

Family Complexity into Adulthood: The Central Role of Mothers in Shaping Intergenerational Ties

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For children of married and divorced/separated parents, we asked about conflicts between the (biological) parents during youth or during youth but before the divorce/separation. The questions were: “How often were there tensions or conflicts between your parents?” “How often did your parents not want to talk to each other for an extended period of time?” and “How often were there *serious* fights between your parents?” The categories were never, sometimes, regularly, and often (coded from 1 to 4). Several children stated they did not know (13.8 percent for the first item, 20.1 percent for the second item, and 14.8 percent for the third item). This can be due to the fact that children did not remember because the divorce occurred too early or because they were not aware of conflicts while leaving open the option that there could have been conflicts. After standardizing the items, we took the average across scores (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$). The scale was constructed when at least one item had a valid score so as to minimize the number of missing cases in the analyses.

We limited the sample to children of divorced/separated parents and children of married/cohabiting parents and estimated random-effects models with and without controlling for conflict for all three outcomes. We note that the correlation between conflict and divorce is very high (Cohen’s $d = 1.09$), which makes it difficult to disentangle the two concepts.

The results show that the main effects of divorce (referring to mothers) are reduced when adding conflict as a control variable. By implication, the effects for fathers decline as well. However, the interactions between gender and divorce remain strong and significant for all three outcomes. After controlling for duration, the effects of divorce for mothers are largely captured by the conflict effects but negative effects for fathers remain. The interactions with gender are still significant when duration is controlled for.

Table S1. Random-Effects Regression of Parent-Child Closeness and Contact (z-scores): Adult-Child Data on Multiple Parents per Child

	(1) Closeness (z)	(2) Closeness (z)	(3) Closeness (z)	(4) Closeness (z)
Interparental conflict		-.239** (.013)		-.217** (.013)
Father vs. mother	-.151** (.030)	-.151** (.030)	-.148** (.029)	-.149** (.029)
Divorced	-.180** (.031)	.032 (.032)	-.100** (.031)	.089** (.032)
x father	-.503** (.038)	-.506** (.038)	-.057 (.043)	-.090* (.043)
Duration			.058** (.004)	.051** (.004)
Duration squared			.004** (.001)	.004** (.001)
Kids	7,513	7,513	7,509	7,509
Parents	3,896	3,896	3,894	3,894
R ² within	.163	.163	.230	.229
R ² between	.124	.190	.147	.203
	(1) Contact (z)	(2) Contact (z)	(3) Contact (z)	(4) Contact (z)
Interparental conflict		-.179** (.013)		-.154** (.013)
Father vs. mother	-.275** (.028)	-.275** (.028)	-.272** (.027)	-.272** (.027)
Divorced	-.224** (.030)	-.066* (.032)	-.149** (.030)	-.015 (.032)
x father	-.512** (.035)	-.512** (.035)	-.073~ (.040)	-.092* (.040)
Duration			.063** (.004)	.059** (.004)
Duration squared			.003** (.001)	.003** (.001)
Kids	7,583	7,583	7,579	7,579
Parents	3,900	3,900	3,898	3,898
R ² within	.251	.251	.323	.323
R ² between	.160	.196	.178	.205
	(1) Support	(2) Support	(3) Support	(4) Support
Interparental conflict		-.134** (.014)		-.113** (.014)
Father vs. mother	-.083** (.028)	-.083** (.028)	-.081** (.027)	-.081** (.027)
Divorced	-.210** (.031)	-.092** (.033)	-.143** (.031)	-.045 (.033)
x father	-.480** (.036)	-.480** (.036)	-.099* (.041)	-.113** (.041)
Duration			.052** (.004)	.049** (.004)
Duration squared			.003** (.001)	.003** (.001)
Kids	7583	7583	7579	7579
Parents	3900	3900	3898	3898
R ² within	.134	.134	.197	.197
R ² between	.195	.213	.204	.217

Note: The control variables are the same as in Table 3.