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HOW DIVORCE, INTERPARENTAL CONFLICT, AND PARENTING STYLES RELATE TO YOUNG ADULT EMOTIONAL REGULATION

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Abstract

Emotional regulation has been linked to one's ability to establish social relationships, as well as the onset of multiple psychological disorders, such as anxiety and depressive disorders. Researchers are beginning to better understand the development of emotional regulation; however, there is still debate surrounding what role familial factors play in this development. This study sought to better understand three factors that impact families: divorce, interparental conflict, and parenting styles. Specifically, this study hypothesized that participants whose parents are divorced and experienced high levels of interparental conflict would experience poor emotional regulation. Additionally, this study hypothesized that participants who perceive their parents as having an authoritative parenting style would have high emotional regulation. The results of this study did not support the idea that divorce or interparental conflict are associated with emotion regulation in young adulthood. However, further analyses found that two specific factors of interparental conflict, self-blame and threat, are correlated with emotion regulation. The results of this study also did not find a relationship between parenting styles and emotion regulation. This has implications for understanding what factors involved in divorce contribute to emotional disturbances in young adults.

Keywords: emotional regulation, divorce, conflict, parenting

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

Psychological research surrounding the development of human emotionality has substantially increased in recent years (Morris et al., 2007). Specifically, extensive research is being established on the development of emotional regulation. Although the definition of emotional regulation is continually debated, a widely accepted definition is "the extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features" (Thompson, 1994, p. 27-28). This ability to effectively recognize and control one's emotions is essential for human connectedness, as emotional regulatory capabilities are understood to play an important role in developing social competencies (Eisenberg et al., 1998; Lapomardo, 2018). This is partially because the ability to communicate with others is often based on one's ability to accurately recognize and express emotions (e.g., smiling in conversation to signify happiness, recognizing when someone is scowling in response to what was said; Halberstadt et al., 2001). Likewise, one must be able to send the appropriate emotional message, with the right intensity, to ensure a successful and helpful interaction (Scammell, 2019). Furthermore, consistent emotional outbursts that are not socially or culturally appropriate will likely result in difficulty building social connections (Quaglia et al., 2014). Without proper emotional regulation, an individual is likely to misconstrue social cues, or act in a way that is not socially appropriate, resulting in poor social development.

Additionally, emotional regulatory processes are essential to maintaining internal arousal (Thompson, 1994). For example, adaptive strategies used to regulate emotions reduce

physiological arousal associated with challenging emotions (Lapomardo, 2018). This highlights an essential aspect of emotional regulation: an ability to anticipate and encode emotional arousal, such as increased heart rate, shakiness, or shortness of breath, to function effectively rather than undermine these symptoms (Thompson, 2001). Individuals who are unable to recognize these physiological symptoms of emotions are at risk of developing anxiety disorders, as they find it extremely difficult to manage feelings appropriately (Thompson, 2001). Relatedly, emotional dysregulation has been linked to multiple other psychological disorders, such as depressive disorders and borderline personality disorder (Berenbaum et al., 2006; Gratz & Gunderson, 2006; Joormann & Gotlib, 2010).

Childhood Emotional Development

The recent spark of interest in emotional regulation research is due in part to researchers' better understanding the huge role that emotion regulation plays in childhood development (Morris et al., 2007). The ability for a child to develop proper emotional regulation is influenced by a number of factors, both internal and external. For example, child temperament, cognitive development, and physiology play a role; furthermore, social relationships are an essential factor in emotional development as well (Morris et al., 2007). Specifically, the parent-child relationship has been shown to have a large effect on the development of proper emotional regulation. There are a multitude of ways a parent can influence his/her child's emotional development. The parent can use verbal messages to influence the child, such as actively directing regulatory processes through direction (e.g. "try taking deep breaths"), using language to advise emotional regulation strategies (e.g. comforting self-talk), or even from the child overhearing the parent's use of emotional regulation strategies (Thompson, 1994). This demonstrates Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which suggests that individuals learn new behavioral patterns from observing

others. Specifically, children learn from observing their parents' emotional reactions in certain situations, and imitating those responses when placed in similar situations (Lapomardo, 2018). Also, children who are encouraged by their parents to converse about emotional experiences may develop a greater ability to communicate their emotions and understand others' emotions in adulthood (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Therefore, parents' ability to implement emotional regulation strategies in their everyday lives is essential in the development of proper child emotional regulation.

Familial Factors

Emotional regulation competencies are also influenced by familial factors, such as family stress, interparental conflict, and structural changes (e.g., parental divorce; Lapomardo, 2018). Divorce rates have declined over the past decade; however, approximately half of all marriages in the United States still end in divorce (US Census Bureau, 2020). The effects of divorce on children's well-being have routinely been thought of as negative; however, parental divorce does not affect all children in the same way or to the same extent (Weaver & Schofield, 2015). For example, in a study conducted by Molepo and colleagues (2012), young children from divorced families expressed worse temperament than those from intact families, while older children from intact families expressed worse temperament than children from divorced families. Moreover, some children may benefit from divorce, as it might remove them from a hostile environment where parents are constantly involved in interparental conflict (Kelly & Emery, 2003). Additionally, on average, the majority of children who come from divorced families are emotionally well-adjusted (Kelly & Emery, 2003).

However, research has indicated that children may experience significant stress during the divorce of their parents, which may lead to academic, behavioral, and/or emotional problems

(Besharat et al., 2018). For example, Anthony and colleagues (2014) found that children who experienced parental divorce achieved less academic growth than children who did not experience parental divorce, and that this relationship was moderated by the child's motivation and engagement in the classroom. Additionally, some studies show that children whose parents eventually divorce exhibit more internalizing and externalizing difficulties than children whose parents never divorced (Lansford, 2009).

Given the relatively high rate of divorce in the United States, it is essential that researchers understand the significant impact divorce has on childhood development. Specifically, some studies have observed difficulties with emotional regulation in children whose parents are divorced. Besharat and colleagues (2018) found that, when compared to children whose parents are not divorced, children of divorce engaged in less adaptive emotion regulation strategies, such as reappraisal, and engaged in more maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, such as rumination and suppression. Reappraisal is one of the most essential emotional regulation strategies, and involves cognitive change in response to a potentially emotionally arousing situation to change the situation's emotional effects (Besharat, 2018). Rumination involves passively and repeatedly focusing on a specific event to analyze its causes and outcomes, while suppression involves actively denying the presence of emotions (Besharat, 2018). Both strategies are harmful to the individual using them.

Furthermore, less research has been conducted on how divorce during childhood affects young adults' emotional well-being (Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018; Mann & Gillion, 2004). Some longitudinal studies suggest that the association between parental conflict and child emotional problems may become stronger with age, partly due to the child's sensitization to conflict with repeated exposure (Mann & Gilliom, 2004). However, other studies suggest that the

short-term effects of divorce are worse than the long-term effects (Lansford, 2009). These conflicting reviews within the literature highlight a need for research on how divorce affects young adults.

Additionally, other researchers argue that the psychological effects of divorce are dependent on the amount of stressors involved (e.g., parental conflict; Anthony et al., 2014). For example, there is considerable debate amongst researchers about the extent to which divorce itself correlates with poor child development outcomes, or if this relationship is attributable to additional factors, such as interparental conflict (Lansford, 2009). The conflict a child's parents engage in throughout the divorce process may be more detrimental to a child's development of emotional regulation than the divorce itself. Moderate parental conflict has been associated with better emotional regulation strategies in children, as exposure to negative emotions, such as anger, allows the child an ability to observe and learn to manage these emotions; however, high levels of parental conflict are presumed to have a negative effect on children's development of emotional regulation strategies (Lapomardo, 2018). For example, a study conducted by Hashemi and Homayuni (2017) suggested that children whose parents are emotionally divorced, defined as experiencing feelings of anger, frustration, or resentment instead of love and affection, experienced higher levels of aggression, emotional problems, and adjustment problems than children whose parents are legally divorced. The researchers argue that children who observe their parents resolve conflict using hostility, aggression, and controlling means learn to interact with their peers in a similar manner (Hashemi & Homayuni, 2017). Additional research has suggested that children who are repeatedly exposed to parental conflict may be stunted in their ability to regulate negative feelings of anger, sadness, or fear (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011).

Parents contribute significantly to children's emotional development by providing external support for regulating their emotions (Lee, 2001). Children continue to seek this nurturance from a trusted adult, especially a parent, throughout development (Lee, 2001). The effects of this recurring exposure to parental conflict is likely to continue into adolescence and adulthood. Thus, the current study will evaluate the relationship between divorce, parental conflict, and emotional regulation capabilities in young adults.

Parenting Styles

It has been established that parents have a large influence on their children's development of emotion regulation. One additional factor in the parent-child relationship that can have such effect is the emotional climate of the family, with one important component being parenting styles (Shaw & Starr, 2019). The three main parenting styles are authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Authoritative parents are highly involved in their child's life, practice open communication, parental acceptance, and trust towards the child (Aunola et al., 2000). Authoritarian parents are characterized by high levels of psychological control, low trust and engagement towards the child, and a lack of open communication, while permissive parents are warm and accepting towards the child, but lack parental control. (Aunola et al., 2000).

Research has established a link between authoritarian parenting styles and children's poor self-regulatory behaviors (e.g., maternal hostility is linked to less adaptive emotional regulation strategies and physiological regulation; Shaw & Starr, 2019). The hostile parenting techniques associated with authoritarian parenting may teach children to suppress their emotions rather than appropriately regulating them using adaptive strategies, such as reappraisal (Shaw & Starr, 2019). Additionally, an authoritarian parent will often punish or minimize appropriate emotional displays by children, which will result in negative emotionality and the development of avoidant

coping strategies (Shaw & Starr, 2019). Moreover, Eisenberg and colleagues (1996) reported that children who receive negative reactions when they display emotions learn to hide these emotions, but still become physiologically aroused when they experience intense emotionality. Therefore, these children are internalizing their difficult emotions instead of externalizing them and learning to properly regulate them.

Furthermore, a permissive parenting style has been linked to poor emotion regulation in children and adolescents as the parent's lack of guidance is likely to lead to a lack of verbal and behavioral control (Jabeen et al., 2013). This lack of structure does not foster, support, or encourage self-regulation and may result in the child being more impulsive (Aunola et al., 2000). Therefore, the child learns to express their emotions thoughtlessly instead of using appropriate strategies to regulate and communicate their emotions. Additionally, permissive parents take a child-centered approach; therefore, they encourage autonomy and independence, but do not demand or require mature behavior from their children (Aunola et al., 2000). Consequently, if the child does not choose to use proper emotion regulation strategies on their own, they will not be required by their parents to learn these strategies.

The final style of parenting, authoritative, is associated with the best adolescent emotional and behavioral outcomes, including proper adaptive strategies (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Authoritativeness is characterized by parental supportiveness, which nurtures children's displays of emotions; therefore, these parents help children evolve their emotion regulation abilities (Rodriguez et al., 2015). Moreover, some research has found that mothers who have an authoritarian or permissive parenting style displayed lower levels of emotional regulation themselves than parents who have an authoritative parenting style (Bahrami et al., 2018). Given the major role observational learning plays in the development of emotional regulation strategies,

it can be assumed that children who do not observe their parents engaging in proper emotional regulation strategies will be less likely to engage in such strategies than children who have parents who routinely practice such strategies. This is supported by Eisenberg and colleagues (2001), who found that parents who consistently regulate their own emotional responses, which is characteristic of authoritarian parents, have children who are high in regulation and who are well-adjusted. Furthermore, some research has demonstrated that adolescents who perceive their parents as warm, responsive, and sensible, which are characteristic of authoritative parents, are more likely to use positive strategies to control and express their own emotions (Tani et al., 2018). Other researchers have also proposed a genetic link in the regulation of emotions (Hariri & Holmes, 2006). This would strengthen the idea that authoritative parents who demonstrate adequate emotional regulation strategies themselves pass this ability on to their children.

The Present Study

Overall, previous research has reported conflicting findings on the effects that divorce has on children, with limited research focusing on the long-term implications divorce has on emotional development. Additionally, more research should be conducted to determine if parental divorce itself is correlated to poor emotion regulation development, or if additional variables such as perceived parental conflict or parenting styles are variables driving this relationship. Thus, the current study presented the following hypotheses:

H1: Emotional regulation would be poorer in participants whose parents are divorced as opposed to participants whose parents are still married.

H2: Emotional regulation would be poorer in participants who reported higher perceived interparental conflict.

H3: There would be a significant interaction between whether a participant's parents are divorced and interparental conflict on emotional regulation.

H4: Participants who perceived their parents as demonstrating higher levels of authoritative, but not authoritarian or permissive, parenting styles would demonstrate higher levels of emotional regulation.

Chapter 2: Method

Participants & Procedure

Participants were recruited to participate in this study using SONA, an online participant recruitment system. Once registered, participants were given an online survey consisting of the Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale, the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict scale, and the Parental Authority Questionnaire. The participants completed the questionnaire packet online and were given course credit for their participation. A total of 98 students (75 female, 22 male, 1 declined to report sex) from Murray State University made up the research sample. An additional 2 participants were excluded for inattention (marking the same response for each question). The age of participants ranged from 18 to 26 (M = 19.48 yrs, SD = 1.45). There were 8 seniors, 14 juniors, 27 sophomores, and 49 freshmen present in this sample. There were 75 Caucasians, 15 African Americans, 2 Asian American, 2 Hispanic, 1 Native American, and 3 who declined to report their ethnicity present in this sample. 57 participants reported their biological parents were married, while 41 reported their biological parents were divorced. 25 participants reported they had a step-parent. Only 22 participants reported their age when their parents were divorced. The average age was 6.67 years old.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

A demographics questionnaire was utilized to assess age, sex, ethnicity, and if the participant's parents are divorced. Additionally, the participants were asked at what age their parents divorced and if either of their parents have remarried.

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS)

The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) was used in this study to measure emotional regulation (see Appendix A for the measure; Gratz & Roemer, 2008). The scale consists of 36 items, and participants indicated how often each statement applies to them on a Likert-type scale. The scale ranges from 1-5 [1: *almost never (0-10%)*, 2: *sometimes (11-35%)*, 3: *about half the time (36-65%)*, 4: *most of the time (66-90%)*, 5: *almost always (91-100%)*]. Some example statements on this scale include, "I know exactly how I am feeling," "when I'm upset, I feel ashamed at myself for feeling that way," and "when I'm upset, I lose control over my behavior." The DERS has found to have high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.93$), good test–retest reliability, and adequate construct and predictive validity (Gratz & Roemer, 2008). There is no clinical cutoff for this scale, however, previous research has suggested the clinical range varies from approximately 80 to 127 (Haynos et al., 2015). The DERS also exhibited high internal consistency in this sample. Reliability in the current sample and other descriptive statistic data for each scale can be found in Table 1.

Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC)

The Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC) was used to measure parental conflict (see Appendix B for the measure; Grych et al., 1992). The scale consists of 48 items, and participants indicated their level of agreement with each statement on a Likert-type scale. The scale ranges from 1-3 (T: *True*, ST: *Sort of or Sometimes True*: F: *False*). Some examples statements on this scale include, "even after my parents stop arguing they stay mad at each other," "I often see or hear my parents argue," and "when my parents argue I'm afraid that they will yell at me too." Although this scale was created to be used with children, research has established strong reliability and validity when used with late adolescents and young adults (Bickman & Fiese, 1997; Moura et al., 2010). Participants were asked to respond to the questions

based on how they perceived their parents' relationship growing up (pre-divorce if applicable). Using a factor analysis, Bickman and Fiese (1997) found three factors with good internal consistency: Conflict Properties ($\alpha = 0.95$), Threat ($\alpha = 0.88$), and Self-Blame ($\alpha = 0.85$). The factors also demonstrated good test-retest reliability with Pearson correlations of .81 for the Self-Blame scale, .86 for the Perceived Threat scale, and .95 for the Conflict Properties scale (Bickman & Fiese, 1997).

Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ)

The Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) was used to measure parenting style (see Appendix C for the measure; Buri, 1991). The questionnaire consists of 30 items, and participants indicated their agreeableness with each statement on a Likert-type scale. The scale ranges from 1-5 (1: *Strongly disagree*, 2: *Disagree*, 3: *Neither agree nor disagree*, 4: *Agree*, 5: *Strongly agree*). The PAQ has three subscales: permissive, authoritarian, and authoritative/flexible. The participants answered each question twice, once to indicate their description of their mother and once to indicate their description of their father. The total score for each participant was determined by averaging the participants' responses for their mother and father.

This scale has demonstrated good test-retest reliability, 0.78-0.92 for subscales of mothers' and fathers' permissiveness, authoritativeness, and authoritarianism, and good internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach alpha's ranging from 0.74-0.87 for subscales of mothers' and fathers' permissiveness, authoritativeness, and authoritarianism. Finally, all three scales demonstrated good discriminant-related validity and criterion-related validity (Buri, 1991).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Variables of Interest

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's α	n
Emotion Regulation	97.26	22.36	45.00	151.00	.94	98
Interparental Conflict	32.67	19.92	2.00	81.00	.96	98
CPIC-Conflict	15.95	10.28	0.00	38.00	.94	98
CPIC-Threat	7.80	5.29	0.00	22.00	.87	98
CPIC-Self-Blame	3.08	3.81	0.00	17.00	.89	98
Permissive Parenting	25.82	5.80	12.50	42.00	.85	98
Authoritarian Parenting	31.18	7.41	13.50	48.50	.91	98
Authoritative Parenting	30.53	7.17	12.50	47.00	.91	98
Age of Participants	19.48	1.45	18.00	26.00	---	98
Age of Divorce	6.67	5.05	0.00	16.00	---	22

Note. CPIC=Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale

Chapter 3: Results

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas of key variables of interest can be found in Table 1.

Divorce, Interparental Conflict, and Emotion Regulation

To test hypothesis one, two, and three, a 2x2 factorial ANOVA was conducted. The results of this analysis are depicted in Figure 1. Hypothesis one stated that emotion regulation would be poorer in participants whose parents were divorced as opposed to participants whose parents were still married. The results of the 2x2 factorial ANOVA indicate there was not a significant main effect of divorce on emotion regulation [$F(1,94 = 2.889$, $p = 0.092$]; thus, hypothesis one was not supported. Hypothesis two stated that emotional regulation would be poorer in participants who reported higher perceived interparental conflict. The results of the 2x2 factorial ANOVA indicate there also was not a significant main effect of interparental conflict on emotion regulation [$F(1,94) = 0.928$, $p = 0.338$); thus, hypothesis two was not supported. Finally, hypothesis three stated that there would be a significant interaction between whether a participant's parents are divorced and interparental conflict on emotional regulation. Results of the 2x2 factorial ANOVA indicate there was not a significant interaction between divorce and interparental conflict on emotion regulation [$F(1,94) = 1.064$, $p = 0.305$); therefore, hypothesis three was not supported.

Because the scores on the Interparental Conflict Scale were dichotomized, a post-hoc analysis was conducted to assess the variable as continuous. A Pearson correlation was conducted to determine if there was a significant association between the Interparental Conflict Scale and emotion regulation. As can be seen in Table 2, the results found a significant

association between interparental conflict and emotion regulation ($p = 0.038$). Further, a Pearson correlation was conducted to determine if there was a significant association between the subscales of the Interparental Conflict Scale and emotion regulation. Results found a significant association between Self-Blame and emotion regulation ($p < 0.001$). There was also a significant association between Threat and emotion regulation ($p = 0.005$). However, there was no association between Conflict Properties and emotion regulation ($p = 0.30$).

Parenting Styles and Emotion Regulation

In order to test the hypothesis that participants who perceive their parents as demonstrating higher levels of authoritative, but not authoritarian or permissive, parenting styles will demonstrate higher levels of emotion regulation, a series of Pearson correlations were run among parenting styles and emotion regulation. As can be seen in Table 2, the results of the Pearson correlation indicate that there was no significant association between emotion regulation and participant's perception of their parents having an authoritative parenting style. There was also no significant association between emotion regulation and participant's perception of their parents having a permissive parenting style or an authoritarian parenting style. Thus, hypothesis 4 was not supported.

Because the scores from the Parental Authority Questionnaire were obtained by averaging the participants' description of their mother and father, a post-hoc analysis was conducted to assess if solely mother and/or father's parenting style would be associated with emotion regulation. However, the results of the Pearson correlations indicated that there was no significant association between emotion regulation and participant's perception of parenting styles when looking at individual parents either.

Figure 1

Emotion Regulation Scores Across Groups

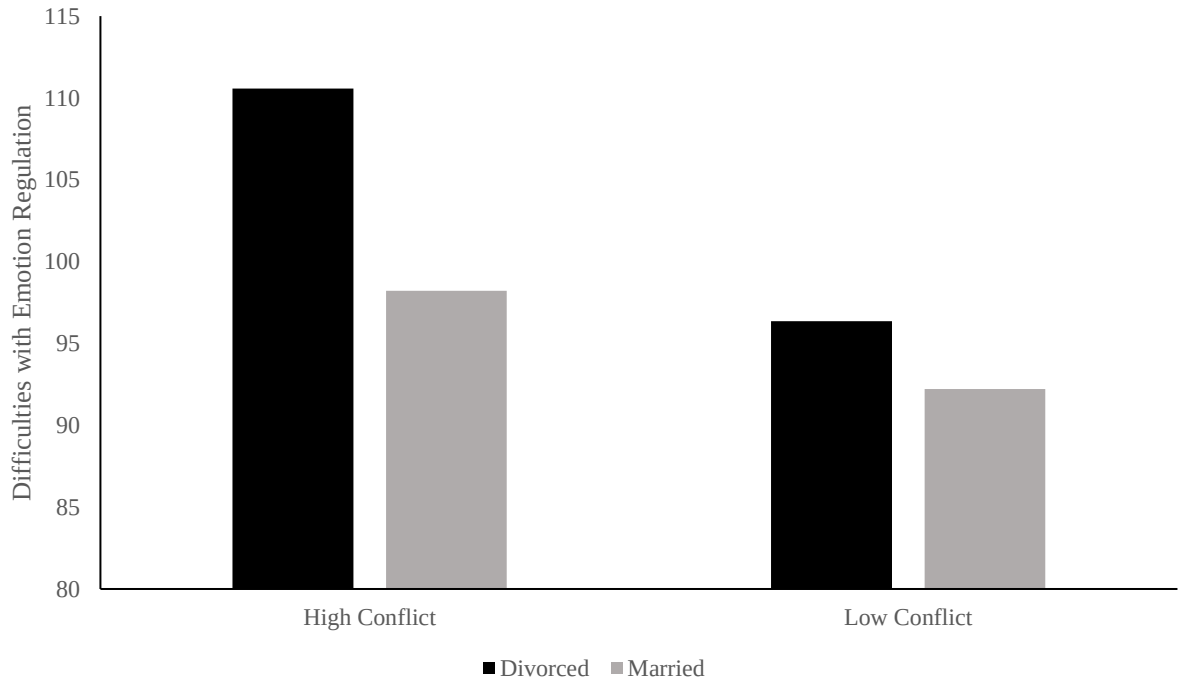

Table 2

Correlations Among Variables of Interest

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Emotion Regulation							
2. CPIC – Sum	.21*						
3. CPIC - Self-Blame	.33*	.58*					
4. CPIC - Conflict Properties	.11	.95*	.38*				
5. CPIC – Threat	.28*	.86*	.43*	.76*			
6. Permissive	.10	-.17	.07	-.25*	-.13		
7. Authoritarian	.06	.25*	.13	.20	.30*	-.20	
8. Authoritative	-.05	-.42*	-.20*	-.45*	-.32*	.44*	-.05

Note. CPIC=Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale

Chapter 4: Discussion and Limitations

Emotion regulation is essential for multiple aspects of emerging adults' lives. This includes engaging in meaningful and appropriate conversations to build social connections (Scammell, 2019; Quaglia et al., 2014), understanding social cues to act in a socially appropriate way, and maintaining internal arousal to help prevent the onset of psychological disorders (Thompson, 1994). Researchers have begun to better understand how emotion regulation is influenced by childhood development (Morris et al., 2007). However, more research is needed to understand the influence of divorce, interparental conflict, and parenting styles on emotion regulation as it develops throughout childhood.

This study did not find a significant difference between emotion regulation difficulties in participants whose parents were divorced and participants whose parents were still married. Thus, hypothesis one was not supported. However, this finding is not in direct contrast with previous research. Some researchers have suggested that children experience significant stress during the divorce of their parents, which could lead to internalizing and externalizing difficulties, including emotion dysregulation (Besharat et al., 2018; Lansford, 2009). However, the majority of children who have divorced parents do not display emotional difficulties that are distinguishable from their peers whose parents are still married (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Lansford, 2009). In studies that do find a difference between children from divorced and non-divorced families, the average differences are small (Amato, 1994). Further, some researchers have found that even if the child is negatively affected initially, their social functioning improves greatly just two years following the divorce of their parents (Forehand et al., 1991). It has also been found

that most children adapt to their new life following divorce within two to three years, as long as they do not encounter continued stress (Forehand et al., 1991). Perhaps the participants in this study had ample time to adjust and improve social functioning prior to the divorce of their parents.

There are, however, multiple factors that have been found to play a major role in the relationship between divorce and emotion regulation abilities. Allison and Furstenberg (1989) suggests that children who are very young, approximately less than 6-year-old, when their parents' divorce experience the most harmful and long-lasting effects. It is thought that children this young do not fully understand self-control; therefore, they lack the cognitive maturity to regulate and express their emotions associated with the intricacies of divorce (Lapomardo, 2018). Older children are much more resilient, and will be more likely to have already developed vital emotion regulation strategies they can equip during the divorce (Allison & Furstenberg, 1998). The average age of divorce in this sample was almost 7-years-old, which could be one explanation as to why there was no significant main effect of divorce on emotion regulation found in this sample.

Additionally, researchers have found other variables that mediate the relationship between divorce and emotion regulation abilities in early adulthood. In a longitudinal study, Amato and Sobolewski (2001) found that marital discord mediates the relationship between divorce and psychological well-being in adult children by weakening the emotional bond between parent and child. Similarly, Shimkowski and Ledbetter (2018) found that how much a parent discloses to their child about the divorce impacts emotion regulation abilities. They found that when parents disclose a low-to-moderate about of information about their divorce, the adult child is able to successfully use reappraisal as an emotion strategy often. However, high levels of

disclosure can result in the adult child feeling caught, which results in poorer mental health (Shimkowski & Ledbetter, 2018). It is possible that the participants in this study experienced a relatively low amount of disclosure from their parents, which could protect them from developing difficulties with emotion regulation. Participants in this study may have experienced low amounts of disclosure because they are located in the Bible Belt region of America. It is assumed that individuals in this region are more religious and hold more conservative views than other regions of the country (Ericksen, 2019). Consequently, divorce may not be talked about as openly amongst families (Marks, 2005). The results of this paper add to previous research that states divorce itself does not universally result in poorer well-being for the child as s/he ages; nevertheless, there are factors involved, such as age of divorce, marital discord, and communication abilities that can result in poorer well-being following a divorce.

Based on this previous research, it was also hypothesized that emotional regulation would be poorer in participants who reported higher perceived interparental conflict. Surprisingly, this study found no significant main effect of interparental conflict on emotion regulation. However, further exploration of the results found a significant association between interparental conflict and emotion regulation. This suggests that the amount of conflict present within a marriage has a meaningful impact on the development of emotion regulatory abilities in childhood that persists into young adulthood. This is consistent with previous research that found children of parents who communicate with anger, frustration, and hatred experience significant emotional difficulties (Hashemi & Homaynui, 2017).

Previous research has also suggested that the amount of blame a child places on themselves for the fighting occurring among their parents could lead to increased emotional distress (Hashemi & Homaynui, 2017). This was supported in this research study, which found a

significant relationship between self-blame and difficulties in emotion regulation. Previous research has also found that appraisals of threat mediates the relationship between interparental conflict and internalizing problems in children and older adolescents (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011; Mann & Gillom, 2004). The results of this study provides support for this by finding a significant relationship between feelings of threat when parents are experiencing conflict, and difficulties in emotion regulation. Moreover, the self-blame scale included in this study also includes questions surrounding one's ability to cope when their parents are arguing. This also adds support to previous research that found children's abilities to cope when exposed to interparental conflict increases their ability to self-regulate their emotions (Siffert & Schwarz, 2011). This finding also expands this result to the young adult population.

Additionally, this study did not find a significant interaction between divorce and interparental conflict on emotion regulation. Therefore, hypothesis three was not supported. It is increasingly evident that exposure to long-lasting conflict between parents can lead to difficulty regulating emotions in young adulthood. It is suggested this conflict reduces the child's emotional security; consequently, reducing their ability to manage their own emotions when they arise (Hashemi & Homayuni, 2017). Additionally, it should be noted that divorce is often a stressful experience for the individuals involved, including the children (Amato, 2010). Children of divorce may undergo a large number of changes during this time. This may include watching one parent move out of their current household, moving school districts, changing holiday schedules, and/or an overall disruption in their ever day routine (Amato, 2010). However, results of this study suggest there is not a multiplicative effect of divorce and interparental conflict on emotion regulation.

Previous researchers have suggested this may be because many children escape

potentially harmful environments when their parents undergo a divorce. For example, the children may be removed from exposure to substance abuse or economic hardships (Amato & Cheadle, 2008). Once the child leaves the environment that causes immense stress and worry, s/he may then be more able to properly develop their emotion regulation abilities (Hashemi & Homayuni, 2017). Furthermore, the stress of divorce can often be mitigated by proper communication amongst all parties. Thus, even if interparental conflict were present, the child would be more capable of learning proper emotion regulation strategies through open communication. The child may also learn essential emotion regulation strategies by observing their parents experience moderate conflict and use adaptive strategies to manage their emotions (Lapomardo, 2018).

Overall, "divorce" is a word that holds negative connotation in many individuals' minds, and has continuously been suggested as the reason to blame for many children's emotional difficulties (Hashemi & Homayuni, 2017). However, it should be considered that the child will benefit from no longer living in a harmful home environment by allowing them to learn proper emotion regulation strategies (Maughan & Cicchetti, 2002). It should also be considered that parents can take steps to properly communicate with their child, despite the presence of interparental conflict, to ensure the child does not develop lasting difficulties with emotion regulation.

Surprisingly, this study found that perceived parenting styles were not a significant indicator of participants' levels of emotion regulation. Therefore, hypothesis four was not supported. Previous research would suggest that emerging adults who perceive their parents as having an authoritative parenting style would demonstrate higher levels of emotional regulation than participants who perceive their parents as having an authoritarian or permissive parenting

style (Morris et al., 2017). However, some researchers have begun to break down the characteristics that make up the three traditional parenting styles and examine their independent relationship with emotion regulation. For example, Tani, Pascuzzi, and Raffagnino (2018) found that maternal and paternal care was associated with emotion dysregulation, but parental overprotection did not have a significant impact on emotion regulation abilities in adulthood. Other researchers have also highlighted the importance of parental care in childhood on proper emotion regulation development (Gee, 2016). Perhaps the emotional relationship young adults perceive to have had with their parent, specifically the amount of care they received, is having a larger impact on emotion regulation development than warmth and overprotection.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study found that interparental conflict is associated with emotion regulation difficulties in adulthood, which supports previous research; however, there are multiple limitations that should be addressed. First, the results could be influenced by the retrospective nature of the study. Asking young adults to reflect back and self-report on the relationship between their parents and their mother and father parenting styles could reflect biases in their perceptions (Halverson, 1988). Future longitudinal studies could help address this limitation. Further, the sample did not represent diversity in sex or ethnicity. Researchers have continuously found differences in emotion regulation abilities amongst men and women. Typically, women use a wider variety of emotion regulation strategies than men (Nolen-Hoeksema & Aldao, 2011). For this reason, women report using more adaptive strategies including reappraisal, acceptance, and seeking emotional support (Nolen-Hoeksema & Aldao, 2011). This would likely have an influence on the results of this study as the majority of participants were female. Research has also found that African American parents have a significantly higher likelihood of divorce

compared to Caucasian families (Gager et al., 2016). Therefore, a more diverse sample may include more participants who experienced the divorce of their biological parents. Future research with a larger, more diverse sample would likely produce more inclusive results.

Further, there are additional parental characteristics that have been found to impact adult children's emotion regulation abilities as well. For example, it has been found that parents who express frequent negative emotion, and parents who demonstrate emotion dysregulation, have children who also exhibit poor emotion regulation (Bariola et al., 2011). Although it is assumed that parents who have adopted an authoritarian or permissive parenting style demonstrate poorer self-regulatory strategies of their own (Bahrami et al., 2018), this factor was not explicitly researched in this study. Future research on emerging adult emotion regulation abilities would benefit from measuring parents' displays of emotion regulation strategies in the home.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study adds promising results to the research conducted on emotion regulation in emerging adulthood. This study shows that interparental conflict in childhood has an impact on emotion regulation in emerging adulthood. Specifically, if the adults blame themselves for their parents' conflict, and if they feel threatened by the conflict, they are more likely to experience emotion regulation difficulties. Further, this study demonstrates that interparental conflict is more impactful on the development of proper emotion regulation skills than divorce itself. Finally, this study can drive future research to determine familial factors outside of parenting styles that impact emotion regulation as well.

Appendix A

Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale (DERS) (Gratz & Roemer, 2004)

Response categories:

1. 1 Almost never (0-10%)
2. 2 Sometimes (11-35%)
3. 3 About half the time (36-65%)
4. 4 Most of the time (66 – 90%)
5. 5 Almost always (91-100%)

_____ 1. I am clear about my feelings.
_____ 2. I pay attention to how I feel.
_____ 3. I experience my emotions as overwhelming and out of control.
_____ 4. I have no idea how I am feeling.
_____ 5. I have difficulty making sense out of my feelings.
_____ 6. I am attentive to my feelings.
_____ 7. I know exactly how I am feeling.
_____ 8. I care about what I am feeling.
_____ 9. I am confused about how I feel.
_____ 10. When I'm upset, I acknowledge my emotions.
_____ 11. When I'm upset, I become angry with myself for feeling that way.
_____ 12. When I'm upset, I become embarrassed for feeling that way.
_____ 13. When I'm upset, I have difficulty getting work done.
_____ 14. When I'm upset, I become out of control.
_____ 15. When I'm upset, I believe that I will remain that way for a long time.
_____ 16. When I'm upset, I believe that I'll end up feeling very depressed.
_____ 17. When I'm upset, I believe that my feelings are valid and important.
_____ 18. When I'm upset, I have difficulty focusing on other things.
_____ 19. When I'm upset, I feel out of control.
_____ 20. When I'm upset, I can still get things done.
_____ 21. When I'm upset, I feel ashamed with myself for feeling that way.
_____ 22. When I'm upset, I know that I can find a way to eventually feel better.
_____ 23. When I'm upset, I feel like I am weak.
_____ 24. When I'm upset, I feel like I can remain in control of my behaviors.
_____ 25. When I'm upset, I feel guilty for feeling that way.
_____ 26. When I'm upset, I have difficulty concentrating.

_____ 27. When I'm upset, I have difficulty controlling my behaviors.
_____ 28. When I'm upset, I believe there is nothing I can do to make myself feel better.
_____ 29. When I'm upset, I become irritated with myself for feeling that way.
_____ 30. When I'm upset, I start to feel very bad about myself.
_____ 31. When I'm upset, I believe that wallowing in it is all I can do.
_____ 32. When I'm upset, I lose control over my behaviors.
_____ 33. When I'm upset, I have difficulty thinking about anything else.
_____ 34. When I'm upset, I take time to figure out what I'm really feeling.
_____ 35. When I'm upset, it takes me a long time to feel better.
_____ 36. When I'm upset, my emotions feel overwhelming.

Appendix B

Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC)
T = TRUE
ST = SORT OF OR SOMETIMES TRUE
F = FALSE

1. I never see my parents arguing or disagreeing
2. When my parents have an argument they usually work it out
3. My parents often get into arguments about things I do at school
4. When my parents argue I end up getting involved somehow
5. My parents get really mad when they argue
6. When my parents argue I can do something to make myself feel better
7. I get scared when my parents argue
8. I feel caught in the middle when my parents argue
9. I'm not to blame when my parents have arguments
10. They may not think I know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot
11. Even after my parents stop arguing they stay mad at each other
12. When my parents argue I try to do something to stop them
13. When my parents have a disagreement they discuss it quietly
14. I don't know what to do when my parents have arguments
15. My parents are often mean to each other even when I'm around
16. When my parents argue I worry about what will happen to me
17. I don't feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement
18. It's usually my fault when my parents argue
19. I often see or hear my parents arguing
20. When my parents disagree about something, they usually come up with a solution
21. My parents' arguments are usually about me
22. When my parents have an argument they say mean things to each other
23. When my parents argue or disagree I can usually help make things better
24. When my parents argue I'm afraid that something bad will happen
25. My mom wants me to be on her side when she and my dad argue
26. Even if they don't say it, I know I'm to blame when my parents argue
27. My parents hardly ever argue
28. When my parents argue they usually make up right away
29. My parents usually argue or disagree because of things that I do
30. I don't get involved when my parents argue
31. When my parents have an argument they yell at each other
32. When my parents argue there's nothing I can do to stop them
33. When my parents argue I worry that one of them will get hurt

34. I feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement
35. My parents often nag and complain about each other around the house
36. My parents hardly ever yell when they have a disagreement
37. My parents often get into arguments when I do something wrong
38. My parents have broken or thrown things during an argument
39. After my parents stop arguing, they are friendly towards each other
40. When my parents argue I'm afraid that they will yell at me too
41. My parents blame me when they have arguments
42. My dad wants me to be on his side when he and my mom argue
43. My parents have pushed or shoved each other during an argument
44. When my parents argue or disagree there's nothing I can do to make myself feel better
45. When my parents argue I worry that they might get divorced
46. My parents still act mean after they have had an argument
47. Usually it's not my fault when my parents have arguments
48. When my parents argue they don't listen to anything I say

Appendix C

Parental Authority Questionnaire

Instructions: For each of the following statements, circle the number of the 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) that best describes how that statement applies to you and your mother (or other female guardian). Then repeat on the right hand side of the page, circling the number that best describes your father (or male guardian). Try to read and think about each statement as it applies to you and your mother/father during your years of growing up at home. There are no right or wrong answers, so don't spend a lot of time on any one item. We are looking for your overall impression regarding each statement. Be sure not to omit any items. If you did not have a person you considered a mother/female guardian or you did not have a person you considered a father/male guardian, you may leave that column of responses blank.

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neither agree nor disagree

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

Mother Rating						Father Rating				
1	2	3	4	5	1. While I was growing up my mother/father felt that in a well-run home the children should have their way in the family as often as the parents do.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	2. Even if his/her children didn't agree with him/her, my mother/father felt that it was for our own good if we were forced to conform to what he/she thought was right.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	3. Whenever my mother/father told me to do something as I was growing up, he/she expected me to do it immediately without asking any questions.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	4. As I was growing up, once family policy had been established, my mother/father discussed the reasoning behind the policy with the children in the family.	1	2	3	4	5

1	2	3	4	5	5. My mother/father has always encouraged verbal give-and-take whenever I have felt that family rules and restrictions were unreasonable.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	6. My mother/father has always felt that what his/her children need is to be free to make up their own minds and to do what they want to do, even if this does not agree with what their parents might want.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	7. As I was growing up my mother/father did not allow me to question any decision he/she had made.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	8. As I was growing up my mother/father directed the activities and decisions of the children in the family through reasoning and discipline.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	9. My mother/father has always felt that more force should be used by parents in order to get their children to behave the way they are supposed to.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	10. As I was growing up my mother/father did not feel that I needed to obey rules and regulations of behavior simply because someone in authority had established them.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	11. As I was growing up I knew what my mother/father expected of me in my family, but I also felt free to discuss those expectations with my mother/father when I felt that they were unreasonable.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	12. My mother/father felt that wise parents should teach their children early just who is boss in the family.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	13. As I was growing up, my mother/father seldom gave me expectations and guidelines for my behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	14. Most of the time as I was growing up my mother/father did what the children in the family wanted when making family decisions.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	15. As the children in my family were growing up, my mother/father consistently gave us direction and guidance in rational and objective ways.	1	2	3	4	5

1	2	3	4	5	16. As I was growing up my mother/father would get very upset if I tried to disagree with him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	17. My mother/father feels that most problems in society would be solved if parents would not restrict their children's activities, decisions, and desires as they are growing up.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	18. As I was growing up my mother/father let me know what behavior he/she expected of me, and if I didn't meet those expectations, he/she punished me.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	19. As I was growing up my mother/father allowed me to decide most things for myself without a lot of direction from him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	20. As I was growing up my mother/father took the children's opinions into consideration when making family decisions, but he/she would not decide for something simply because the children wanted it.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	21. My mother/father did not view his/herself as responsible for directing and guiding my behavior as I was growing up.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	22. My mother/father had clear standards of behavior for the children in our home as I was growing up, but he/she was willing to adjust those standards to the needs of each of the individual children in the family.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	23. My mother/father gave me direction for my behavior and activities as I was growing up and he/she expected me to follow his/her direction, but he/she was always willing to listen to my concerns and to discuss that direction with me.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	24. As I was growing up my mother/father allowed me to form my own point of view on family matters and he/she generally allowed me to decide for myself what I was going to do.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	25. My mother/father has always felt that most problems in society would be solved if we could get parents to strictly and forcibly deal with their children when they don't do what they are supposed to as they are growing up.	1	2	3	4	5

1	2	3	4	5	26. As I was growing up my mother/father often told me exactly what he/she wanted me to do and how he/she expected me to do it.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	27. As I was growing up my mother/father gave me clear direction for my behaviors and activities, but he/she was also understanding when I disagreed with him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	28. As I was growing up my mother/father did not direct the behaviors, activities, and desires of the children in the family.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	29. As I was growing up I knew what my mother/father expected of me in the family and he/she insisted that I conform to those expectations simply out of respect for his/her authority.	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	30. As I was growing up, if my mother/father made a decision in the family that hurt me, he/she was willing to discuss that decision with me and to admit it if he/she had made a mistake.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter

MURRAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board

328 Wells Hall
Murray, KY 42071-3318
270-809-2916• msu.irb@murraystate.edu

TO: Amanda Joyce, Psychology

FROM: Jonathan Baskin, IRB Coordinator

DATE: 3/19/2021

RE: Human Subjects Protocol I.D. – IRB # 21-133

The IRB has completed its review of your student's Level 1 protocol entitled *Parenting and emotion regulation*. After review and consideration, the IRB has determined that the research, as described in the protocol form, will be conducted in compliance with Murray State University guidelines for the protection of human participants.

The forms and materials that have been approved for use in this research study are attached to the email containing this letter. These are the forms and materials that must be presented to the subjects. Use of any process or forms other than those approved by the IRB will be considered misconduct in research as stated in the MSU IRB Procedures and Guidelines section 20.3.

Your stated data collection period is from 3/19/2021 to 5/7/2021.

If data collection extends beyond this period, please submit an Amendment to an Approved Protocol form detailing the new data collection period and the reason for the change.

This Level 1 approval is valid until 3/18/2022.

If data collection and analysis extends beyond this date, the research project must be reviewed as a continuation project by the IRB prior to the end of the approval period, 3/18/2022. You must reapply for IRB approval by submitting a Project Update and Closure form (available at murraystate.edu/irb). You must allow ample time for IRB processing and decision prior to your expiration date, or your research must stop until such time that IRB approval is received. If the research project is completed by the end of the approval period, then a Project Update and Closure form must be submitted for IRB review so that your protocol may be closed. It is your responsibility to submit the appropriate paperwork in a timely manner.

The protocol is approved. You may begin data collection now.

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