school, become parents earlier, drop out at higher rates, and hold more negative life attitudes

than individuals whose parents divorced when they were younger (Aro & Palosaari, 1992; Weaver & Schofield, 2015). It has been suggested that older children experience greater emotional turmoil and loss because they face major changes in their family structure simultaneously with the challenges and transitions of adolescence (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

Considering the nature and timing of parental divorce provides important context when exploring the interpersonal development of ACD, particularly their attachment styles and their approach to conflict in relationships. Children of divorce who frequently witnessed hostile interactions between parents have been found to develop more “jeopardized” attachment styles (Amato, 2010). These children also engaged in more verbally and physically aggressive or avoidant behaviors when confronted with conflict, which negatively affected their relationships with others (Amato, 2010; Camara & Resnick, 1989).

The effects of experiencing parental conflict in childhood impact relationship outcomes of these children into adulthood. ACD are more likely to exhibit insecure attachment styles (Amato, 2001; Nair & Murray, 2005) and delay or avoid marriage (Storksen et al., 2007). Among those who do marry, ACD are six times more likely to divorce than those whose parents are still married (Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Storksen et al., 2007). ACD who reported growing up with consistently hostile parental conflict (i.e., mutual rejection and co-parenting struggle) were likely to report jealousy, fears of abandonment, and relationship problems in their romantic relationships (Amato, 2001). Moreover, parental conflict has been found to be negatively associated with ACD’s marital harmony and positively associated with ACD’s marital discord (Amato, 2001).

The impact of divorce seems to extend beyond childhood into adulthood by affecting how individuals interact with and perceive romantic relationships. While divorce can negatively

impact their emotional and behavioral outcomes, it is also possible that ACD could develop adaptive conflict management skills in response to their parents' divorce. Overall, the variability in ACD's post-divorce adjustment depends on their perception of parental conflict and their age at the time of divorce, and more research is needed to explore how these mechanisms influence the conflict management of ACD. The present study sought to collect data and compare the conflict management skills of ACD and non-ACD to better understand how parental conflict could impact conflict management skills in romantic relationships. Significant differences in attachment and conflict style between ACD and non-ACD were anticipated. Specifically, it was hypothesized:

- (1) Greater frequency and intensity of parental conflict will be associated with anxiety and avoidance in attachment
- (2) Greater frequency and intensity of parental conflict will be associated with negative conflict orientations in ACD
- (3) The potential moderating role of age at the time of parental divorce will be explored on the above effects.

## Method

### Participants

Data for the current study were collected online. Two groups of participants were selected for the study. Group 1 consisted of participants whose parents divorced before the participant was 18. Group 2 consisted of participants whose parents never divorced. Participants were screened through Prolific, a crowdsourcing website for hired volunteers. In order to be eligible, both groups were required to currently be 18-25 years old, in a relationship for at least 4 months, and living in the United States. The screener then assessed participant parental divorce status, and, if applicable, participant age at the time of the divorce. Participants that experienced parental divorce at or after 18 were excluded from data collection, as this study aimed to focus on childhood experiences of parental divorce. In total, 250 participants successfully completed the screener.

The final study consisted of 181 participants, 72.4% of screened participants. Participants were 23 years old on average ( $SD = 2$  years). The majority identified as dating, serious and long-term (70.2%,  $n = 127$ ). Race and ethnic composition, as well as other demographics for the sample, can be found in Table 1. Of the participants, 50.3% ( $N = 91$ ) had divorced parents, and 49.7% ( $N = 90$ ) had parents that were not divorced.

### Procedure

The present study was conducted online at the convenience of the participants. In order to determine if individuals were eligible for the study, they completed the pre-screener and received 10 cents regardless of eligibility. Those who met the eligibility criteria were sent a link via Prolific to complete the full study. Prior to completing any study measure, participants were presented with a consent form that described the purpose of the study and risks/benefits. After

providing consent (consent form can be found in Appendix A), participants were directed to a brief screening process that separated participants by their parental divorce status (i.e., parental divorce status, age at time of parental divorce; see Appendix B). After successful completion of the measures, the study concluded with a debriefing form (see Appendix C). An incentive of \$2 was given to participants for successful completion of the final study.

## **Measures**

### *Parental Conflict*

The Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC) short form (see Appendix D; Holt et al., 2020) was used to examine how emerging adults perceive the conflict between their parents, as it has been found to be previously validated for adults (Tveit et al., 2022). This short form is based on the original work of Grych and colleagues (1992) that has been previously validated for use on late adolescents (Moura et al., 2010). The CPIC short form consisted of 25 items that operated on a 3-point scale consisting of T = *True*, PT = *Partly true*, and F = *False*. The CPIC short form is divided into 5 subscales: frequency, intensity, resolution, content, and triangulation. The highest score possible was 75 and the lowest score possible was 25, with higher scores indicating increasingly negative forms of conflict or appraisal. Alpha values for the CPIC within the current study were excellent ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Alpha values for CPIC subscales within the current study were as follows: frequency = .82, intensity = .89, resolution = .90, child content = .80, triangulation = .84.

### *Experiences in Close Relationships*

The Experiences in Close Relationships Scale—Short Form (ECR-S; see Appendix E; Wei et al., 2007) is a 12-item measure of adult attachment style in romantic relationships that used a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*. This

scale was derived from the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998). Six items were retained for the ECR-S Avoidance subscale and 6 items were retained for the ECR-S Anxiety subscale. Research found that the ECR-S possessed an accessible factor structure, test-retest reliability, internal consistency, and construct validity across 6 samples of undergraduate students (Brennan, et al., 1998). The highest score possible was 84 and the lowest score possible was 12, with higher scores indicating increasingly negative forms of attachment. Alpha values for the ECR within the current study were good ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Alpha values for the Avoidance subscale and Anxiety subscale were .82 and .77, respectively.

#### *The Inventory of Interpersonal Ambivalence-18*

The Inventory of Interpersonal Ambivalence-18 (IIA-18) (see Appendix F; Siefert & Haggerty, 2015) is an 18-item measure used to assess ambivalence about close relationships. The IIA-18 used a 4-point scoring system with 1 = *False* and 4 = *Very true*. On its own, this scale was useful in solely focusing on interpersonal ambivalence. When combined with the ECR, these scales worked together to provide a broader focus on adult attachment status (Siefert & Haggerty, In Prep). The highest score possible was 72 and the lowest score possible was 18, with higher scores indicating increasing ambivalence. Alpha values for the IIA-18 within the current study were excellent ( $\alpha = .95$ ).

#### *Conflict Management Questionnaire*

The Conflict Management Questionnaire (CMQ) (see Appendix G; Hojjat, 2000) was a 17-item measure that was utilized to assess the conflict management techniques used in romantic relationships. These items addressed four conflict management orientations: Positive-Active (POS/ACT), Negative-Active (NEG/ACT), Positive-Passive (POS/PAS), and Negative-Passive (NEG/PAS). Positive conflict indicated more productive and cooperative conflict strategies,

whereas negative conflict demonstrated maladaptive and destructive conflict strategies. An active conflict style indicated greater participation in conflict, whereas a passive conflict style indicated reduced or lack of participation in conflict. Scores were calculated based on a 9-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 9 = *Strongly agree*. Respondents rated the degree to which each statement characterized their conflict management behaviors generally in their present intimate relationship. The highest score possible was 153 and the lowest score possible was 17, with higher scores indicating increasingly negative forms of conflict or appraisal. Alpha values for the CPIC within the current study were excellent ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Alpha values for CMQ subscales within the current study were as follows: POS/ACT = .52, NEG/ACT = .68, POS/PAS = .67, NEG/PAS = .71.

#### *Attention Markers*

There were 3 attention markers to ensure participants thoughtfully completed the final study. Two questions were direct instructions (e.g., “Select slightly true”), and one question was an open-ended prompt (e.g., “Describe parental conflict in three words”). It should be noted that only two participants were excluded from the study based on poor performance on attention check questions.

## Results

Prior to analysis, data were checked for normalcy and outliers. There was no more than 5% of missing data for any participant or measure. Univariate outlier analysis showed that there were several univariate outliers on measures, but this was no more than five outliers for most scales, excluding the avoidance subscale with six outliers. In order to preserve sample size, these outliers were winsorized to fall within three standard deviations of the sample mean. The negative active conflict management subscale was found to have 11 univariate outliers; however, this was not entirely unexpected as the items reflected quite negative interpersonal conflict strategies (e.g., “I may hit my partner physically”). The outliers were retained, given the alignment of their distribution with previous studies (Courtain & Glowacz, 2021; Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013; Straus, 2004), suggesting their inclusion as part of the naturally occurring variability within samples. Missing data within the scales were addressed using a common imputation method: substituting missing values with the mean of the total sample size (Parent, 2013; Raaijmakers, 1999). This approach upheld data integrity and facilitated comprehensive dataset analysis.

Eleven multivariate outliers were identified and subsequently excluded from the sample to ensure statistical accuracy without compromising the integrity of the sample size. Statistical analysis for study variable skewness indicated that the majority of scales and subscales exhibited negligible skewness, with the exception of four subscales: Frequency, Child Content, Avoidance, and NEG/ACT. They were retained as skewness was not entirely unexpected given the outliers described above (Courtain & Glowacz, 2021). Skewness is also common in psychological data and does not necessarily invalidate the subscales' validity (Malgady, 2007; Trafimow et al., 2019). Means and SD for study variables can be found in Table 2.

Associations between demographic variables and study variables were explored and conducted separately for ACD and non-ACD. It should be noted that although data were collected on relationship status of the sample, the breakdown of the distribution of this variable did not allow for statistically meaningful comparisons across group, so the association between relationship status and study variables was not conducted.

No significant correlations were observed between ACD current age and parental conflict ( $r = -.16, p = .16$ ) and between non-ACD current age and parental conflict ( $r = -.08, p = .47$ ). In ACD, there was not a significant correlation between current age and avoidant attachment ( $r = -.03, p = .82$ ), anxious attachment ( $r = .03, p = .78$ ), or ambivalence ( $r = -.06, p = .62$ ). Avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, or ambivalence were also not correlated in non-ACD ( $r = -.13, p = .24$ ;  $r = -.21, p = .07$ ;  $r = -.13, p = .23$ ). Age was negatively related to a NEG/PAS conflict style ( $r = -.293, p < .05$ ) in non-ACD participants. In both groups, POS/PAS was more common in men ( $r = -.30, p < 0.01$ ) and anxiety was more common in women ( $r = .33, p < .01$ ). For non-ACD, there was a significant gender difference on NEG/ACT, in which women engaged in this conflict style more frequently than men ( $r = .30, p < .01$ ).

A series of independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare ACD and non-ACD participants on the study variables. Table 2 provides results as well as descriptive statistics. ACD reported significantly higher parental conflict than non-ACD (see Table 2). ACD reported higher attachment anxiety than non-ACD. ACD also reported higher ambivalence than non-ACD. There was not a significant difference in avoidance. NEG/ACT was reported by ACD more than non-ACD. ACD reported more NEG/PAS than non-ACD. There was not a significant difference in POS/ACT or POS/PAS.

A Pearson bivariate correlation was conducted to test the first hypothesis that greater frequency and intensity of parental conflict will be associated with attachment. The data were analyzed separately for ACD and non-ACD (see Table 3). Surprisingly, frequency and intensity were not associated with attachment variables for ACD; however, there was a significant association in ACD between lack of resolution and anxiety ( $r = .22, p < .05$ ) as well as child content and avoidance ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ). There were also associations between anxiety and triangulation ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ), avoidance and triangulation ( $r = .22, p < .01$ ), and ambivalence and triangulation ( $r = .25, p < .01$ ). For non-ACD, the only significant association was between triangulation and attachment anxiety ( $r = .25, p < 0.05$ ).

A correlation analysis was used to test the second hypothesis (i.e., greater frequency and intensity of parental conflict will be associated with negative conflict orientations in ACD). There was not a significant association between overall parental conflict and conflict styles and frequency and conflict styles (see Table 4). Intensity was moderately and negatively correlated with POS/PAS. Although not part of the original hypothesis, there were significant correlations between resolution and POS/ACT, resolution and NEG/ACT, child content and POS/ACT, child content and NEG/ACT, triangulation and POS/PAS, and triangulation and NEG/PAS.

Finally, in order to test moderation effects for the third hypothesis, interaction terms were created between age at the time of divorce and specific parental conflict characteristics. Then, a series of 13 hierarchical regressions were conducted where the main effects of parental conflict and age at divorce were entered into step 1 and then interaction term was entered in step 2. Results showed no interactions for attachment, but post-hoc testing (Holmbeck, 2002) revealed that age at the time of divorce was related to higher NEG/ACT in ACD who reported high

triangulation ( $B = .76, SE = .04, p < .05$ ). Age at divorce was not significantly related to NEG/ACT at low levels of triangulation ( $B = -.74, SE = .04, p = ns$ ).

## Discussion

Research has shown that ACD tend to obtain less education, have worse psychological wellbeing, lower levels of marital satisfaction, and lower levels of marital commitment (Amato, & Sobolewski, 2001; Barrett & Turner, 2005; Muetzelfeld, 2020; Page, 2023; Whitton et al., 2008). However, less is known about how ACD manage conflict within their own interpersonal relationships. The present study specifically examined the conflict styles and attachment of ACD and non-ACD by assessing factors such as their perception of parental conflict, attachment styles, and conflict management styles. Additionally, the study sought to determine whether age at the time of parental divorce impacts attachment and conflict management styles since prior research has presented conflicting findings on whether younger children or older children of divorce fare worse in achievement, adjustment, and wellbeing (Amato, 2001; Amato, 2010; Frisco et al., 2007).

Overall, the results of the present study partially supported the original hypotheses that focused specifically on the frequency and intensity of parental conflict and their effect on attachment and conflict styles. Rather, this study provided evidence for the significance of other variables, notably triangulation, on attachment and conflict styles. Additionally, ACD reported significantly more intense, frequent, and hostile parental conflict than non-ACD, as expected and indicated by prior research (Kelly, 1998; Noller et al., 2008). The cohesive and successful resolution strategies of non-divorced couples contrasted starkly with divorced couples, who often were unable to reach a mutual understanding and tended to pressure children to take sides. These factors arguably created an atmosphere of division and conflict resolution challenges and explain the greater anxiety and ambivalence in ACD compared to non-ACD (Finkelstein & Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2022). Moreover, ACD engaged in negative conflict styles more frequently,

demonstrating an inclination for active engagement rather than passive avoidance. These conflict styles may stem from their upbringing in environments where discord and tension were more prevalent, leading to a more assertive approach to interpersonal challenges.

The first hypothesis (i.e., link between parental conflict and attachment) was not supported although it was crafted based on prior findings that frequent and intense conflict plays a significant role in attachment (Hoeveler, 1999; Zack, 2016). Instead, results indicated that triangulation was significantly related to attachment. Triangulation refers to the inclusion of children in parental disputes to alleviate tension within the parental relationship, often having the opposite effect (Bowen, 1978). Romantic attachment in adulthood has been linked to childhood attachment to parents (Pascuzzo et al., 2013). Although initially unforeseen, it is unsurprising that triangulation exerts a substantial impact on attachment. Family triangulation has recently been associated with increased anxiety and lower self-esteem in children (Dallos et al., 2016; van Dijk et al., 2022). The present study reveals how triangulation is related to increased tension within families and may negatively impact the interpersonal development of children. This finding emphasizes the need for parents to communicate directly with each other, rather than resorting to such emotionally manipulative tactics.

Furthermore, the results of this study found that the interactions between parental conflict and the subsequent conflict styles adopted by ACDs were more complex than anticipated. Regarding the second hypothesis, frequency of parental conflict was not associated with any conflict styles. However, intensity was found to be negatively correlated with a positive passive conflict style at the bivariate level. ACD were likely to engage in positive active and negative active conflict styles if their parents were unable to constructively resolve conflict. If the ACD felt triangulated in their parents' arguments, they were likely to engage in positive passive and

negative passive conflict styles. As noted above (van Dijk et al., 2022), studies have found that triangulation is associated with lower self-esteem. This lower self-esteem may then manifest itself in a more passive conflict management style as the individual is not confident in their ability to resolve interpersonal conflict. This link will need to be examined further in future research.

The current study found that triangulation has significant implications for child development. Increased age and higher levels of triangulation were associated with a more negative active conflict style; however, no association was found between age, low triangulation, and negative active conflict. Besides increased marital conflict and dissatisfaction, triangulation has been linked to negative affect in children (Dallos et al., 2016; Kerig, 1995). Triangulation can be detrimental to adolescent development, particularly when parents pressure their children to take sides (Etkin et al., 2014). Older children have a significantly reduced developmental clock compared to younger children, so the ability to foster meaningful coping strategies may be limited. This can lead to greater and more active externalization during conflict. These findings emphasize the enduring impact of parental conflict on ACD conflict resolution strategies, highlighting the importance of developmental considerations.

Alternatively, classic models of family therapy (Haley, 1977) have highlighted the need for a power balance among parental figures for family stability. Maintaining power imbalance within relationships outweigh the gains, thus creating tension and a power struggle within the family structure. Since children develop in response to their social environment, it is important to address and modify the maladaptive conflict tactics (i.e., triangulation) of parents to improve the future romantic cognitions and behaviors of their children. By addressing these underlying

problems, therapeutic interventions can guide the adoption of healthier familial interactions, generational cycles, and romantic outcomes.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

One considerable strength of the present study was its comprehensive nature that accounted for anxiety, avoidance, and ambivalence in attachment as well as many different aspects of parental conflict rather than parental conflict overall. Other studies have rarely combined the variables examined in this study (Crowell et al., 2009), let alone examined the moderating role of age at divorce. This is the only study of which I am aware that measured perception of parental conflict with both attachment and ACD conflict styles.

Nonetheless, there are several limitations in the present study. First, the conflict management subscales exhibited low reliability, potentially impacting the interpretation of results related to those dimensions. Future research could explore alternative measures to address this limitation and enhance the validity of findings. Additionally, the extensive statistical tests employed in this study may increase the risk of Type I error. While efforts were made to mitigate this risk through appropriate adjustments and rigorous methodology, it remains a consideration in the interpretation of findings. The cross-sectional nature of data collection eliminates the ability to analyze participants over time and relies on retrospective self-report data. About 68% of participants were white, which reduces applicability of the findings to non-white populations. The study also did not assess the differences between heterosexual couples and LGBTQ+ couples, two family structures that may experience divorce and conflict differently.

### **Conclusion**

Despite its limitations, this study provides crucial information in understanding the impact that parental conflict has on the interpersonal development of children. While the initial

hypotheses concerning the influence of frequency and intensity were only partially supported, this divergence led to an unexpected revelation: triangulation manifested consistently across both ACD and non-ACD. While past studies have explored the adverse consequences of divorce, the revelations of this study stand as equally important in addressing the challenges associated with parental divorce. These findings can provide new insights into ongoing therapeutic interventions, familial interactions, and co-parenting strategies related to divorce and conflict in general. Future research should consider including a larger, more diverse sample, account for diverse family dynamics, and incorporate self-esteem.

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Table 1. *Demographic Variables*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender Identity</b>		
Male	70	42.2
Female	96	57.8
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White	115	67.6
Black	9	5.3
Asian	18	10.6
Mixed	19	11.2
Other	9	5.3
<b>Relationship Status</b>		
Single	7	3.9
Married	26	14.4
Engaged	18	9.9
Dating, serious and long-term	127	70.2
Dating, non-serious	3	1.7
<b>Are your parents divorced?</b>		
Yes	91	50.3
No	90	49.7

Table 2. Mean and SD of Study Variables.

Study Variable	ACD		Non-ACD		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
CPIC	55.08	10.06	44.30	11.59	<b>6.48*</b>
Frequency	12.21	2.69	10.76	3.04	<b>3.32*</b>
Intensity	14.21	3.45	11.67	3.98	<b>4.45*</b>
Resolution	14.39	3.07	10.79	3.72	<b>6.89*</b>
Child Content	5.48	1.88	4.79	1.30	<b>2.76*</b>
Triangulation	8.75	2.48	6.37	2.27	<b>6.53*</b>
Anxiety	26.30	7.11	21.98	6.40	<b>4.17*</b>
Avoidance	14.14	5.64	13.21	5.91	1.05
Ambivalence	42.05	12.64	37.05	12.80	<b>2.56*</b>
POS/ACT	26.93	4.63	27.06	4.50	-.19
POS/PAS	21.06	6.26	19.63	5.79	1.55
NEG/ACT	8.60	4.45	7.19	3.22	<b>2.36*</b>
NEG/PAS	20.83	7.02	18.51	6.68	<b>2.21*</b>

Note. \* =  $p < .05$

Table 3. *Pearson bivariate correlation for CPIC subscales and attachment.*

		Anxiety	Avoidance	Ambivalence
ACD	Frequency	.064	.100	.133
	Intensity	-.004	.100	.130
	Resolution	<b>.224*</b>	-.055	.176
	Child Content	.062	<b>.365**</b>	.147
	Triangulation	<b>.254*</b>	<b>.220*</b>	<b>.246*</b>
Non-ACD	Frequency	.040	.069	.076
	Intensity	.099	-.059	.057
	Resolution	.193	.160	.134
	Child Content	.210	.197	.269
	Triangulation	<b>.247*</b>	.115	.195

*Note.* \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .001$

Table 4. *Pearson bivariate correlation for parental conflict and conflict management styles.*

Study Variable	POS/ACT	POS/PAS	NEG/ACT	NEG/PAS
CPIC	.158	-.059	.020	.026
Frequency	.171	-.025	.051	.017
Intensity	.183	<b>-.217*</b>	-.084	-.123
Resolution	<b>.377**</b>	-.177	<b>-.254*</b>	-.147
Child Content	<b>-.294**</b>	.138	<b>.319**</b>	.155
Triangulation	-.031	<b>.223*</b>	.211	<b>.324**</b>

*Note.* \* =  $p < .05$ , \*\* =  $p < .001$

## Appendix A

### Consent Form

**Title of the Project:** Generational Drama: The Legacy of Parental Conflict on Attachment Style and Conflict Management Skills in Adult Children of Divorce

PI: Brianna Mejia-Hans

Co-investigators: Michelle Leonard, PhD, L.P., Pam McAuslan, PhD

**Invitation to be Part of Research Study:** You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by the University of Michigan – Dearborn. To participate, you must be over the age of 18 years old, can read, write, and understand the English language. Taking part in this research study is voluntary.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to examine how divorce and parental conflict affect the conflict management styles of young adults. This is important because understanding this impact may reveal valuable insight on the relationship between family systems and romantic development that could inform counseling and therapeutic interventions for individuals affected by divorce.

**Important Information:** If you choose to participate, you will be asked to complete an online survey. These questions focus on your experiences of parental conflict in childhood and inquire about your attachment styles and conflict management skills. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes of your time.

**What are the potential benefits of participating in this study?** The benefits of participating in this study include gaining insight about your previous childhood experiences and how they have impacted your current romantic experiences. Additionally, you may gain greater understanding of the process of psychological research methods in general. Taking part in this research project

is completely voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time. After you have completed the study protocol, no further action is required on your part. The study staff will keep your responses anonymous and confidential.

**What are the potential risks of participating in this study?** Although risks of the study are quite minimal, you may still experience some risks related to participation even when the researchers are careful to avoid them. Risks of this research study include slight potential for distress (such as experiencing feelings of anxiety or sadness) when reflecting upon your childhood experiences. The study staff will try to reduce the likelihood that you will experience these risks and will provide you with follow-up resources if necessary at the end of the study.

**How will we plan to protect your information?** We plan to remove any identifying information (e.g., name, telephone number, date of birth, etc.) collected as part of the study.

**What will happen to the information we collect about you after the study is over?** We will keep your research data to use for future research. Because data is collected anonymously and is analyzed in aggregate, your direct information will not be directly or indirectly identifiable. Your data will also be kept secure among the research team and will not be shared. We may share your research data with other investigators without asking for your consent again, but it will not contain information that could directly identify you. In order to thank participants for their time and effort, there will be an incentive of \$2.

**Your participation in this study is voluntary.** Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

**Contact Information for the Study Team and Questions about the Research:** If you have questions about this research, you may contact Brianna Mejia-Hans (email: [hansb@umich.edu](mailto:hansb@umich.edu)) or Dr. Michelle Leonard (email: [mtleon@umich.edu](mailto:mtleon@umich.edu)).

**Your Rights as a Research Participant:** As part of their review, the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences has determined that this study is no more than minimal risk and exempt from on-going IRB oversight. I understand the purpose of the study, risks/benefits, and procedure, and by selecting "Yes" I am providing my consent.

Yes

No

## Appendix B

### Demographic & Parent Information

*Please complete the following questions. Choose the option that corresponds with your response.*

*Thank you!*

**1. Are your biological parents divorced?**

A. Yes

B. No

**2. What was your age at the time of your parents' divorce?\***

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Which most closely describes your current relationship status?**

A. Single

B. Dating, non-serious

C. Dating/Engaged, serious and long-term

D. Married

\*Questions ONLY for ACD

## Appendix C

### Debriefing Form

Thank you for your interest or participation in the Parental Conflict, Attachment Style, and Conflict Management Skills in Adult Children of Divorce research study. We hope that exploring how parental conflict later impacts attachment styles and conflict management skills can inform the proposal and implementation of intervention strategies to prevent negative communication cycles and improve interpersonal relationships.

This provided sheet is a reminder that if you would like to seek additional services, you are more than welcome to contact any of the treatment providers listed below.

#### *Psychological Services:*

US National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

Call 1-800-273-TALK (8255); En Español 1-888-628-9454

Crisis Text Line: Text "HELLO" to 741741

Canada Suicide Prevention

Call 1-833-456-4566

CrisisTextLine: Text message to 45645

#### *Domestic Violence:*

US National Domestic Violence Hotline 1-800-799-7233 (SAFE) or 1-800-787-3224

If you're unable to speak safely, you can log onto [thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org) or text LOVEIS to 22522.

CA Assaulted Women's Helpline

Toll-free: 1-866-863-0511

Toll-free TTY: 1-866-863-7868

Thank you again for your participation!

Brianna Mejia-Hans

University of Michigan-Dearborn

[hansb@umich.edu](mailto:hansb@umich.edu)

## Appendix D

### Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale Short Form

*If your parents don't live together in the same house with you, think about times that they are together when they don't agree OR about times when both of your parents lived in the same house, when you answer these questions. T = True ST = Sort of True F = False (Presented in numerical order with subscale titles deleted)*

#### **Frequency**

- 1.\* I never see my parents arguing or disagreeing.
- 10. They may not think I know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot.
- 20. I often see my parents arguing.
- 29.\* My parents hardly ever argue.
- 37. My parents often nag and complain about each other around the house.

#### **Intensity**

- 5. My parents get really mad when they argue.
- 14.\* When my parents have a disagreement, they discuss it quietly.
- 24. When my parents have an argument, they say mean things to each other.
- 33. When my parents have an argument, they yell a lot.
- 38.\* My parents hardly ever yell when they have a disagreement.
- 40. My parents have broken or thrown things during an argument.

#### **Resolution**

- 2.\* When my parents have an argument, they usually work it out.
- 11. Even after my parents stop arguing, they stay mad at each other.
- 21.\* When my parents disagree about something, they usually come up with a solution.

30.\* When my parents argue, they usually make up right away.

41.\* After my parents stop arguing, they are friendly toward each other.

48. My parents still act mean after they have had an argument.

### **Child Content**

3. My parents often get into arguments about things I do at school.

22. My parents' arguments are usually about something I did.

31. My parents usually argue or disagree because of things that I do.

39. My parents often get into arguments when I do something wrong.

### **Triangulation**

8. I feel caught in the middle when my parents argue.

27. My mom wants me to be on her side when she and my dad argue.

36. I feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement.

44. My dad wants me to be on his side when he and my mom argue.

## Appendix E

### Experiences in Close Relationship Scale--Short Form

*Respond to each statement by circling a number to indicate how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Items are rated on a 7-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.*

- 1.\* It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
3. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
4. I find that my partner(s) don't want to get as close as I would like.
- \*5. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
6. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
7. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
- \*8. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
- \*9. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
10. I get frustrated if romantic partners are not available when I need them.
11. I am nervous when partners get too close to me.
12. I worry that romantic partners won't care about me as much as I care about them.

## Appendix F

### The Inventory of Interpersonal Ambivalence-18

Please rate each statement below based on how true it is for you. Many statements include two points within a single sentence. If either point is completely false for you, you should rate the statement as “False, Not True”. Thus, if any part of the statement is entirely false for you, you should rate the entire statement as “False, Not True”.

		False, Not True	Slightly True	Mainly True	Very True
1	I have a desire to be close to others, but feel negative emotions when others get close to me.	F	ST	MT	VT
2	I want to talk about my feelings with others, but I keep my feelings bottled up inside.	F	ST	MT	VT
3	I would like to form connections with others, but I find myself withdrawing before a connection is made.	F	ST	MT	VT
4	I want to depend on others, but I don't because I fear others will let me down if I rely on them.	F	ST	MT	VT
5	I want to share my struggles with others, but I am afraid sharing will just make things worse.	F	ST	MT	VT
6	I have very mixed feelings about connecting with others.	F	ST	MT	VT
7	On the one hand, I think the people I am close to care about me, but on the other hand, I often doubt it.	F	ST	MT	VT
8	I want to have close relationships; at the same time, the idea of letting others into my life is very scary.	F	ST	MT	VT
9	The idea of an emotionally close relationship is both pleasing and frightening to me.	F	ST	MT	VT
10	I wish I could be closer to those I care about, but I'm too afraid to let others get close to me.	F	ST	MT	VT
11	Close relationships are hard for me, but I know I want close relationships in my life.	F	ST	MT	VT
12	Being emotionally close to others triggers a lot of good and bad feelings all at once.	F	ST	MT	VT
13	Having someone I could share things with is something I'd like, but sharing would be hard for me even if I had the opportunity.	F	ST	MT	VT
14	I believe I need others, but I avoid close relationships because I think people will ultimately let me down.	F	ST	MT	VT
15	I have a lot of strong positive and strong negative feelings about being in close relationships.	F	ST	MT	VT
16	I want to have close relationships, but I find it very hard to trust other people.	F	ST	MT	VT
17	I want to have close relationships with others, but something holds me back from putting myself out there.	F	ST	MT	VT
18	I've generally kept others at a distance despite knowing I want close relationships.	F	ST	MT	VT

## Appendix G

### Conflict Management Questionnaire

*Please rate the following items as 1 = strongly disagree to 9 = strongly agree.*

1. I try to find the source of the problem so that it can be resolved once and for all. **(POS/ACT)**
2. I may push for my point of view until my partner has no choice but to agree. **(NEG/ACT)**
3. I try to negotiate a mutually agreeable solution. **(POS/ACT)**
4. I would suggest consulting a marriage (relationship) counselor if the two of us cannot reach an agreement. **(POS/ACT)**
5. I withdraw from the interaction if I find it too stressful to get involved in an argument with my partner. **(NEG/PAS)**
6. I try to bring up the conflictive issue in the open so that the problem can be discussed and resolved. **(POS/ACT)**
7. I may become cold and distant and keep mostly to myself. **(NEG/PAS)**
8. I prefer to calm the situation down by being affectionate than to deal with the problem head on. **(POS/PAS)**
9. I may threaten my partner with serious negative consequences. **(NEG/ACT)**
10. I just listen calmly to what my partner has to say regarding the topic without voicing my own disagreements, hoping that this will help resolve the problem. **(POS/PAS)**
11. I try to distract myself from dealing with the problem by doing other things, like working longer hours, etc. **(NEG/PAS)**
12. I often give in to my partner's wishes in spite of my strong disagreement because he/she does not leave me any other choice. **(NEG/PAS)**
13. I let my partner have his/her way over trivial everyday disagreements rather than get both of us upset by having an argument. **(POS/PAS)**
14. I try to give the problem some time, as the passage of time may help resolve the conflict. **(POS/PAS)**
15. I may try to get what I want by lying. **(NEG/ACT)**
16. I sometimes remain silent myself, let my partner get all of his/her frustrations out, hoping that this will make him/her feel better and more able to deal with the situation. **(POS/PAS)**
17. I may hit my partner physically. **(NEG/ACT)**