

Parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness in young adulthood

Examining the mediational role of loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce

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PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

Abstract

Parental conflict may cause young adults to feel offended. Since forgiveness is essential to repair interpersonal relationships and effectively cope with the offense it is crucial to investigate the association between parental conflict and divorce specific forgiveness. Thus, the aim of this cross-sectional study was to investigate the association between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. Furthermore, the mediating effects of loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce were investigated. The sample consisted of 197 young adults who took part in the Villa Pinedo Project ($M_{age} = 21.31$ years, $SD = 1.88$, age range: 18 - 26). The association between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness was assessed using partial correlation. A regression analysis, using the bootstrapping method, was performed to examine indirect effects. Results suggested that more parental conflict intensity is associated with less divorce specific forgiveness. Furthermore, painful feelings about the divorce, but not loyalty conflict, functioned as a mediator in the relationship between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. Taken together, the results provide evidence for the suggestion that parental conflict intensity is directly associated with divorce specific forgiveness and indirectly related to divorce specific forgiveness through painful feelings about the divorce.

Keywords: parental conflict; divorce specific forgiveness; loyalty conflict; painful feelings about the divorce; young adults

Samenvatting

Ouderlijk conflict kan zorgen voor een gevoel van transgressie voor kinderen. Vergeving is van groot belang voor het repareren van interpersoonlijke relaties en het verwerken van de transgressie. Daarom is het essentieel om de associatie tussen ouderlijk conflict en scheidingsspecifieke vergevingsgezindheid te onderzoeken. Het doel van deze cross-sectionele studie was daarom het onderzoeken van de associatie tussen ouderlijke conflictintensiteit en scheidingsspecifieke vergevingsgezindheid. Daarnaast zijn ook de mediërende effecten van loyaliteitsconflicten en pijnlijke gevoelens over de scheiding geanalyseerd. De steekproef bestond uit 197 jongvolwassenen die deelnamen aan het Villa Pinedo Project ($M_{leeftijd} = 21.31$ jaar, $SD = 1.88$, leeftijd range: 18 - 26). De associatie tussen ouderlijke conflictintensiteit en scheidingsspecifieke vergevingsgezindheid is getest met een partiële correlatie. Een regressieanalyse, waarbij de bootstrapping methode is gebruikt, is uitgevoerd om indirecte effecten te testen. Resultaten suggereren dat een hogere ouderlijke conflictintensiteit geassocieerd is met minder scheidingsspecifieke vergevingsgezindheid. Daarnaast functioneerde pijnlijke gevoelens over de scheiding, maar niet loyaliteitsconflict, als een mediator in de relatie tussen ouderlijke conflictintensiteit en scheidingsspecifieke vergevingsgezindheid. Concluderend, laten de resultaten bewijs zien voor de suggestie dat ouderlijke conflictintensiteit direct geassocieerd is aan scheidingsspecifieke vergevingsgezindheid en indirect gerelateerd is aan scheidingsspecifieke vergevingsgezindheid via pijnlijke gevoelens over de scheiding.

Trefwoorden: Ouderlijk conflict; vergeving; loyaliteitsconflict; pijnlijke gevoelens over de scheiding; jongvolwassenen

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness is a process by which victims reduce negative feelings towards an offender who committed an offense towards them (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk & Kluwer, 2003). Forgiveness after an offense plays an important role in the process of repairing interpersonal relationships after conflict and offenses have taken place (Karremans & Van Lange, 2008). Offenses like lying, breaking promises and hurting another individual are often at play when two partners divorce (Amato, 2010; Amato & Previti, 2003), which may implicate that forgiveness plays an important role in the context of divorce.

Even though the associations between divorce, conflict and forgiveness among ex-partners have been researched (Kluwer, 2016; Visser et al., 2017), forgiveness by children of divorce in the context of parental conflict has not been studied systematically. Freedman and Knupp (2003) concluded that an educational intervention among ten adolescents, which focused on forgiveness, improved adolescent adjustment to parental divorce. However, their research did not take into account that parental conflict may still be at play after parents separated (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Similar to feelings of offenses between ex-partners, children of divorced parents may also feel offended by parental conflict (Freedman & Knupp, 2003; Kelly, 2003). Therefore, if children feel offended, they need to forgive their parents to effectively cope with their hurt feelings. In the remainder of this study, we will refer to forgiveness of their parents by children in the context of divorce as *divorce-specific forgiveness* (DSF).

Previous research among adolescents and young adults concluded that parental conflict was associated with being close to neither of the parents and a lesser relationship quality (Riggio, 2004; Sobolowski & Amato, 2007). Even though becoming detached from parents is normal to some extent among adolescents and young adults, a close and high-quality relationship between parent and young adult is still crucial for the development of the young adult (Arnett, 2000; Steinberg, 2001). Since forgiveness is essential to repair interpersonal relationships and effectively cope with the offense (Karremans & Van Lange, 2008), it is crucial to investigate the association between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness.

Hereafter we will describe relevant literature on the relationship between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. Furthermore, possible mechanisms through which parental conflict intensity may exert influence on divorce specific forgiveness will be discussed.

The relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness

Parental conflict is associated with several negative outcomes. For example, research on parental conflict intensity shows associations with maladjustment, antisocial behavior, lower life satisfaction and less coping ability (Bing, Nelson & Wesolowski, 2009; Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Feinberg & Kan, 2008; Lamela, Figueiredo, Bastos & Feinberg, 2016). Research on the relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness has not been performed yet. However, several studies may provide indirect evidence for the suggestion that parental conflict intensity might have negative consequences with regard to divorce specific forgiveness and will be discussed hereafter.

Parental conflict intensity is considered to be an important factor in family functioning after parental divorce (Lamela et al., 2016). For example, Sobolowski and Amato (2007) conclude that high parental conflict is associated with being close to neither of the parents. Furthermore, Riggio (2004) found that parental conflict is negatively associated with the quality of the relationship between the parent and child. This implicates that more parental conflict results in a lesser quality relationship. Also, a higher degree of exposure to parental conflict is related to more negative affect towards parents (Lamela et al., 2016).

The findings that parental conflict is associated with the quality of parent – child relationship, less family functioning, negative affect towards parents and being close to neither of the parents are relevant since these factors are considered important in predicting the willingness to forgive in research. For example, Paleari, Regalia and Fincham (2002) performed research on the willingness to forgive in parent – adolescent relationships. Based on their empirical model, they concluded that the willingness of the adolescent to forgive parents is influenced by the degree of relationship positivity. Relationship positivity in this context reflected the amount of positive affect of adolescents towards their parents. Results indicated that less positive affect towards parents was associated with less willingness to forgive. Furthermore, Van der Wal, Karremans and Cillessen (2017) concluded that people are more likely to forgive when they perceive the relationship as highly valuable. These findings on likeliness to forgive may implicate that adolescents are less likely to forgive their parents due to more negative affect and a lack of closeness if they experience more parental conflict.

Thus, these findings provide indirect evidence for the suggestion that more parental conflict intensity is associated with less divorce specific forgiveness. However, the question remains how conflict between parents may hamper forgiveness from children whose parents are divorced. Here, we will consider two mechanisms, namely loyalty feelings and painful

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

feelings about divorce, through which parental conflict intensity may exert influence on divorce specific forgiveness.

The relation between loyalty conflict and divorce specific forgiveness

Due to involvement in the divorce process or pressure by the parents to take sides and show more affection to one parent than the other parent, a feeling of distress can arise in the young adult (Amato & Afifi, 2006). The negative feelings due to involvement in the divorce or pressure by parents to take sides will be referred to as a loyalty conflict (Amato & Afifi, 2006). These feelings of loyalty conflict may for example be present when parents use children to deliver messages to the other parent in conflict situations (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Furthermore, Verrocchio, Marchetti and Fulcheri (2015) reported that parents may use various tactics such as bad storytelling to gain more affect than the other parent. The experience of loyalty conflicts is associated with depression, lower subjective well-being and both internalizing and externalizing problems (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Baker & Brassard, 2013; Mueller, Rosenfield, Jouriles & McDonald, 2013).

Loyalty conflict as a mediator in the relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness has not been researched yet. However, several studies provide indirect evidence for the suggestion that loyalty conflict may be an important mechanism. For example, Amato and Afifi (2006) concluded that high parental conflict, for both children of marriage and children of divorce, resulted in feeling trapped and being caught in between parents more often than children in a low parental conflict situation. Furthermore, Baker and Eichler (2014) reported that adolescents who classified their divorced parents' relationship as bad experienced more loyalty conflicts. The experience of loyalty conflicts is negatively associated with relationship quality with both mother and father, indicating that the relationship between parent and child is less for children and adolescents who experience more loyalty conflicts (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Since relationship value and negative affect towards parents are predictors of the willingness to forgive, this may imply that experiencing loyalty conflicts decreases the willingness to forgive (Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2002; Van der Wal, Karremans & Cillessen, 2017). Thus, these findings provide indirect evidence for our expectation that loyalty conflict mediates the relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness.

The relation between painful feelings about the divorce and divorce specific forgiveness

Feelings of psychological distress as a consequence of parental divorce are known as painful feelings about the divorce (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000). Examples of these feelings of psychological distress are sadness and anger since the parents are separated, in conflict or not living together. The experience of painful feelings about the divorce is associated with less perceived health and less social adjustment among young adults (Fabricius & Luecken, 2007; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004).

To our knowledge, the relation between painful feelings about the divorce and divorce specific forgiveness has not been researched yet. However, relevant research may provide indirect evidence for the suggestion that painful feelings about the divorce functions as a mediator through which parental conflict intensity can exert influence on divorce specific forgiveness. For example, Hannum and Dvorak (2004) reported that the experience of parental conflict was associated with psychological distress. These findings were replicated by Amato and Afifi (2006) and Fabricius and Luecken (2007), since these studies also reported that more parental conflict was associated with more psychological distress. In turn, psychological distress was negatively associated with attachment to both parents, which indicates that young adults were less attached to both parents if parents had more conflicts (Hannum & Dvorak, 2004). The result that psychological distress is associated with being less attached to both parents may implicate that painful feelings about the divorce results in less willingness to forgive, since negative affect towards parents and relationship value are predictors of willingness to forgive (Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2002; Van der Wal, Karremans & Cillessen, 2017). Thus, these findings provide indirect evidence for our expectations that painful feelings about the divorce is a mediator through which parental conflict intensity exerts influence on divorce specific forgiveness

Current study

The main goal of the current study is to examine the association between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. Furthermore, the current study investigates the possible mechanisms through which parental conflict intensity may influence divorce specific forgiveness. The mechanisms that will be examined in the current study are loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce. Thus, the central question in the current study is: *‘What is the effect of parental conflict intensity on divorce specific forgiveness among young adults? And do loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce mediate this relationship?’*

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

The current study used a cross-sectional design and data of the Villa Pinedo Project to examine the relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. The Villa Pinedo project is a project that aims to help children and young adults with parents that are divorced. Young adults become a buddy for a younger individual who also has experienced their parents' divorce. The role of the buddy is then to help the younger individual with difficulties that are present due to the parental divorce.

The current study is the first to examine the relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness among young adults. However, based on indirect empirical evidence, the following hypotheses are drawn. First, we hypothesize that more parental conflict intensity is associated with less divorce specific forgiveness. Second, we hypothesize that loyalty conflict functions as a mediator in the relationship between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. Thus, more parental conflict leads to more loyalty conflict which in turn leads to less divorce specific forgiveness. Third, we hypothesize that painful feelings about the divorce functions as a mediator in the relationship between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. Thus, more parental conflict is associated with more painful feelings about the divorce, which in turn leads to less divorce specific forgiveness.

The research hypotheses are depicted in the following research model:

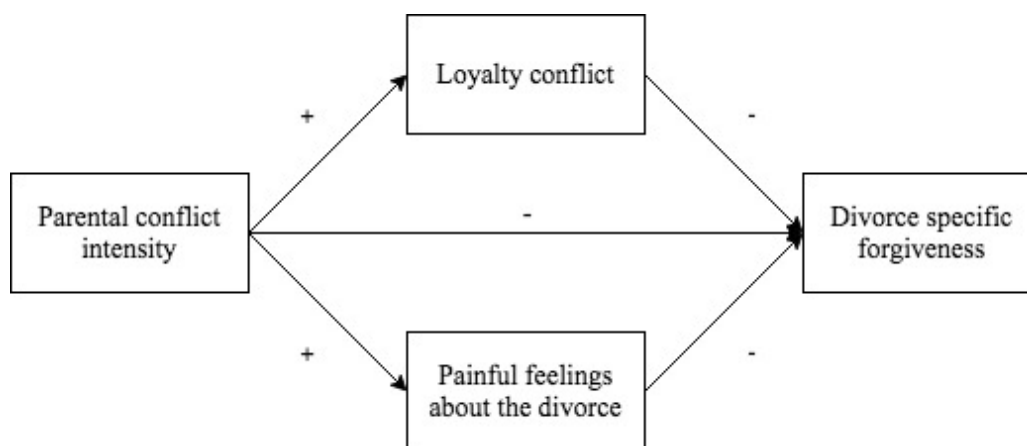


Figure 1. The proposed research model for the current study

In the current study, we will explore possible influencing factors which we may need to control for during our analyses. Since age and gender are associated with emotional reactivity and sensitivity, these factors will be examined (Bloise & Johnson, 2007; Dahl & Gunnar, 2009; Mestre, Samper, Frias & Tur, 2009). Furthermore, research indicates that time and living arrangements after divorce are associated with various outcomes for the child of

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

divorce (Averdijk, Eisner, Malti & Ribeaud, 2012; Kelly, 2007). Also, the relationship and contact that children have with both parents has been associated with the adaptation of the child and quality of family contact after divorce (Ahrns, 2007). Thus, the influence of age, gender, living situation, time after divorce and continuous contact with parents will be explored.

Methods

Sample and procedures

The current study is part of an ongoing project that examines associations between engagement in the buddy volunteer project (Villa Pinedo) and psychosocial wellbeing. The Villa Pinedo project focusses on adolescents and young adults with divorced parents. The Villa Pinedo project therefore consists of young adults in the Netherlands of whom parents are divorced.

Participants of the current study were 197 young adults (mean age = 21.31 years, $SD = 1.88$, age range: 18 - 26). Of the 197 participants who participated in the study, 18 (9.1%) of the individuals described themselves as a boy (mean age = 22.33 years, $SD = 1.65$, age range: 19 - 25) while the other 178 (90,9%) young adults described themselves as girls (mean age = 21.21 years, $SD = 1.86$, age range: 18 - 26) and one individual did not answer the question.

Participants were recruited after their admission as a buddy to the Villa Pinedo project and asked to fill in the survey. An online questionnaire was sent to the participants after which they had to give their informed consent. Participants were therefore able to fill-in the questionnaire in their own time and in a surrounding of their choice. In the questionnaire, various questions were asked with regard to demographic variables such as age, gender and living situation. Furthermore, multiple topics such as divorce specific factors and well-being of the participants were measured. No rewards were provided for participation in the study. Ethical approval was granted to conduct the Villa Pinedo study by the ethical commission of the faculty of social sciences at Utrecht University. In the next section, only the variables that are relevant for the current study will be described.

Measures

Demographic factors. Age of respondents was assessed with the question: *'What is your date of birth?'*. Various questions were used to gather information on family composition. The following questions were used in the current study: *'Does your mother have a new relationship?'* and *'Does your father have a new relationship?'*. On both questions on family composition, the following answer options were provided: *'No, my mother/father does*

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

not have a new relationship, *Yes, and they live together*, *Yes, but they don't live together*, *I don't know*. Divorce specific information was also assessed and the following question was used in the questionnaire: *How long has it been since your parents have been divorced?*

Parental conflict intensity. Parental conflict intensity was assessed through six statements about parental conflict intensity in the questionnaire (Pinedo & Vollinga, 2013). The following statements were used: *Do your parents argue with each other when you're present?*, *Does your mother say nasty things about your father?*, *Does your father say nasty things about your mother?*, *Can your parents both be present at a party?*, *Can your parents just look each other in the eyes?* and *Do you feel relaxed when your parents are together?*. Participants were asked to rate their answer on a six-point scale which consisted of 1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *regularly*, 4 = *often*, 5 = *always* or 6 = *not applicable (n/a)*. The option of '*n/a*' was coded as a missing. Since the fourth, fifth and sixth statement were stated positively, these statements were reversed so that a high score reflected a high level of parental conflict. Scores on the six items were averaged to construct a parental conflict intensity scale. A reliability analysis was performed to assess the reliability of the new construct, which resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .84.

Loyalty conflict. Loyalty conflict was assessed through six statements (Pinedo & Vollinga, 2013). The following statements were used: *Do your parents ask you to think along about important decisions, such as where you are during holidays or at whom you would rather sleep?*, *Are important decisions made by both of your parents?*, *Do you have the feeling that you have to choose between your father and mother?*, *Do you have the freedom to love your mother as much as your father?*, *I feel like I'm stuck between my parents* and *When my parents argue, I feel forced to choose a side*. Participants were asked to rate their answer on a six-point scale which consisted of 1 = *never*, 2 = *sometimes*, 3 = *regularly*, 4 = *often*, 5 = *always* or 6 = *not applicable (n/a)*. The option of '*n/a*' was coded as a missing. The first, second and fourth statement were reversed so that a high score would indicate a high level of loyalty conflict. The coding of '*n/a*' resulted in 107 missings for item 1. The large number of missings for item 1, which assessed involvement in decisions related to holidays and sleeping at the house of both parents, may be caused by the fact that a large proportion of the sample does not live at home anymore. Scores on the six items were averaged to construct a loyalty conflict scale. A reliability analysis was performed to assess the reliability of the new construct, which resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .73.

Painful feelings about the divorce. Painful feelings about the divorce was assessed using the Painful Feelings About Divorce (PFAD) Scale (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000).

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

The PFAD scale consisted of the six following items: *'Sometimes I wonder whether I could have prevented my parents' divorce'*, *'I wish I did more to keep my parents together'*, *'Many of the problems of my parents were caused by me'*, *'If I were easier as a child, my parents might not have separated'*, *'Sometimes I'm mad at my mom because of the divorce'* and *'Sometimes I'm mad at my father because of the divorce'*. Participants were asked to rate their answer on a seven-point Likert scale which ranged from *strongly disagree* (= 1) to *strongly agree* (= 7). Scores on the seven items were averaged to construct the painful feelings about the divorce scale. A reliability analysis was performed to assess the reliability of the new construct, which resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .68.

Divorce specific forgiveness. Divorce specific forgiveness was assessed using the following four items: *'At this moment, are you mad at your parents because they divorced?'*, *'At this moment, are you sad because your parents divorced?'*, *'At this moment, do you forgive your parents for the divorce?'* and *'At this moment, how satisfied are you with the way your parents are handling/have handled the divorce?'*. Items 1 and 2 were reversed so that a high score reflected more willingness to forgive. Participants were asked to rate their answer on a 5-point Likert scale which ranged from *'not angry at all'* (= 1) to *'very angry'* (= 5) for item 1, *'very sad'* (= 1) to *'not sad at all'* (= 5) for item 2 and from *'not at all'* (= 1) to *'very much'* (= 5) for items 3 and 4. Scores on the four items were averaged to a divorce specific forgiveness scale. A reliability analysis was performed to assess the reliability of the new construct, which resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .54.

In light of the low reliability, we conducted several additional analyses. The means of item 1 ($M = 4.57, SD = .74$), item 2 ($M = 4.23, SD = .98$) and item 3 ($M = 4.22, SD = 1.12$) differed from item 4 ($M = 2.93, SD = 1.46$) on first sight. Furthermore, a factor analysis including the four items revealed that Cronbach's alpha would increase to .61 if item 4 was deleted. Also, the inter-item correlation matrix revealed that the highest correlation of item 4 with the other three items was .26 (for item 3), which is rather low. These findings might be caused by the fact that item 1, 2 and 3 which reflect anger, sadness and forgiveness, describe an affective state while being satisfied (item 4) might be more related to practical issues. To solve this issue, item 1, 2 and 3 were separated into the construct affective divorce specific forgiveness, while item 4 was transformed into the construct satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness. For affective divorce specific forgiveness, the scores on the three items were averaged to construct a new scale. A reliability analysis then was performed and this resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .61, which can be classified as a low, but acceptable reliability of the constructed scale.

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

Analytical plan

All analyses were performed using SPSS version 24.0. First, descriptive and correlation analyses were performed. The descriptive analysis described the means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum for research variables and potential control variables. The correlation analysis consisted of all the variables in the research model (parental conflict intensity, loyalty conflict, painful feelings about the divorce, affective divorce specific forgiveness and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness) and the continuous potential control variables that were identified (age and time after divorce). To test for categorical potential control variables (gender, continuous contact with parents and living situation), a one-way ANOVA test was performed. Potential control variables had to be significantly related to at least one of the research variables to be included as a control variable.

To test whether parental conflict intensity associated with affective divorce specific forgiveness and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness (hypothesis 1), a partial correlation test was performed. The dependent variables were both affective and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness and parental conflict intensity was the independent variable.

To test whether loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce functioned as a mediator in the relation between parental conflict intensity and both affective and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness (hypothesis 2 and 3), a regression was performed (PROCESS, model 4). The decision was made to use a bootstrapping procedure, since this method is the most powerful method in testing for indirect effects when using smaller sample sizes (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). An indirect effect was considered to be significant if its 95% bootstrap confidence interval from 5000 bootstrap samples did not include zero.

Results

Descriptive analyses

A summary of the descriptives (means, *SDs*, minimum and maximum) for the research variables in this study are provided in Table 1. The mean score for affective divorce specific forgiveness was 4.34 (*SD* = .71, range: 2-5). Furthermore, the mean score for satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness was 2.93 (*SD* = 1.46, range 1-5). For parental conflict intensity, four missings were reported. Also, twelve missings were noted for painful feelings about the divorce. Table 2 provides a summary of the descriptives (means, *SDs*, minimum and maximum) for the potential control variables. Aside from one missing value for age, no missings were reported.

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum for variables in the research model

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min.</i>	<i>Max.</i>
Parental conflict intensity	193	2.72	1.02	1	5
Loyalty conflict	197	1.74	.81	1	5.33
Painful feelings about divorce	185	3.89	1.02	1	5
Affective divorce specific forgiveness	197	4.34	.71	2	5
Satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness	197	2.93	1.46	1	5

Table 2

Means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum for potential control variables

	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Age	196	21.31	1.87	18	26
Gender (1 = male)	197	1.91	.29	1	2
Time after divorce (in months)	197	14.12	19.61	0	205
Experience(d) period without contact with parents	197	2.28	.66	1	3
Living situation	197	4.07	1.33	2	6

Table 3 provides information on correlations among the research variables and continuous potential control variables. Parental conflict intensity was correlated to loyalty conflict ($r = -.52, p < .01$), painful feelings about the divorce ($r = .27, p < .01$), affective divorce specific forgiveness ($r = -.17, p < .05$) and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness ($r = -.44, p < .01$). Furthermore, loyalty conflict was correlated to both affective divorce specific forgiveness ($r = .38, p < .01$) and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness ($r = .36, p < .01$). Also, painful feelings about the divorce was correlated with affective divorce specific forgiveness ($r = -.62, p < .01$) and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness ($r = -.29, p < .01$). Table 4 provides a summary of the results of the one-way ANOVA that was performed to identify which categorical potential control variables should be included.

As can be seen in Table 3 and 4, age was significantly related to painful feelings about the divorce ($r = .16, p < .05$). Furthermore, gender was significantly associated with loyalty conflict ($F(1,183) = 4.73, p < .05$). Also, continuous contact with both parents was significantly associated with parental conflict intensity ($F(2,190) = 17.37, p < .01$), loyalty conflict ($F(2,182) = 4.88, p < .01$), and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness ($F(2,194) = 6.13, p < .01$). Thus, age, gender and continuous contact with both parents were included as control variables in the analyses.

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

Table 3

Pearson correlations between research variables included in the research model and continuous potential control variables (age, time after divorce)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Parental conflict intensity	-						
2. Loyalty conflict	-.52**	-					
3. Painful feelings about divorce	.27**	-.39**	-				
4. Affective divorce specific forgiveness	-.17*	.38**	-.62**	-			
5. Satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness	-.44**	.36**	-.29**	.27**	-		
6. Age	-.01	-.03	.16*	-.08	.04	-	
7. Time after divorce	.07	.01	-.07	-.03	-.03	.04	-

Note * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 4

F-values for potential categorical control variables on research variables included in the research model

	Parental conflict intensity	Loyalty conflict	Painful feelings about divorce	Affective divorce specific forgiveness	Satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness
Gender	.64	4.73*	.57	2.11	1.10
Continuous contact with both parents	17.37**	4.88**	1.68	.03	6.13**
Living situation	1.06	1.56	.35	.78	.51

Note * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Affective divorce specific forgiveness

To examine whether parental conflict intensity was associated with affective divorce specific forgiveness (research question 1), a partial correlation analysis was performed. After controlling for age, gender and continuous contact with both parents, we found a significant negative association between parental conflict and affective divorce specific forgiveness ($r = -.19, p < .01$). The negative association implied that more parental conflict is associated with less affective divorce specific forgiveness.

To test whether loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce mediated the relationship between parental conflict intensity and affective divorce specific forgiveness (research question 2 and 3), a regression analysis was performed (PROCESS, model 4). Age, gender and continuous contact with both parents were included as control variables in the analysis. Results of the regression analysis were graphically represented in Figure 2. The total

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

effect of parental conflict intensity on affective divorce specific forgiveness, thus including the direct and indirect effect, was significant ($b = -.16, SE = .06, t = -2.9, p < .01$). The total indirect effect of parental conflict intensity on affective divorce specific forgiveness through loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce together was also significant ($b = -.18, SE = .05, BCa CI [-.27, -.09]$). Furthermore, the indirect effect of parental conflict intensity on affective divorce specific forgiveness through loyalty conflict was not significant ($b = -.05, SE = .03, BCa CI [-.12, .00]$). The indirect effect of parental conflict intensity on affective divorce specific forgiveness through painful feelings about the divorce was significant ($b = -.13, SE = .03, BCa CI [-.20, -.07]$). Taken together, we found that painful feelings about the divorce, but not loyalty conflict, mediated the relation between parental conflict intensity and affective divorce specific forgiveness.

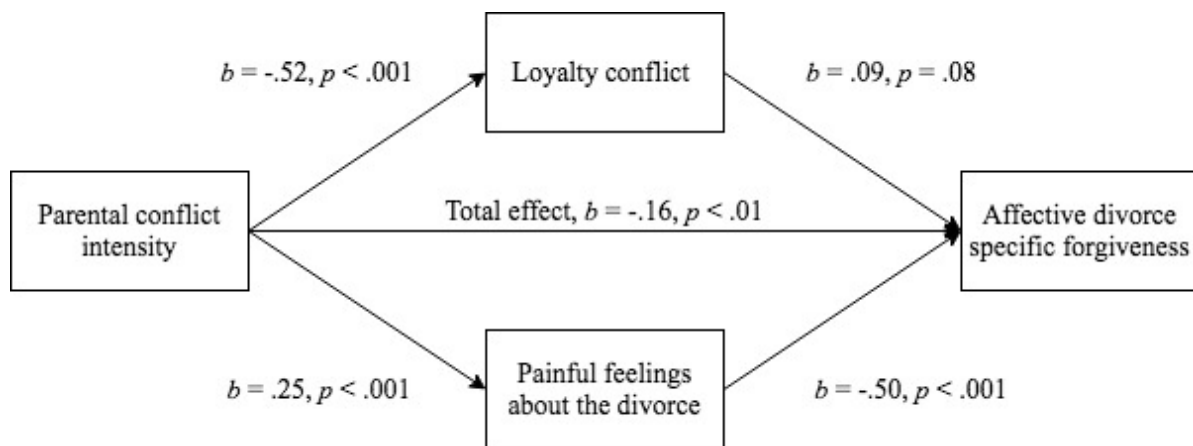


Figure 2. Model of relationship between parental conflict intensity, loyalty conflict, painful feelings about the divorce and affective divorce specific forgiveness.

Satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness

To examine whether parental conflict intensity is associated with satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness (research question 1), a partial correlation was performed. Age, gender and continuous contact with both parents were included as control variables. The association between parental conflict and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness was significant ($r = -.39, p < .01$). The negative association indicated that more parental conflict intensity was associated with less satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness.

A regression analysis was performed (PROCESS, model 4) to examine whether loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce mediated the relationship between parental conflict intensity and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness (research question 2

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

and 3). The control variables in this analysis included age, gender and continuous contact with both parents. Results of the regression analysis were graphically represented in Figure 3. The total effect of parental conflict intensity on satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness, thus including the direct and indirect effect, was significant ($b = -.64, SE = .10, t = -6.23, p < .01$). The total indirect effect of parental conflict intensity on satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness through loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce together was also significant ($b = -.14, SE = .06, BCa CI [-.28, -.03]$). Furthermore, the indirect effect of parental conflict intensity on satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness through loyalty conflict was not significant ($b = -.07, SE = .06, BCa CI [-.21, .03]$). The indirect effect of parental conflict intensity on satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness through painful feelings about the divorce was significant ($b = -.06, SE = .04, BCa CI [-.15, -.00]$). The upper limit of the 95% bootstrap confidence interval for painful feelings about the divorce was below zero before rounding off to two decimals, which indicated a rather small, but significant effect since zero is not included in the confidence interval. Taken together, we found evidence that painful feelings about the divorce, but not loyalty conflict, mediated the relation between parental conflict intensity and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness.

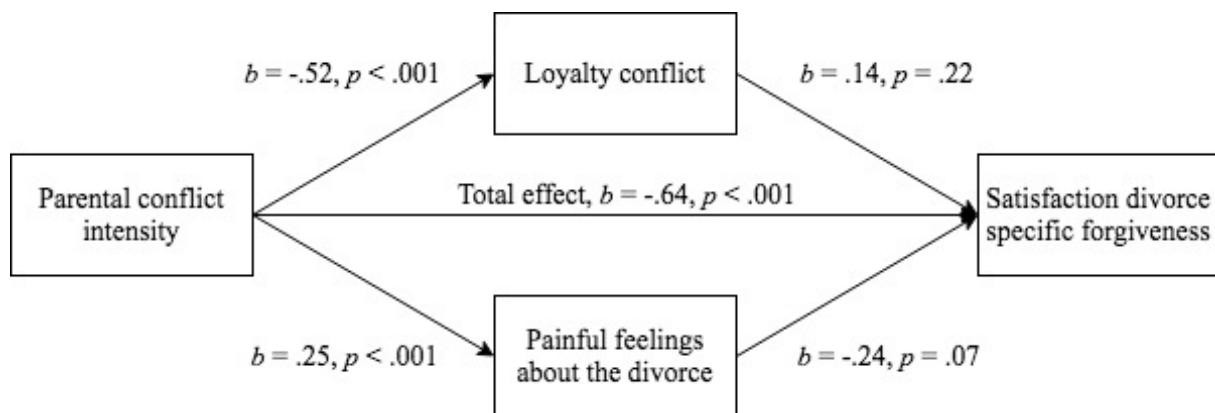


Figure 3. Model of the relationship between parental conflict intensity, loyalty conflict, painful feelings about the divorce and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness.

Discussion

The main goal of the current study was to examine the relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. Furthermore, possible mechanisms, namely loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce, were examined. Based on indirect evidence, we expected that more parental conflict intensity was associated with less divorce specific forgives. Furthermore, we expected loyalty conflict and painful feelings

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

about the divorce to function as mediators. Specifically, we expected that more parental conflict was related to more loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce, which in turn would be related to less divorce specific forgiveness. Preliminary analyses resulted in the decision to separate divorce specific forgiveness into an affective and satisfaction variant of divorce specific forgiveness. Results of the partial correlation confirmed our first hypothesis, since parental conflict intensity was negatively associated with both affective divorce specific forgiveness and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness. No support for our second hypothesis was found, since the results of the regression analysis did not show significant indirect effects of parental conflict intensity on divorce specific forgiveness through loyalty conflict. Furthermore, consistent with our third hypothesis, parental conflict intensity had an indirect effect on both affective and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness through painful feelings about the divorce.

The relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness

First, this study aimed at investigating the association between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. We hypothesized that parental conflict intensity was associated with divorce specific forgiveness. The first hypothesis was based on previous research which concluded that parental conflict was associated with more negative affect towards parents, being close to neither of the parents and a lesser relationship quality (Lamela et al., 2016; Riggio, 2004; Sobolowski & Amato, 2007). Since negative affect towards an individual and relationship quality with that person are found to be associated with willingness to forgive, we expected a negative association. (Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2002; Van der Wal, Karremans & Cillessen, 2017). Our results confirmed the hypothesis, since parental conflict intensity was negatively associated with both affective and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness. Thus, more parental conflict intensity was associated with less affective divorce specific forgiveness and less satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness.

Loyalty conflict and divorce specific forgiveness

Second, the current study aimed at investigating loyalty conflict as a mediator. As our second hypothesis, we expected that loyalty conflict would mediate the relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. However, our results did not provide evidence to confirm this expectation. Outcomes of the regression analyses did not reveal significant indirect effects of parental conflict intensity on neither affective nor satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness through loyalty conflict.

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

Contrary to previous research by Amato and Afifi (2006) who found a positive association between parental conflict and loyalty conflict, both our preliminary analysis (see table 1) and regression analysis (see figure 2 and 3) revealed a negative relation between parental conflict intensity and loyalty conflict. Thus, while Amato and Afifi (2006) concluded that more parental conflict was associated with more loyalty conflict, our results suggested that more parental conflict was associated with less loyalty conflict. These inconsistencies in findings may be contributed to the fact that Amato and Afifi (2006) analysed marital conflict reported by parents and not through reports of the young adults themselves like the current study. This methodological difference may have contributed to the inconsistencies since the perception of parental conflict may be different for the children compared to parents' perception. Furthermore, the lack of findings on the mediating influence of loyalty conflict may be caused by the fact that we did not control for personality characteristics. According to Van der Wal, Karremans and Cillessen (2017), personality characteristics such as self-esteem may influence the willingness to forgive. Since we did not control for these personality characteristics, this may have caused the lack of effect for loyalty conflict as a mediator. Furthermore, parental conflict may alter the attitude of the mother towards the father. The attitude of the mother about the father is negatively associated with maternal gatekeeping, which in turn is associated with less father involvement (Fagan & Barnett, 2003). Therefore, maternal gatekeeping and a lack of involvement of the father may prohibit the existence of loyalty conflicts.

Painful feelings about the divorce and divorce specific forgiveness

As our third hypothesis, we expected that the relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness would be mediated by painful feelings about the divorce. Psychological distress due to parental divorce, which is described as painful feelings about the divorce in the current study, was previously found to be higher in situations with more parental conflict (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007; Hannum & Dvorak; 2004). Indirect evidence suggested that painful feelings about the divorce was associated with being less attached to parents, which in turn is a predictor of willingness to forgive (Paleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2002; Van der Wal, Karremans & Cillessen, 2017). Results of the current study provided evidence for our hypothesis, since the indirect effect of parental conflict intensity on both affective and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness through painful feelings about the divorce was significant. However, the mediational effect for painful feelings about the divorce in relation to affective divorce specific forgiveness was

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

rather small and only significant before rounding off to two decimals. Therefore, future research should focus on replicating and strengthening these findings.

Strengths, limitations and future directions

There are several strengths that can be attributed to this study. To our knowledge, the current study is the first study that focused on the direct relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness among young adults. Relevant research on forgiveness in the context of divorce previously focussed mostly on forgiveness after divorce as an intervention (Freedman & Knupp, 2003), but did not take into account that parental conflict may continue after separation (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Furthermore, this is the first time to our knowledge that possible mechanisms (i.e. loyalty conflict and painful feelings about the divorce) in this relationship are investigated.

However, the current study also has several limitations. First, we focussed on the willingness to forgive among young adults towards parents as one unity. It may be possible that parental conflict may hamper forgiveness more towards one of the parents than the other parent. Relevant research does not provide an unambiguous answer to this suggestion. For example, Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000) conclude that parental conflict is associated with paternal blame but not maternal blame. Contrary to the findings of Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000), Fabricius and Luecken (2002) found that parental conflict was associated with both paternal and maternal blame. Furthermore, a reliability analysis on the constructed affective divorce specific forgiveness scale revealed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.61 which can be classified as a low, but acceptable, reliability. Also, the current study does not control for personality characteristics while these might influence the willingness to forgive (Palleari, Regalia & Fincham, 2002; Van der Wal, Karremans & Cillessen, 2017).

Since the current study is the first to examine divorce specific forgiveness in the context of parental divorce, future research is needed to replicate current findings. Furthermore, one of the limitations of the current study is that we did not control for personality characteristics. Future research on divorce specific forgiveness should therefore control for the influence of personality characteristics.

Implications

Results of the current study provide several theoretical implications. First, the current study is the first to examine divorce specific forgiveness in the context of parental conflict while also considering possible mechanisms. Second, the current study made a distinction

PARENTAL CONFLICT INTENSITY AND DIVORCE SPECIFIC FORGIVENESS

between affective divorce specific forgiveness and satisfaction divorce specific forgiveness. These constructs may provide a foundation for future research on divorce specific forgiveness. Third, the finding that parental conflict is negatively associated with loyalty conflict is contradicting with previous research who found a positive association (Amato & Afifi, 2006). While possible causes for the inconsistencies have been discussed, future research should focus on clarifying these contradicting results. Fourth, results of the current study showed that more parental conflict intensity is associated with more painful feelings about the divorce. This result is a replication of previous findings on painful feelings about the divorce (Amato & Afifi, 2006; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004).

To conclude, the current study examined the relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness. Results of the current study provide evidence for the suggestion that young adults' willingness to forgive their parents is associated with parental conflict intensity. Furthermore, results indicate that painful feelings about the divorce, but not loyalty conflict, functions as a mediator in the relation between parental conflict intensity and divorce specific forgiveness.

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