Siblings, Parenting, Conflict, and Divorce:
Do Young Adults’ Perceptions of Past Family Experiences
Predict Their Present Adjustment?

by

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B.A., Carleton University, 2004

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relations among parenting quality, parental differential treatment (PDT), perceived unfairness of PDT, direct and differential exposure to interparental conflict, and adjustment in a sample of 368 young adults from intact and divorced families. Participants completed online questionnaires regarding their own and their sibling’s family experiences in middle adolescence and their present adjustment. Participants from divorced families differed from those from intact families on their reports of parenting quality, amount and unfairness of PDT, and direct and differential exposure to conflict. Results of regression analyses revealed that lower levels of parental affection, greater amounts of differential maternal affection and control, perceptions of receiving relatively less affection from parents than one’s sibling, more perceived unfairness of PDT, and more frequent exposure to conflict predicted poorer adjustment in young adulthood. Limitations of the present study, directions for future research, and implications of the findings for clinical practice are discussed.
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Introduction

Overview

Despite the fact that biological siblings share on average 50% of their genetic material, two siblings can be surprisingly different from one another. It has been suggested that non-shared environmental variables, or environmental influences that differ between siblings, can serve to make two siblings within a family as different from one another as two unrelated children (Plomin & Daniels, 1987). What are these differing environmental influences that contribute to differences between siblings? This question has been addressed extensively in intact families containing siblings whose parents are continuously married. Two non-shared environmental variables explaining why siblings may differ from each other are parental differential treatment, or differences between the way parents treat one sibling and the way they treat another sibling, and differential exposure to marital conflict, or differences between siblings in the levels of marital conflict to which they are exposed.

In the present study, the relationships among perceptions of past differential parental treatment, differential exposure to interparental conflict, and present general adjustment will be investigated in a sample of young adults from intact and divorced families. Few studies have examined these predictors of adjustment in samples of divorced families (Kurdek, 1989; Monahan, Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1993) or stepfamilies (Mekos, Hetherington, & Reiss, 1996). A substantial body of past research has generally indicated that parental divorce negatively affects child adjustment. Research examining siblings from intact families suggests that parental differential
treatment may play an important role in sibling differences in adjustment, particularly when siblings perceive parental differential treatment as unfair. In the present study, young adults’ perceptions of parental differential treatment following divorce will be investigated. Parental differential treatment may increase following divorce, due to parental stress and adjustment-related changes in children’s behaviour.

Many studies have reported that destructive interparental conflict negatively influences child adjustment. Some studies have investigated sibling differences in level of exposure to marital conflict and how these differences may lead to sibling differences in adjustment in intact families (Richmond & Stocker, 2003), domestically violent families (Skopp, McDonald, Manke, & Jouriles, 2005), or long-established remarried families (Mekos et al., 1996). Since interparental conflict tends to be high in families that will later experience divorce, differential exposure to marital conflict may be especially relevant for predicting the adjustment of young adults from divorced families.

The goal of the present study is to examine how perceptions of past parental differential treatment (PDT), perceived unfairness of PDT, and differences between siblings in levels of exposure to interparental conflict may be associated with present adjustment among young adults from intact and divorced families.

Relation Between PDT and Siblings’ Adjustment

Differential parental treatment has been widely studied as a predictor of siblings’ adjustment and behaviour (Plomin & Daniels, 1987). Three domains of differential parental behaviour have commonly been found to predict adjustment: conflict-negativity, warmth-support, and monitoring-control. In general, it appears that receiving more positive parental treatment (i.e., warmth, affection, support) and less negative parental
treatment (i.e., conflict, hostility, harsh discipline) than one’s sibling leads to better adjustment, while receiving less positive and more negative parental treatment than one’s sibling leads to poorer adjustment. Findings related to parental differential control and monitoring are more inconsistent. Receiving more of the negative forms of parental control, such as coercive control, than one’s sibling may promote poor adjustment, while receiving more of the positive forms of parental control, such as consistent monitoring, than one’s sibling may promote good adjustment. Some research has found that all siblings are better adjusted when parents treat siblings equally than when levels of parental differential treatment within the family are high (e.g., Boyle, Jenkins, Georgiades, Cairney, Duku, & Racine, 2004).

**Parental Differential Treatment: Conflict and Negativity**

Differences in the levels of parental conflictual and negative behaviours directed at each sibling appear to be associated with siblings’ adjustment, including internalizing and externalizing problems (Boyle et al., 2004; Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Deater-Deckard, Pike, Petrill, Cutting, Hughes, & O’Connor, 2001; Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001; McGuire, Dunn, & Plomin, 1995; Stocker, 1995; Tarullo, Ronsaville, Brown, & Radke-Yarrow, 1995), negative emotionality (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1992b), delinquency (Conger & Conger, 1994), general well-being (McHale, Crouter, McGuire, & Updegraff, 1995), and social competence (Anderson, Hetherington, Reiss, & Howe, 1994; Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Deater-Deckard et al., 2001; Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001). In general, if one sibling receives more negative parental treatment than does the other sibling, the more negatively treated sibling tends to exhibit poorer adjustment. Negative parental behaviours may include parent-child conflict (Anderson et
al., 1994; McHale et al., 1995; Stocker, 1995), poor quality parent-child relationships (Stocker, 1995), negativity (Anderson et al., 1994; Boyle et al., 2004; Brody et al., 1992b; Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Deater-Deckard et al., 2001; Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001; McHale et al., 1995), criticism (Tarullo et al., 1995), discipline (Deater-Deckard et al., 2001; McGuire et al., 1995), hostility (Conger & Conger, 1994), and negative control (McGuire et al., 1995).

**Parental Differential Treatment: Warmth and Positivity**

Parental differential treatment in the domain of warmth and positivity also appears to be related to siblings’ adjustment and behaviour, including internalizing and externalizing problems (Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Deater-Deckard et al., 2001; Dunn, Stocker, & Plomin, 1990; McGuire et al., 1995, Richmond & Stocker, 2003; Stocker, 1993, 1995; Tamrouti-Makkink, Dubas, Gerris, & van Aken, 2004; Tarullo et al., 1995), attachment style (Sheehan & Noller, 2002), anxiety (Sheehan & Noller, 2002), emotional distress (Daniels, Dunn, Furstenberg, & Plomin, 1985), delinquency (Daniels et al., 1985), disobedience (Daniels et al., 1985), self-worth (Daniels et al., 1985; McHale et al., 1995; Sheehan & Noller, 2002), and social competence (Anderson et al., 1994; Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Deater-Deckard et al., 2001). Many studies report that siblings who receive more parental warmth and positivity exhibit better adjustment than siblings who receive less. Parental positivity may include warmth (Anderson et al., 1994; McGuire et al., 1995; Tamrouti-Makkink et al., 2004), support (Anderson et al., 1994), positive behaviour (Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980; Deater-Deckard et al., 2001; Stocker, 1993), responsiveness (Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980), parental closeness and involvement (Daniels et al., 1985; Stocker, 1995; Tarullo et al, 1995), affection (Dunn et
al., 1990; McGuire et al., 1995; McHale et al., 1995; Sheehan & Noller, 2002; Stocker, 1993), attention (McGuire et al., 1995), or favouring one child over another (Richmond & Stocker, 2003; Stocker, 1995).

Unlike most studies that report that parental positivity is related to better adjustment, one study reported contradictory findings. Brody et al. (1992b) found that younger siblings who received more maternal responsive behaviour and more paternal positive and responsive behaviour than their older siblings displayed more negative emotionality than their older siblings. One explanation may be that parents direct more of all types of behaviours (positive, negative, and monitoring) towards younger siblings, because these children are seen by all family members as relatively less competent and thought to need more guidance and reproach than older siblings (Brody, Stoneman, & Burke, 1987).

*Parental Differential Treatment: Control and Monitoring*

Parents may direct differing amounts of control or monitoring behaviours towards each sibling. These differences in level of parental control or monitoring appear to influence siblings’ adjustment and behaviour, including internalizing and externalizing problems (Dunn et al., 1990; Stocker, 1993), anxiety (Sheehan & Noller, 2002), negative emotionality (Brody et al., 1992b), self-esteem (Sheehan & Noller, 2002), and social competence (Anderson et al., 1994; Deater-Deckard et al., 2001). Siblings who experience higher levels of negative forms of parental control, such as coercive control (e.g., Brody et al., 1992b; Dunn et al., 1990; Sheehan & Noller, 2002; Stocker, 1993), than their co-siblings tend to be more poorly adjusted. Conversely, siblings who experience higher levels of positive forms of parental control, such as monitoring
(Anderson et al., 1994) or praise (Deater-Deckard et al., 2001), than their co-siblings tend to be better adjusted.

Unlike most studies that report that parental control is associated with poorer adjustment, while parental monitoring is related to better adjustment, two studies report somewhat contradictory findings. Tamrouti-Makkink et al. (2004) found that adolescent girls exhibited more internalizing behaviours when their parents directed less coercive control towards them than towards their brothers. The authors suggest that this finding reflects the lack of necessity for parents to control internalizing daughters, who are generally unlikely to misbehave. Alternatively, this finding may reflect daughters’ perceptions that their parents care less about them than about their brothers. In another study, adolescents who received more maternal control than their twins reported lower personal self-esteem and higher anxiety, while adolescents who received more paternal control than their twins reported higher personal self-esteem (Sheehan & Noller, 2002). However, these authors suggested that the adolescents may have been looking to their fathers to provide positive control in the forms of guidance or monitoring.

*PDT and Family-Wide Sibling Adjustment*

Although many studies report that more favourable parental treatment is related to better adjustment and poorer treatment is related to poorer adjustment, some researchers propose that higher levels of parental differential treatment within a family lead to poorer adjustment for all siblings. This effect may occur because more favourably treated siblings observe their co-siblings being treated more poorly and feel anxious that they will be next to receive more negative treatment. Alternatively, more favourably treated siblings may view the poorer parental treatment of their co-siblings as unjust and resent
their parents for engaging in high levels of differential treatment.

Boyle et al. (2004) found that family-wide maternal differential treatment was related to higher levels of children’s maladjustment. In families characterized by high absolute levels of maternal differential treatment, all siblings’ adjustment suffered, not just that of siblings receiving disfavoured treatment. Family-wide differential parental treatment had a modest negative effect on children’s adjustment even after taking into account differential parental treatment specific to each child. This finding suggests that there is a quadratic relation between parental differential treatment and adjustment. In other words, as the amount of parental differential treatment increases, regardless of which sibling is favoured, children’s adjustment is expected to deteriorate. In another study, older siblings had higher well-being under conditions of equal parental affection and discipline, suggesting that receiving favoured parental treatment did not benefit older siblings’ adjustment (McHale et al., 1995).

“Sibling Barricade” Effect

It has been proposed that parental differential treatment may affect siblings in unexpected ways, such that when parents treat one sibling more positively, the other sibling exhibits poorer adjustment. This effect, which has been called the “sibling barricade effect” (Reiss et al., 1995), may occur due to sibling comparison processes, in which the less favourably treated sibling compares the parental treatment he receives to that received by his co-sibling. The less favourably treated sibling sees his own treatment as "worse," or in an overall negative light, even if the parents treat both siblings relatively positively compared to other families (Feinberg, Neiderhiser, Simmens, Reiss, & Hetherington, 2000). Conversely, when one sibling is treated more negatively by parents,
the other sibling may exhibit better adjustment. This effect may occur because the less negatively treated sibling compares her own parental treatment to that of her more negatively treated co-sibling and perceives her own treatment as better, even if both siblings are treated relatively negatively by the parents compared to other families.

Direct and Differential Parenting

Differential parental treatment appears to contribute to child and adolescent adjustment over and above the effects of parenting directed at a particular child or adolescent (Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001; Stocker, 1995). Tamrouti-Makkink et al. (2004) reported similar findings for opposite-sex but not same-sex sibling dyads. This finding suggests that if a child receives relatively positive parental treatment, his adjustment may be somewhat poorer than expected if his sibling receives even better parental treatment. Additionally, if a child receives relatively negative parental treatment, her adjustment may be somewhat better than expected if her sibling receives even poorer parental treatment. The amount of variance explained by differential parenting appears to be generally quite modest compared to the amount of variance explained by direct parenting quality (Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001).

Longitudinal Relations Between Differential Parenting and Child Adjustment

A few longitudinal studies have reported that earlier parental differential treatment appears to predict later adjustment. Results of these studies generally suggest that earlier differential parental treatment leads to later positive or negative sibling adjustment, rather than earlier positive or negative sibling adjustment leading to later parental differential treatment. For example, Tarullo et al. (1995) found that over time, persistent patterns of similar or differential maternal treatment were related to
psychological problems among younger but not older siblings. In another study, earlier differential parental hostility led to later differences in sibling delinquency. The sibling who was previously treated in a more hostile manner by parents was later more delinquent than the other sibling (Conger & Conger, 1994). McGuire et al. (1995) reported that earlier differences in siblings’ behavioural problems did not predict later maternal differential treatment, while earlier differential maternal discipline predicted later externalizing problems for older siblings.

Richmond, Stocker, and Rienks (2005) examined the relations among PDT, sibling relationship quality, and children’s adjustment in a 6-year, three-wave longitudinal study of 133 intact families. Over time, as children were favoured less by their parents than were their siblings, their externalizing problems increased, and for younger siblings only, their depressive symptoms increased.

In another 3-year, three-wave longitudinal study of 384 intact families containing adolescent siblings, Shebloski, Conger, and Widaman (2005) found that adolescents’ perceptions that parents favoured their siblings over them predicted a decrease in self-worth over time. However, for later born siblings, self-worth also predicted perceptions of parental partiality over time. This relation was not significant for first-born siblings, for whom earlier perceptions of parental partiality predicted later observed parental differential treatment. Shebloski et al. (2005) suggested that first-born siblings may have a strong influence on their parents’ behaviour due to their privileged status in the family.

*Birth Order and Parental Differential Treatment*

Results of studies examining the relation between birth order and siblings’ reactivity to parental differential treatment have been somewhat inconsistent. Several
studies employing samples of adolescent siblings found that older siblings are more reactive to differential parental behaviour than younger siblings (Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001; Kowal, Kramer, Krull, & Crick, 2002; Shebloski et al., 2005; Tamrouti-Makkink et al., 2004). It may be that older siblings are more easily influenced by their parents than are younger siblings (Tamrouti-Makkink et al., 2004), or that earlier born adolescents compare their own parental treatment with that of their siblings more than do later born adolescents (Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001). Older siblings may be more sensitive to PDT because it threatens their privileged position in the family (Shebloski et al., 2005). Similarly, McHale, Updegraff, Jackson-Newsom, Tucker, & Crouter (2000) found that adolescents reacted more strongly to parental differential treatment than did younger children, perhaps due to their generally lower self-esteem, or because of the use of their more highly developed cognitive abilities to closely monitor PDT within their families.

Conversely, two studies employing samples of younger children reported that younger siblings were more negatively influenced by parental differential treatment than older siblings (McHale et al., 1995; Tarullo et al., 1995). It is proposed that older siblings may be less reactive to parental differential treatment, because they view differential treatment as legitimate. Older, more independent siblings may view their parents’ greater affection towards a younger sibling as appropriate based on the younger sibling’s developmental level (McHale et al., 1995).

The findings of studies investigating the relation between birth order and reactivity to parental differential treatment suggest that in samples of adolescent siblings, older siblings may be more sensitive to the effects of parental differential treatment.
Conversely, in samples of siblings in early, middle, or late childhood, younger siblings may be more negatively influenced by parental differential treatment. It is possible that children’s developmental status interacts with birth order to influence reactivity to parental differential treatment.

*Parental Differential Treatment in Divorced and Remarried Families*

Most studies of the relation between differential parental treatment and child adjustment have employed samples of intact families with continuously married parents or samples in which divorced or remarried families are not examined separately from intact families. However, a few studies have investigated how parental differential treatment may operate in divorced or remarried families. The findings of three studies examining different family structures are presented in this section.

Monahan et al. (1993) studied adolescent sibling pairs from divorced families. Adolescents’ adjustment was measured approximately 4.5 years after parental divorce. Sibling differences were associated in the expected direction with outcome variables, such that the sibling with higher parental involvement and lower parent-child conflict, for example, was better adjusted. Siblings who spent more time living apart after their parents’ divorce were more different than siblings who spent more time living together on parental treatment and adjustment; however, siblings living together also exhibited significant differences.

Mekos et al. (1996) examined parental differential treatment and adolescent adjustment in intact families and remarried families that had been established for longer than five years. Results revealed that differential parental treatment and differences in sibling adjustment were greater in remarried families than in non-divorced families,
particularly in remarried families in which siblings did not share a biological parent. Parental differential treatment was more strongly predictive of differences between siblings in adjustment in remarried families than in nondivorced families. In remarried families, the mother’s biological child was at greater risk for behavioural problems and poor parent- and stepparent-child relations than was the father’s child.

Kim, Hetherington, and Reiss (1999) found that parental hostile and coercive behaviours and poorer monitoring predicted adolescent siblings’ externalizing behaviours and deviant peer group association in stepfather families and non-stepfamilies. However, the relations between parental treatment and adolescent adjustment varied slightly between the two family types and for boys and girls. For example, mothers’ negativity was significantly related to higher levels of externalizing behaviour in both family types, while stepfathers’ negativity was more strongly related to adolescent adjustment than was biological fathers’ negativity. Poor maternal monitoring was associated with poor adjustment among boys from stepfamilies and among girls from intact families. Children from stepfamilies exhibited poorer adjustment and more negative parent-child relationships than children from intact families. Although this study did not explicitly investigate differential parenting, the findings are illustrative of the relations between parental negativity and monitoring and adolescent adjustment in different family types.

PDT and Sibling Relationship Quality

In addition to contributing to differences in siblings’ adjustment, differential parental treatment has also been studied as a possible factor contributing to the quality of sibling relationships (Plomin & Daniels, 1987). Equal treatment of siblings by parents appears to be important for the development of positive sibling relationships. This
finding may occur because the boundaries between family relationships are not fixed; events in one relationship, such as a negative relationship between a parent and one sibling, can affect behaviours and perceptions in another relationship, such as the sibling relationship (Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand, 1992).

In general, higher levels of differential parental treatment between siblings in the domains of conflict and negativity (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1992a, 1994; Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980), warmth and positivity (Brody, Stoneman, & Burke, 1987; Brody et al., 1992a, 1994; Stocker, Dunn, & Plomin 1989; Volling, 1997), and monitoring and control (Brody et al., 1987; Brody et al., 1992a; Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand, 1992; Stocker et al., 1989; Volling & Belsky, 1992) appear to be related to lower-quality sibling relationships characterized by negativity (Brody et al., 1992a; Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand, 1992; Stocker et al., 1989), conflict (Volling & Belsky, 1992), antisocial behaviour (Bryant & Crockenberg, 1980), little prosocial behaviour (Brody et al., 1987), few verbal interactions (Brody et al., 1987), hostility (Volling, 1997), and low involvement (Volling, 1997).

However, certain studies report that differential parental treatment in the domain of conflict and negativity (Brody, Stoneman, & Burke, 1987; Feinberg et al., 2003) is unrelated to the quality of sibling relationships. Several studies even report contradictory findings, such that increased levels of parental differential treatment in the domains of discipline (McHale et al., 1995; Volling, 1997), warmth and positivity (Brody et al., 1992a; Feinberg et al., 2003; Volling & Belsky, 1992), and managing (Brody et al., 1987) are related to higher quality sibling relationships characterized by warmth (Feinberg et al., 2003; McHale et al., 1995), positive behaviour (Brody et al., 1992a; Volling &
Belsky, 1992), little negative behaviour (Brody et al., 1992a; Brody et al., 1987), and low conflict (Feinberg et al., 2003; Volling, 1997). Children's perceptions of the fairness of PDT and the context in which PDT occurs may influence the link between PDT and its outcomes for siblings.

**Children's Perceptions of Fairness of Parental Differential Treatment**

The results of several studies have emphasized the importance of examining children's perceptions of the fairness of parental differential treatment (Kowal & Kramer, 1997; Kowal et al., 2002; Kowal, Krull, & Kramer, 2004; McHale et al., 2000). When children believe that the differences between the parental treatment they receive and the parental treatment their sibling receives are justified, parental differential treatment appears to have somewhat positive consequences for children's socioemotional adjustment (Kowal et al., 2002; McHale et al., 2000), sibling relationships (Kowal & Kramer, 1997; McHale et al., 2000), and parent-child relationships (Kowal et al., 2004). However, when children view parental differential treatment as unfair, this treatment may be related to poorer child adjustment (Kowal et al., 2002; McHale et al., 2000) and poorer quality parent-child (Kowal et al., 2004) and sibling (Kowal & Kramer, 1997) relationships.

Children rate PDT as fair in about 75% of the instances reported (Kowal & Kramer, 1997; Kowal et al., 2002). Early adolescents express several reasons why parental differential treatment of two siblings might occur, including age differences, personality differences, differences in parent-child relationships, differences in needs, and differences in tendency to actively seek out certain forms of parental treatment (Kowal & Kramer, 1997). Although perceived fairness of PDT appears to partially moderate the
association between PDT and child adjustment, some direct relations between PDT and child adjustment (Kowal et al., 2002) and between PDT and sibling relationship quality remain (Kowal & Kramer, 1997). McHale et al. (2000) note that simply perceiving PDT as fair does not ensure that siblings will experience positive outcomes; siblings who receive disfavoured parental treatment but perceive this treatment as very fair may be at risk for low self-esteem.

*Parental Differential Treatment When One Child Has Special Needs*

Several studies have examined the extent of parental differential treatment and its impact on child adjustment and sibling relationships in families containing one typically-developing sibling and one sibling with special needs (McHale & Pawletko, 1992; Quittner & Opipari, 1994; Wolf, Fisman, Ellison, & Freeman, 1998). These studies investigated whether PDT is more pronounced in these families, perhaps due to the effects of parental stress and greater differences in needs between siblings. Additionally, these studies sought to evaluate whether parental differential treatment would have less detrimental effects on siblings' adjustment in a context in which PDT was justified by one sibling's disability or chronic illness.

Wolf et al. (1998) reported that perceiving that one is preferred by parents over one's sibling was related to poorer adjustment (e.g., more internalizing and externalizing problems) for some children (i.e., siblings of children with pervasive developmental disorder), while perceiving that one's sibling is preferred by parents over oneself was related to poorer adjustment for other children (i.e., siblings of children with Down's syndrome). Perceptions of parental preferential treatment were unrelated to adjustment among siblings of non-disabled children. This finding emphasizes the importance of
examining the context in which parental differential treatment occurs, since contextual factors such as siblings’ particular needs and characteristics may influence the relation between differential parental treatment and child adjustment.

Quittner and Opipari (1994) found that maternal differential treatment (i.e., amount and quality of time spent with each child) was more pronounced in families containing a younger sibling with cystic fibrosis than in families with a healthy younger sibling. This finding supports the notion that parental differential treatment may be magnified in high risk families due to increased stress experienced by parents and increased demands placed on parents’ time and energy. The findings of this study may also be relevant for families at high risk due to parental separation or divorce.

McHale and Pawletko (1992) reported that in general, maternal differential treatment of siblings was more pronounced in families containing a younger sibling with mental retardation than in families containing two non-disabled children. Differential rates of maternal behaviour were generally related to poorer adjustment among children with a disabled younger sibling. Experiencing relatively more positive forms of maternal discipline (i.e., reasoning, compromise, mediation) was associated with poorer adjustment in older children with a disabled younger sibling and better adjustment in older children with a non-disabled younger sibling. Children with a disabled younger sibling may feel guilty when they receive more positive maternal behaviour than their younger sibling, perhaps believing that more attention should be paid to the younger child with greater needs. This guilt may lead to poorer adjustment. Conversely, for children with a typically developing younger sibling, receiving more positive maternal behaviour than their co-sibling may cause them to feel favoured, leading to more positive
adjustment. The sibling relationship quality of children with non-disabled younger siblings was more negatively affected by differential maternal treatment.

McHale and Pawletko (1992) suggest that children may evaluate different forms of differential parental treatment differently, such that differences in maternal warmth may have negative consequences for a child’s adjustment, but differences in the amount of time spent playing with or helping a child may be seen as appropriate to the different developmental levels of the two siblings. In families containing a disabled younger sibling, older siblings may view differential maternal treatment as fair, since disabled children have greater needs than their non-disabled older siblings do and require more parental attention. However, even justified differential treatment may result in the older sibling feeling jealous or neglected, which may lead to increased depressive or anxious feelings.

*Family Systems Theory*

Family stress may lead to higher levels of parental differential treatment. In family systems theory, marital conflict is thought to be associated with several types of parental differential treatment (Minuchin, 1974). Minuchin (1974) describes three types of “rigid triads,” which represent chronic boundary problems within the family system, including triangulation, detouring, and stable coalitions. These rigid triads occur when members of one subsystem (e.g., the spousal subsystem) attempt to negotiate the stresses in that subsystem through another subsystem (e.g., the parent-child subsystem).

Triangulation occurs when each parent demands that a child side with him or her against the other parent. The child is placed in a difficult position, since whenever she takes one parent’s side, she is automatically seen as attacking the other parent.
Triangulation appears especially likely to occur in families in which there are high levels of conflict between parents, such as divorcing families. Triangulation may result in parental differential treatment if one sibling is triangulated and the other sibling is not. A parent may treat the triangulated sibling more warmly than the co-sibling when the triangulated sibling is seen to be taking that parent’s side, but more negatively if the triangulated sibling is seen to be taking the other parent’s side.

Detouring occurs when spouses negotiate their stresses through a child. Its purpose is to maintain the illusion of harmony in the spousal subsystem. The parents pay excessive attention to any deviant behaviour of a child, which allows them to ignore their own marital problems by submerging them and dealing only with the problem of parenting their “deviant” child. Detouring may include attacking or scapegoating a child or defining a child as the source of all family problems due to his or her negative behaviour. Detouring may represent a form of parental differential treatment if one sibling is scapegoated, resulting in the scapegoated child receiving more negative parental treatment than the co-sibling.

A stable coalition occurs when one parent joins one child in a rigidly bounded, cross-generational alliance against the other parent. Stable coalitions represent a form of parental differential treatment, since the parent may treat the sibling with whom she has a coalition more positively than other siblings who are excluded from this parent-child alliance.

According to Minuchin (1974), all three types of “rigid triad” may occur in families with behavioural problems. These types of chronic boundary problems represent the interaction patterns typically observed in families who have children with severe
psychosomatic problems. These forms of parental differential treatment certainly appear to have negative consequences for children’s adjustment.

Another form of parental differential treatment may occur if one sibling in a family is seen as a “parental child” (Minuchin, 1974). A parental child is created when there is an allocation of parental power to one child in a family, and it can be a natural arrangement in single-parent families. However, problems can arise when the delegation of authority is not explicit, perhaps because siblings may see the parental child as being unfairly favoured by a parent. Difficulties can also occur if parents relinquish all parenting power, leaving the parental child to be the primary source of guidance, control, and decision-making in the family. These excessive demands placed on the parental child may overwhelm his or her coping abilities and interfere with his or her own needs. This form of parental differential treatment may lead to negative adjustment both for the parental child, who may not be able to cope with the responsibilities he has been given, and for other siblings, who may feel rejected and disfavoured by the parent when compared to the parental child.

Minuchin (1974) suggests that divorce can place stress on the family system as it attempts to adapt to decreased membership in the family. Following a parental separation or divorce, new family subsystems, rules, and lines of differentiation must develop. For example, the family unit that consisted, before the divorce, of two parents with their children must now become a family unit containing one parent with the children, while the other parent is excluded. Conflicts inevitably arise in transitional phases such as separation or divorce, and if these conflicts are not satisfactorily resolved, these transitional problems may lead to further problems in the family. Therefore, the
increased stress produced by a family transition such as separation or divorce seems likely to lead to increased parental differential treatment.

*Stress and Parental Differential Treatment*

Several empirical studies have investigated whether more parental differential treatment of siblings occurs in families experiencing high levels of stress. Parents may be less likely to follow the prescribed norms of treating all of their children equally when they are under stress (Crouter, McHale, & Tucker, 1999). When parental resources are primarily being devoted to dealing with stress, such as in a divorcing family, parents may devote less effort to treating both of their children equally. When parents are under stress, their parenting behaviours may become more driven by their personal preferences or by their children’s unique characteristics (Henderson, Hetherington, Mekos, & Reiss, 1996).

In stressful family circumstances, one sibling’s good coping abilities may not be related to another sibling’s adjustment to the same circumstances. If a parent favours one sibling by providing him with more emotional support and affection, this sibling is likely to be buffered from the negative effects of the stressful family situation, while the other sibling may be more negatively influenced. Differential parental treatment can therefore be seen as both a protective factor and a risk factor within families, since it serves to guard one sibling from poor outcomes while exposing another sibling to negative consequences (Henderson et al., 1996).

Evidence for a relation between parental stress and parental differential treatment has been mixed, with some studies finding a significant relation and other studies finding no relation (Crouter et al., 1999). The strongest evidence for a relation between stress
and parental differential treatment appears to come from studies of stress related to marital conflict. A marital relationship marked by high levels of conflict may lead to parental differential treatment if spouses who cannot resolve their marital conflict use their relationships with their children as a conflict resolution strategy. One child may be brought very close to the marital relationship, while another child may be kept distant from it, leading to parental differential treatment of two siblings in the same family (Reiss et al., 1994, as cited in Crouter et al., 1999).

According to Rutter (1987, as cited in Henderson et al., 1996), exposure to risk factors, such as parental differential treatment, under conditions of high stress may lead to poor adjustment, while exposure to these same risk factors under conditions of low stress may not be related to adjustment. Therefore, it is possible that the relation between high levels of parental differential treatment and poor child adjustment is stronger in high-stress families.

Several studies report that family stress due to marital conflict is associated with the occurrence of parental differential treatment (e.g., Crouter et al., 1999; Deal, 1996; Jenkins, Rasbash, & O'Connor, 2003; Velling & Elins, 1998). Parental differential treatment has also been reported to occur more frequently in divorced than intact families (Barrett Singer & Weinstein, 2000), and single parents appear more likely to engage in differential negativity towards their children than do married parents (Jenkins et al., 2003). Higher levels of other family stressors, such as family chaos, parental depression, and low socioeconomic status (Asbury, Dunn, Pike, & Plomin, 2003; Jenkins et al, 2003), are also associated with increased levels of PDT.

Under certain circumstances, however, parental differential treatment may be
unrelated to parental stress (Crouter et al., 1997; Volling, 1997; Volling & Elins, 1998). For example, in one study, families in which all members reported above-average levels of PDT did not experience higher parental stress levels than other families (Crouter et al., 1999). In these families, where all family members are aware of and accept the relatively high levels of parental differential treatment, PDT may be viewed as justified. These families were likely to contain two children who differed substantially from each other, such as opposite-sex siblings far apart in age. In these families, parents may be more willing to recognize and report PDT and to see it as normative and adaptive.

Volling (1997) reported that differential parental discipline of two siblings was related to positive family functioning, perhaps because it is adaptive to discipline children based on their different developmental levels. However, differential parental favouritism was linked to negative family functioning, including marital dissatisfaction (Volling, 1997), perhaps because it may be indicative of an alliance between a mother and one child that has a negative effect on marital relationship quality.

Only one study reviewed reported that increased family stress levels did not increase the frequency or degree of PDT (Henderson et al., 1996). However, parents who engaged in higher levels of marital conflict also directed higher overall levels of negativity and coercion and lower levels of warmth toward their children. In this study, high levels of family stress also did not strengthen the relation between parental differential treatment and adolescent adjustment. It is suggested that the stressors examined (economic stress, parental depression, and marital conflict) may not have discriminated between siblings because all siblings in a family may experience these stressors similarly. Alternatively, siblings’ perceptions of the stressfulness of family
circumstances may be more important to consider than the parent reports employed in this study, and may better predict their adjustment than more objective measures of stress. According to parents’ reports, both siblings would experience high family stress, but only one sibling might actually perceive that they were experiencing high levels of stress.

Critique of Parental Differential Treatment Research

High quality research in the area of parental differential treatment includes longitudinal studies sampling large numbers of families containing two or more siblings. Whenever possible, samples that are representative of the population from which they are drawn are used. Multiple raters, including parents, children, teachers, or observers, are used to measure constructs of interest, such as PDT and children’s adjustment. In addition, multiple measurement techniques, including written questionnaires, qualitative interviews, or observations of family interactions, are often employed. One example of such a study is the Nonshared Environment in Adolescent Development Study (Feinberg et al., 2000; Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001; Henderson et al., 1996; Reiss et al., 1995). Other such studies include those by Boyle and his colleagues (Boyle et al., 2004; Jenkins et al., 2003), McHale et al. (1995), Richmond et al. (2005), and Shebloski et al. (2005).

The results of these studies are fairly consistent with the results of other studies in this area, including cross-sectional studies, those employing smaller, convenience samples, or those in which all measures are completed by one rater. Parental differential treatment is generally found to influence children’s adjustment negatively, particularly for the child who is receiving less preferential (i.e., less positive, more negative) parental treatment than his or her sibling.
Parental differential treatment appears to have particularly detrimental effects on children’s adjustment when it occurs in the context of poor quality direct parenting (Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001). In addition, these longitudinal studies emphasize that the relation between PDT and children’s adjustment is most likely reciprocal in nature. Some studies have reported that while earlier PDT predicts later sibling differences in adjustment, earlier differences between siblings in adjustment are also predictive of later more pronounced PDT (e.g., Shebloski et al., 2005).

A recent quantitative review of nonshared environmental variables influencing siblings, including parental differential treatment, found that effect sizes were greater in longitudinal than cross-sectional studies. However, when studies conducted both longitudinal and cross-sectional analyses, effect sizes were larger for cross-sectional analyses (Turkheimer & Waldron, 2000). With regard to rater, effect sizes of nonshared environmental variables on siblings’ outcomes were greatest for child reports and observations, and smallest for fathers’ reports (Turkheimer & Waldron, 2000). Overall, effect sizes were fairly small for parental differential treatment predicting sibling outcomes (Turkheimer & Waldron, 2000). This finding has been supported by other researchers, who have found that the effects of parental differential treatment on children’s adjustment are small to moderate in size (e.g., Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001).

Impact of Divorce on Children’s Adjustment

In general, children from divorced families tend to exhibit more adjustment problems than do children from intact families, although the differences between these two groups of children appear relatively small in magnitude (Kelly, 2000). Children who
experience multiple family transitions (i.e., divorce, remarriage, subsequent divorce) experience the most adjustment difficulties (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). In earlier studies, in which children from divorced families were compared to children from intact families without taking into consideration underlying differences between these two groups, children from divorced families exhibited poorer adjustment. More recently, it has become apparent that although divorce leads to stressful changes and difficulties for both parents and children, it may also lead to reduced conflict, more positive interpersonal relationships, and opportunities for personal growth and enhanced well-being (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Lamb, Sternberg, & Thompson, 1997). In general, children from divorced and remarried families appear to show more variability in their adjustment than children from intact families (Hetherington, 1993).

**Short-Term Outcomes of Parental Divorce**

After parental divorce, many children experience short-term difficulties. Symptoms of distress following parental divorce tend to last 1 to 2 years (Lamb et al., 1997). In infancy and toddlerhood, children tend to react to parental divorce with symptoms of depression and anxiety, including psychosomatic symptoms (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). Slightly older children may feel depressed, lonely, helpless, anxious, and angry, and may be non-compliant, demanding, antisocial, and experience academic problems (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Lamb et al, 1997). Divorce appears to be most strongly related to externalizing problems, such as antisocial behaviour and aggression, as well as to decreases in social responsibility, capacity for self-regulation, cognitive skills, and academic achievement. The influence of divorce is less strong, but still apparent, for internalizing problems, such as depression or anxiety, and difficulties
with interpersonal relationships (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

**Long-Term Outcomes of Parental Divorce**

In most cases, children's difficulties following parental divorce ameliorate with time; however, even in the long term, children from divorced families tend to exhibit poorer social, emotional, and academic adjustment than children from intact families (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Long-term negative effects of divorce include higher levels of delinquency, behavioural problems, depression, poor academic achievement, interpersonal difficulties, poor self-esteem, and pessimistic views of the future (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999; Lamb et al., 1997). Long-term effects of divorce tend to be less consistently reported in the literature than short-term effects. In the long term, the majority of children whose parents divorce fall within the normal range of psychosocial development (Lamb et al., 1997).

**Outcomes of Parental Divorce in Adolescence and Young Adulthood**

Among adolescents and young adults, the effects of earlier parental divorce may once again become evident (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Adolescents and young adults from divorced families may have increased difficulty in forming intimate relationships, in educational and occupational achievement, and in developing independence. Adolescents from divorced families are more likely to become adolescent parents, drop out of high school, associate with delinquent peer groups, engage in higher levels of antisocial behaviour, and experience higher levels of internalizing and externalizing problems than adolescents from intact homes. Adolescents who become disengaged and distant from their families following divorce may be particularly at risk (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Some research has suggested that parental
divorce during adolescence may have more negative consequences than earlier parental
divorce (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999), perhaps since adolescence is already a time of many
changes, including the advent of intimate relationships, increased independence, and
separation from the family. Additionally, adolescents will soon make the transition into
young adulthood, which brings about more changes that may be difficult to negotiate for
adolescents whose lives have recently been disrupted by parental divorce.

Young adults from divorced families are less likely to attend or graduate from
college and more likely to be unemployed, receiving social assistance, or having financial
difficulties than young adults from intact families (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).
In the domain of interpersonal relationships, young adults from divorced families may
have difficulties in their relationships with parents, children, and romantic partners
(Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Kot & Shoemaker, 1999; Wallerstein & Lewis,
1998).

Despite the multiple negative outcomes described for children, adolescents, and
young adults from divorced families, the effects of divorce may be positive in some
instances. When divorce ends a high-conflict, abusive, or neglectful home environment
and creates a more nurturing family environment, children tend to show improved
adjustment (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Positive outcomes reported to follow
divorce include an increased sense of responsibility, greater social responsiveness,
increased autonomy, higher self-esteem and self-control, and more positive views of
future relationships (Kot & Shoemaker, 1999).

Effects of Marital Conflict on Child Adjustment

The impact of marital conflict on children’s adjustment may be more important
that the impact of the divorce itself (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Kelly, 2000; Kot & Shoemaker, 1999). Results of prospective longitudinal studies reveal that children whose parents will later divorce exhibit higher levels of adjustment problems years prior to the divorce, perhaps due to increased exposure to marital conflict. Additionally, children from high conflict intact families exhibit similar adjustment difficulties to children from divorced families, particularly in the externalizing domain (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

High levels of conflict appear to impact child adjustment more negatively in divorced families than in intact families, perhaps due to increased stress levels and decreased resources available in divorced families, particularly immediately following a divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Divorced parents who are able to cooperate in the domains of visitation, discipline, and daily routines and who are able to resolve their conflicts in a healthy manner have children with more positive adjustment (Dreman, 2000). Children whose parents remain engaged in high levels of destructive conflict long after divorce are at higher risk for developing adjustment problems (Lamb et al., 1997). Indeed, although continued contact with both parents following divorce can benefit children, frequent contact with both parents may be harmful for children whose parents’ post-divorce relationship is hostile and conflictual (Lamb et al., 1997).

Children from divorced families and children from high conflict intact families exhibit more adjustment problems than children from harmonious, low conflict intact families. When divorce leads to increased conflict, children, adolescents, and young adults from divorced homes exhibit higher levels of adjustment problems than do those from high conflict intact homes. However, when divorce leads to decreased conflict and
increased family harmony, children from divorced families do not differ significantly from children from low conflict intact families, and their adjustment is more positive than children from high conflict intact families (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

Following divorce, acrimony between parents tends to decrease substantially (Kelly, 2000). However, approximately 25% of divorced parents continue to engage in high levels of conflict in which children feel caught in the middle (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Adolescents who feel caught in the middle of conflict between their parents after divorce are more poorly adjusted than children whose parents engage in conflict frequently, but do not place their children in the middle of their arguments (Kelly, 2000).

Post-Divorce Parenting and Child Adjustment

Children’s adjustment following a divorce is strongly related to parenting quality (Dreman, 2000; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Kelly, 2000; Lamb et al., 1997). High quality parenting includes warmth and support, good communication, responsiveness to children’s needs, monitoring, positive discipline practices, and firm, consistent control. Additionally, it is important that parents not expose their children to interparental conflict, enter into parent-child alliances that exclude the other parent, or allow their children to become caught in the middle of parental conflicts (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

Following a divorce, parents’ own psychological problems, including depression and anxiety, may lead to poorer parenting quality, especially for difficult or demanding children (Dreman, 2000; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Lamb et al., 1997). Parenting quality tends to improve as time passes following a divorce, as parents’ own
emotional states improve and as the new family system establishes stable roles and relationships. On average, however, divorced parents’ parenting is less authoritative than that of married parents (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Parental differential treatment may occur following divorce due to parents’ decreased resources and the difficulty of parenting a particular child as compared to his or her sibling.

Maintaining contact with the non-custodial parent (normally the father) may be more important for boys than for girls (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). When interparental conflict is relatively low, having contact with a supportive, authoritative, and well-adjusted non-custodial parent leads to improved child adjustment (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Kelly, 2000), particularly for children of the same gender as the non-custodial parent. If interparental conflict is high, children, particularly boys, who have higher levels of contact with non-residential fathers are more poorly adjusted. This finding may occur because mother-son conflict and tension increases significantly more following a divorce than does mother-daughter conflict. Therefore, when boys have high contact with fathers and parents argue often, conflict between boys and mothers may also increase, leading to poorer child adjustment (Kelly, 2000).

Quality of contact between fathers and children after divorce appears to be more important than frequency of contact. Fathers who helped their children complete homework, listened to their children’s difficulties, provided emotional support, and parented authoritatively had children with better academic achievement and less internalizing and externalizing symptoms than fathers who engaged in less adequate parenting (Kelly, 2000).
*Sibling* and *Post-Divorce Adjustment*

Studies of siblings' adjustment and coping following a parental divorce are just beginning to emerge (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Different family members may perceive the same events differently, and therefore common events such as parental divorce may influence their adjustment in different ways.

A search of the literature revealed only one published study that directly examined siblings' adjustment following parental divorce. Kurdek (1989) examined the relations among siblings' and mothers' reports of early adolescent siblings' divorce-specific adjustment, general behavioural adjustment, birth order, and gender composition of the sibling dyad.

After controlling for age, siblings' self-reports of understanding of the divorce, problematic beliefs regarding the divorce, and general understanding of conflict resolution were significantly correlated with their co-siblings' self-reports. Older siblings had a more mature understanding of the divorce and general conflict resolution, fewer problematic beliefs regarding the divorce, and a more internal locus of control than younger siblings. Sister-sister dyads showed a more mature understanding of the divorce and general conflict resolution than brother-brother dyads. After controlling for age, mothers' reports of siblings' problematic beliefs about the divorce, emotional adjustment, dependency on adults, and aggression were significantly correlated with mothers' reports regarding co-siblings. According to mothers' reports, older siblings were better adjusted than younger siblings, exhibiting more positive emotional reactions to the divorce and less dependency on adults.

Kurdek (1989) suggests that older and younger siblings may process divorce-
related events differently due to cognitive development and socialization practices. He proposes that the greater risk for boys for short- and long-term problems related to parental divorce often reported in the literature may be partially due to limitations in interpersonal reasoning, since brother-brother dyads reasoned less maturely than did sister-sister dyads.

Although Kurdek (1989) found that sibling differences in divorce-specific adjustment and general behavioural adjustment following a parental divorce may be related to gender and birth order, this study did not investigate specific mechanisms leading siblings to adjust differently following parental divorce. In the present study, several sibling-related factors that may influence the present adjustment of young adults from divorced families are examined: past perceptions of parental differential treatment, fairness of parental differential treatment, and differential exposure to interparental conflict.

Relation Between Marital Conflict and Child Adjustment

As reported in the previous section, interparental conflict appears to be a mechanism through which divorce negatively affects children (Cummings & Davies, 2001), and interparental conflict may have a more direct influence on child adjustment than divorce. The association between marital conflict and children’s adjustment, including externalizing and internalizing problems, has been widely studied and is well-established (Cummings & Davies, 2001; Davies & Cummings, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 1990).

Recent research suggests that marital conflict may more strongly predict internalizing than externalizing problems, since angry marital conflict leads to distress
and emotional arousal in children. One hypothesis is that marital conflict may lead
directly to internalizing problems and indirectly to externalizing problems through its
negative influence on parenting quality (Cummings & Davies, 2001). Longitudinally,
high levels of marital conflict predict child maladjustment, and children’s responses to
marital conflict (e.g., emotional reactivity) appear to be relatively stable over time.
Additionally, marital conflict predicts poorer family functioning, including lower quality
parenting, and poorer peer relationships for children. Marital conflict and marital
violence are related to child maladjustment even after taking into account other family
attributes, such as parental depression (Cummings & Davies, 2001).

Only a few studies, however, have examined the impact of marital conflict on
siblings (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1994; Mekos et al., 1996; Richmond & Stocker,
2003; Skopp et al., 2005). Differences between siblings in exposure to marital conflict
and interpretations of marital conflict may contribute to siblings’ adjustment.

Conflict Properties Influencing Child Adjustment

Several properties of interparental conflict may influence the stressfulness of
conflict for children and the impact of conflict on children’s adjustment. Conflict that is
frequent, intense (i.e., involving physical aggression, high hostility, or negative affect),
child-related, and poorly resolved is associated with higher levels of distress, behavioural
problems, and emotional insecurity in children (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Grych &
Fincham, 1990). Conversely, interparental conflict that is successfully resolved can
provide children with models of healthy conflict resolution and lead to increased social
competence, emotional security, and improved coping skills (Davies & Cummings,
1994).
Destructive and Constructive Marital Conflict

Cummings and Davies (2001) distinguish between destructive marital conflict, which has adverse effects on children, and constructive marital conflict, which may benefit children. Destructive forms of marital conflict involve violence, fear, nonverbal conflict, verbal aggression, withdrawal, hostility and anger, aggression against objects, threats to end the marriage, and ignoring. Constructive aspects of conflict include affection, support, problem-solving, apologizing, compromise, changing topics, postponing the discussion, humour, successful resolution, direct explanations about conflict resolution, and optimism for future conflict resolution. Children exhibit increased emotional insecurity in response to destructive marital conflict and increased emotional security in response to constructive marital conflict. Parents’ emotional expressions during marital conflict may influence children’s emotions and behaviours as much as or more than specific conflict strategies. Additionally, children’s perceptions of conflict, rather than objective characteristics of conflict, are more predictive of the effects of conflict on children (Cummings & Davies, 2001).

Mechanisms

Direct and indirect mechanisms through which marital conflict may influence child adjustment include modelling, exposure to stress, and parent-child relationships. Parents who engage in aggressive, hostile behaviours during conflict episodes may provide their children with dysfunctional models of conflict resolution techniques (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Experiencing high levels of intense stress due to marital conflict may lead children to use immature or maladaptive coping strategies, including aggressive or withdrawn behaviour (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Children who are exposed to
interparental conflict may experience a decrease in parent-child relationship quality, including parental rejection, hostility, unresponsiveness, emotional unavailability, poor attachment, inconsistent discipline, and rigid psychological control, which may lead to higher levels of emotional insecurity and behavioural problems (Cummings & Davies, 2001; Davies & Cummings, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 1990).

Cognitions, emotions, and coping strategies may also act as mediators in the relation between marital conflict and child maladjustment (Cummings & Davies, 2001). Children’s cognitions, particularly self-blame, perceived threat to self, and internalized negative representations of family relationships, may mediate the relation between marital conflict and internalizing symptoms.

With regard to emotions, children tend to react to marital conflict with fear, anger, and distress. Heightened emotional reactions following interparental conflict are related to children’s interfering in and avoidance of marital conflict, difficulty with behavioural regulation, aggression, and negative internal representations of the meaning of marital conflict for the self and the family. In the long term, children who exhibit heightened emotional reactions and high levels of distress in response to marital conflict are at higher risk for developing internalizing and externalizing difficulties (Cummings & Davies, 2001).

Findings regarding children’s coping strategies in the face of marital conflict are mixed. Some studies find that children who are exposed to high levels of marital conflict are more likely to use intervention and avoidance coping strategies, and that these coping strategies are associated with poor child adjustment, while other studies report non-significant or opposite findings. The examination of the effects of marital conflict on
children’s coping styles is important, since maladaptive coping strategies can lead to a variety of psychological difficulties (Cummings & Davies, 2001).

Family characteristics such as parental psychopathology and sibling relationship quality may moderate the relation between interparental conflict and children’s adjustment (Cummings & Davies, 2001). Parental depression and parental alcohol abuse may increase the negative effects of marital conflict on children. High levels of marital conflict have been found to co-occur with conflicted, rivalrous sibling relationships. Sibling relationship quality, in turn, correlates with child adjustment. Alternatively, good sibling relationships may help buffer children from the negative impact of interparental conflict (Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003).

**Cognitive-Contextual Model of Marital Conflict**

Grych and Fincham (1990) propose a cognitive-contextual framework for understanding how marital conflict influences children’s adjustment. This framework discusses the distal and proximal contexts in which conflict occurs. Distal context represents stable or very slowly changing factors, including the child’s previous experience with conflict, perceptions of the emotional climate of the family, temperament, and gender. Proximal context represents the child’s thoughts and feelings as the conflict is occurring, including expectations for a particular conflict episode and mood.

The cognitive aspect of Grych and Fincham’s (1990) framework is related to children’s processing of marital conflict. First, primary processing occurs, in which children attend to the conflict episode and gain information about the negativity, threat, and relevance of the conflict. Primary processing leads children to decide whether the
conflict is threatening. Next, secondary processing occurs, in which children make attributions of responsibility or blame regarding the conflict and create efficacy expectations regarding their ability to cope with the conflict. Another important element of this framework is affect. The affect that children experience as a result of exposure to interparental conflict influences how they evaluate the significance of the conflict and how they react to the conflict. All of the elements in Grych and Fincham’s (1990) framework are likely to vary based on a child’s age or developmental level.

Based on their cognitive-contextual framework, Grych and Fincham (1990) propose two additional mechanisms through which interparental conflict may influence children’s adjustment. The first mechanism is dysfunctional attributions. Children who view marital conflict as stable and global and who blame themselves for their parents’ conflict may be more poorly adjusted than those who view conflict as temporary and specific to one particular event and who attribute responsibility for the conflict to others, such as their parents. The second mechanism is maladaptive coping strategies. Children may cope with marital conflict by acting out or withdrawing; these behaviours may be adaptive, because they succeed in reducing or stopping conflict. However, children who continue to act aggressively or withdraw in all conflict situations may experience negative consequences, including poor interpersonal relationships.

*Emotional Security Model of Marital Conflict*

Davies and Cummings (1994) propose that emotional security mediates the relation between exposure to interparental conflict and child adjustment. Emotional security is defined as “emotional well-being and a capacity for emotional regulation in the face of stress” (Davies & Cummings, 1994, p. 389). Emotional insecurity is
influenced by children's history of exposure to destructive marital conflict, and it leads to increased adjustment difficulties and influences future responses to conflict. Children who have a history of greater exposure to marital conflict appear to become sensitized to conflict and subsequently respond with more negative emotions, including distress and anger, and more maladaptive behaviours, such as aggression and attempts to mediate between their parents (Cummings & Davies, 2001; Davies & Cummings, 1994). Additionally, they may perceive conflict in ambiguous situations (Grych & Fincham, 1990).

Davies and Cummings (1994) propose that emotional security influences child adjustment in three ways. First, emotional security influences children's emotional regulation, including feelings, behaviour, and physiological arousal. Children who are exposed to frequent, destructive marital conflict may experience chronically elevated levels of arousal and have difficulty regulating their emotions and behaviour, which may lead to adjustment problems. Second, emotional security motivates children to cope with events such as marital conflict by trying to regulate their parents' behaviour. Children may try to intervene in marital conflict in order to increase their sense of emotional security. This may be temporarily adaptive, successfully ending conflict and reducing children's feelings of distress, but may lead to persistent patterns of aggressive or disruptive behaviour. Third, emotional security affects how children view relationships in their family. Children who have a history of exposure to frequent, destructive marital conflict may develop negative internal representations of themselves and others, leading to poor adjustment over time.
Patterns of Family Functioning and Child Adjustment

Kerig (1995) examined the relation between marital conflict and child adjustment in four clusters of families. In cohesive families, all family members felt close to one another. In separate families, all family members felt distant from one another. In detouring families, the child was excluded from a very close parental alliance. In triangulated families, either a strong parent-child alliance existed, or the child was caught in the middle, with each parent trying to establish an alliance with the child.

Triangulated couples experienced the poorest marital adjustment and the most destructive child-rated marital conflict. This finding supports family systems theory, which suggests that triangulation of a child can interfere with marital problems and detract from the couple's ability to resolve conflict, leading to increased tension in the marriage and family (Minuchin, 1974). Detouring couples rated their marital adjustment as good. This pattern also supports family systems theory, which proposes that detouring couples form a strong alliance in order to attend to the problems of their child, idealizing their marriage and denying that conflict exists. Children from detouring families were most likely to blame themselves for marital conflict.

With regard to child adjustment, children who described their families as detouring were rated by their parents as exhibiting the highest levels of externalizing and internalizing problems. Family systems theory suggests that detouring couples may, at least in the short-term, successfully avoid marital conflict and tension, but this may result in poorer adjustment for their child (Minuchin, 1974). Children who rated their families as triangulated were no more likely to exhibit adjustment difficulties than those who rated their families as cohesive, perhaps because most children in triangulated families were
involved in a strong parent-child alliance. This supportive, close parent-child relationship may buffer the child from the effects of family discord (Rutter, 1987, as cited in Kerig, 1995). However, according to mothers' reports, children from triangulated families exhibited high levels of total adjustment problems.

Kerig's (1995) findings may be relevant for the study of parental differential treatment. In families containing more than one sibling, certain patterns of family functioning, such as triangulation and detouring, may result in differential parental treatment of the two siblings. These types of parental differential treatment, related to higher levels of marital conflict, may lead to poor child adjustment.

*Differential Exposure to Marital Conflict*

Differential exposure to marital conflict has been examined in a few studies as a possible predictor of siblings' adjustment. In general, the sibling who is exposed to higher levels of marital conflict is more poorly adjusted. Additionally, witnessing marital conflict may influence sibling relationship quality; siblings who are infrequently exposed to overt marital conflict appear to have more harmonious sibling relationships, characterized by high warmth and low conflict (Brody et al., 1994).

Three studies examined the relation between differential exposure to marital conflict and siblings' adjustment. Mekos et al. (1996) reported that the frequency with which children were exposed to marital discord did not differ between non-divorced and remarried families. This finding may not be surprising, because all remarriages had been established for at least five years. In all families, differential exposure to marital conflict was related to differences in sibling problem behaviour, including substance use and delinquency. In both family types, the more deviant sibling was exposed more to marital
conflict. Siblings who exhibit more negative adjustment, particularly externalizing
behaviour problems, may be more likely to be exposed to marital conflict, especially if
parents argue about how to manage the more poorly adjusted sibling’s behaviour.

In Richmond and Stocker’s (2003) study of early adolescent siblings, older
siblings were exposed to more marital conflict than younger siblings, but younger
siblings felt more threatened by marital conflict than older siblings. Age differences
between siblings were not related to differential exposure to marital conflict, perhaps due
to the limited range of age differences in this study (9 months to 4 years). Siblings who
differ greatly in age may experience marital conflict differently. Male older siblings
blamed themselves more for marital conflict than did female older siblings. Richmond
and Stocker (2003) suggest that older brothers may be the subject of marital conflict more
often than older sisters, or they may feel more responsible for family well-being.

The sibling who was exposed to higher levels of marital conflict was more likely
to experience higher levels of depression, externalizing problems, and self-reported
behavioural conduct problems. The sibling who felt more to blame for conflict was more
likely to experience higher levels of depression and self-reported behavioural conduct
problems. After controlling for parental differential treatment, differences in exposure to
marital conflict and self-blame still accounted for unique variance in adjustment
(Richmond & Stocker, 2003).

Richmond and Stocker (2003) used a sample of intact families in which high
levels of marital conflict did not occur. The relation between exposure to and appraisals
of marital conflict and sibling adjustment may be different in samples characterized by
high levels of marital conflict, such as violent or divorced families.
Skopp et al. (2005) examined differences in siblings’ exposure to interparental conflict in a sample of 112 sibling pairs and their mothers who had sought assistance at domestic violence shelters. One sibling’s exposure to interparental conflict was significantly correlated with the other sibling’s exposure to conflict; however, correlations were low to moderate in size, indicating that each sibling witnessed somewhat different amounts of conflict between parents. Siblings who felt more threatened by interparental conflict were more likely to exhibit higher levels of internalizing problems, while siblings who blamed themselves more for conflict between parents were more likely to exhibit higher levels of both internalizing and externalizing problems.

The present study examines the impact of perceptions of past differential exposure to interparental conflict on the adjustment of young adults from divorced and intact families.

The Present Study

This study was a retrospective examination of the impact of perceptions of past family experiences on older adolescents’ and young adults’ present adjustment. This age group was studied in light of their mature cognitive abilities, which would allow them to reflect insightfully on events that occurred during childhood or adolescence and to integrate past and present experiences. Reflecting on parental divorce and other aspects of family relationships is also thought to be salient during this developmental phase, when young people typically become involved in their first serious romantic relationships. Using a sample of older adolescents and young adults allowed for an examination of how perceptions of earlier family experiences influence current
adjustment. Finally, most research to date that examined the impact of parental
differential treatment (PDT) and differential exposure to marital conflict on adjustment
has focused on children or adolescents. The present study attempted to extend the
findings of previous studies to later developmental periods.

Due to the retrospective nature of this study, it was considered that the results
might be limited by features common to all retrospective research, such as participants’
inaccurate or biased memories. However, the goal of this study was to examine older
adolescents’ and young adults’ perceptions of their past experiences, their siblings’ past
experiences, and their present adjustment. The accuracy of participants’ memories may
be less important than how they perceive past events, since how they perceive and make
sense of past events may be more likely to influence their present adjustment than the
objective characteristics of these events.

The first goal of the present study was to examine the relations among young
persons’ perceptions of parenting quality, parental differential treatment, perceived
unfairness of parental differential treatment, direct and differential exposure to
interparental conflict, and present general adjustment.

There were five hypotheses regarding the relations among these variables:

1. Direction and amount of parental differential treatment and direction and
   amount of differential exposure to interparental conflict will be associated
   with general present adjustment. That is, participants who report receiving
   relatively poorer parenting than their siblings and being exposed to more
   conflict between parents than their siblings will report poorer adjustment. In
   addition, participants who report greater amounts of PDT and differential
exposure to interparental conflict in their families will report poorer adjustment than those reporting smaller amounts.

2. Perceptions of having received poor quality direct parenting in the past and having been exposed to high levels of interparental conflict (including more frequent conflict, more self-related conflict, and more triangulation) will be related to poorer current adjustment.

3. Perceptions of having received relatively more negative treatment by their parents than their siblings will be associated with poorer present adjustment, even after controlling for the perceived quality of direct parenting.

4. Perceptions of having been exposed to relatively higher levels of interparental conflict than one’s sibling will be associated with poorer current adjustment, even after controlling for direct exposure to interparental conflict.

5. Perceptions that past PDT was unfair will be related to poorer present adjustment, over and above the effects of direction of perceived past PDT. In addition, perceived unfairness of PDT will moderate the relation between direction of PDT and adjustment. That is, direction of PDT will predict poorer adjustment when PDT is perceived as unfair, but not when PDT is perceived as fair.

The second goal of this study was to compare older adolescents and young adults from intact families with those from divorced families on several variables. There are three hypotheses regarding these comparisons between family types.

1. Participants who experienced their parents' divorces will perceive more negative past direct parenting, greater amounts of past PDT, and more
unfairness of PDT than those raised in intact families.

2. Participants will perceive higher levels of past direct exposure to interparental conflict and greater amounts of differential exposure to conflict in divorced families than in intact families.

3. Participants from divorced families will report poorer current adjustment than participants from intact families.
Method

Participants

Participants included 375 older adolescents and young adults. For participants from intact families, participation criteria included coming from a family in which the parents had never separated or divorced. For participants from divorced families, participation criteria included coming from a family in which the biological parents had separated or divorced by the time the participant was 13 years old. The 13-year-old age cut-off was chosen so that parental divorce had occurred prior to middle adolescence (age 14 to 15 years), which was the time period regarding which participants were asked to report their family experiences. Additionally, all participants were required to be between 17 and 30 years old and to have at least one biological sibling.

Seven participants were excluded from the sample because they did not meet the inclusion criteria. One participant responded to the questionnaires regarding a half sibling. Four participants were older than 30 years. Two participants were from families in which their parents had separated or divorced after they were 13 years old.

The final sample (N = 368) included 363 students from the University of Victoria enrolled in undergraduate psychology courses and 5 university or college students from other areas of Canada and the United States. The 5 participants from other areas of Canada and the United States were similar to the 363 University of Victoria students on key demographic variables. For example, these 5 participants were college or university students between the ages of 18 and 28 years; they were primarily Caucasian, and they reported coming from lower middle class or upper middle class families.

Of these participants, 256 were from intact families (164 females; 92 males) and
112 were from divorced families (80 females; 32 males). Participants ranged in age from 17 to 30 years (M = 19.37, SD = 2.14). Participants self-reported their ethnicity: 78.3% were Caucasian, 9.2% were Asian, 2.2% were Middle Eastern, 3% were Indian, 4.3% reported multiple ethnicities, 1.7% reported another ethnicity, and 1.4% did not report their ethnicity. Participants reported coming primarily from upper middle class (66%) and lower middle class (22.8%) families; 6% of participants reported that they came from working class families, and 4.9% of participants reported that they came from upper class families. One participant (0.3%) did not report the social class of his or her family of origin.

The sample size of 368 was sufficient to ensure that regression coefficients would be stable; this stability is achieved when there are approximately 10 participants per parameter estimated in each statistical analysis.

**Measures**

**Demographic information.** In a self-report questionnaire (see Appendix A), participants were asked to provide their own and their sibling’s date of birth, gender, and birth order rank, the total number of children in their family, their ethnicity, the social class of their family of origin, and whether their parents had ever divorced or separated. Participants from divorced families were asked their age at the time of their parents’ separation or divorce, whether their parents had ever reconciled, whether their parents had remarried, how many parental remarriages they had experienced, whether their remarried parents had separated or divorced, and how many break-ups of these remarriages they had experienced. Participants from divorced families were also asked about their own living arrangements and their sibling’s living arrangements following
their parents’ divorce. This demographic information was collected primarily for descriptive purposes.

Participants who had more than one sibling were asked to follow specific instructions to determine which sibling about whom to complete the sibling questionnaires. If they had only one sibling aged 19 years or older, they were instructed to respond to the questionnaires regarding this sibling. If they had more than one sibling aged 19 years or older, they were instructed to respond to the questionnaires regarding the sibling closest to them in age. If they did not have a sibling aged 19 years or older, they were instructed to respond to the questionnaires regarding the sibling closest to them in age.

A summary of the constructs, variables, measures, and subscales used in this study is presented in Table 1.
Table 1

* Constructs Assessed and Measures Employed in the Present Study *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Parenting</th>
<th>Conflict</th>
<th>Adjustment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>Parental differential treatment (PDT)</td>
<td>Perceived unfairness of PDT</td>
<td>Direct parental treatment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>Sibling Inventory of Differential Experience (SIDE; Daniels &amp; Plomin, 1985)</td>
<td>Kowal, Krull, &amp; Kramer, 2004 (9 items)</td>
<td>Colorado Parental Child-Rearing Scale (CPCRS; George &amp; Bloom, 1997) (20 items)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subscales</td>
<td>1.Differential Affection (5 items)</td>
<td>Participants selected whether they believe the parental behaviour was fair or unfair for each item on the SIDE. (9 items)</td>
<td>1.Affection (5 items)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.Differential Control (4 items)</td>
<td>2.Punitive-ness (5 items)</td>
<td>2.Content (4 items)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.Father</td>
<td>3.Control (5 items)</td>
<td>3.Triangulation (5 items)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.Mother</td>
<td>4.Lax Discipline (5 items)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>2.Father</td>
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*Parenting.* As can be seen in Table 1, participants completed three questionnaires regarding the parenting that they and their sibling received during their middle adolescent years when they were 14 to 15 years old (Grades 9 and 10). These three parenting
questionnaires included the SIDE (Daniels & Plomin, 1985), the CPCRS (George & Bloom, 1997), and Kowal et al.’s (2004) measure of perceived unfairness of PDT. Middle adolescence was chosen because it is close enough to young adulthood that participants were likely to readily recall their family experiences during this time period. Additionally, participants would have been young enough in middle adolescence to still have been living at home with their siblings. Items contained in these questionnaires are presented in Appendix A.

*Parental differential treatment.* Participants completed two subscales of the Sibling Inventory of Differential Experience (SIDE; Daniels & Plomin, 1985) that assess differential parenting: Differential Affection and Differential Control. These two subscales ask respondents to compare their experiences in the domain of parental treatment with their perceptions of their sibling’s treatment by parents. Participants completed each subscale twice, once regarding differential treatment by mothers and once regarding differential treatment by fathers. Participants responded to the questionnaire concerning their general perceptions of parental differential treatment that occurred when they were 14 to 15 years old (Grades 9 and 10).

The Differential Affection subscale focuses on parents’ differential pride, enjoyment, understanding, interest, and favouring targeted towards their two children, and it contains 5 items. The Differential Control subscale targets parents’ differential strictness, punishment, discipline, and blame targeted towards their two children, and it contains 4 items. Possible ratings for each item range from “-2” to “2”. A rating of “-2” indicates that a particular parental behaviour was directed toward the participant’s sibling much more than to the respondent. A rating of “0” indicates that both siblings received
the same amount of the parental behaviour. A rating of “2” indicates that the parental
behaviour was directed toward the participant much more than to the sibling.
Additionally, for each item, participants were asked to select whether they now believe
that this parental behaviour was fair (coded as “0”) or unfair (coded as “1”) (Kowal,
Krull, & Kramer, 2004).

Eight parental differential treatment scores and two unfairness scores were
computed as follows. Four scores for Direction of Mother’s Differential Control,
Direction of Father’s Differential Control, Direction of Mother’s Differential Affection,
and Direction of Father’s Differential Affection were created. Direction scores for
differential control were created by taking the mean score of the 4 subscale items for
mothers and for fathers. Higher positive scores indicate that the participant received
more parental control than the sibling, while higher negative scores indicate that the
sibling received more parental control than the participant. Direction scores for
differential affection were created by reverse coding the 5 subscale items and taking the
mean for mothers and fathers. These items were reverse coded so that higher positive
scores on both parental differential treatment variables (Affection and Control) would
indicate that participants received more negative parental treatment than their siblings.
Due to the reverse coding, higher positive scores indicate that the participant received
less parental affection than the sibling, while higher negative scores indicate that the
sibling received less parental affection than the participant. For each direction of PDT
score, the minimum possible score was -2 and the maximum possible score was 2.

Four scores for Amount of Mother’s Differential Control, Amount of Father’s
Differential Control, Amount of Mother’s Differential Affection, and Amount of Father’s
Differential Affection were created. Amount scores for differential control and affection were computed by squaring the participant's score on each item and taking the mean score for all squared items on each subscale. Higher scores indicate higher amounts of differential parental treatment, regardless of which sibling was treated preferentially. For each amount of PDT score, the minimum possible score was 0 and the maximum possible score was 4. In order for all participants to be included in all analyses, a conservative approach was taken to the replacement of missing data in this study. Participants who were missing one of the 8 PDT scores were assigned the mean score for the entire sample for that particular subscale.

Unfairness of Mother’s PDT and Unfairness of Father’s PDT scores, which represent participants’ perceptions of the unfairness of their mothers’ and father’s parental differential treatment, were computed by taking the mean for the 9 items. Higher scores indicate greater perceptions that PDT was unfair. For each unfairness score, the minimum possible score was 0 and the maximum possible score was 1. Participants who were missing one of the 2 unfairness scores were assigned the mean sample score for Unfairness of Mother’s PDT or Unfairness of Father’s PDT.

Daniels and Plomin (1985) reported that two-week test-retest reliabilities for the PDT subscales were .77 for both Mother’s Differential Control and Father’s Differential Affection, .82 for Mother’s Differential Affection, and .85 for Father’s Differential Control in a sample of 57 biological sibling pairs. Factor analysis using all nine differential parental treatment items revealed the two proposed factors (Differential Affection and Differential Control). Sibling agreement on these two subscales was low to moderate in a sample of 149 Caucasian sibling pairs aged 12-28 years, with larger
negative correlations indicating greater agreement between the two siblings regarding their perceptions of parental differential treatment. For Mother’s Differential Affection, Mother’s Differential Control, Father’s Differential Affection, and Father’s Differential Control, correlations between siblings were -.26, -.25, -.28, and -.49, respectively. All correlations were statistically significant at p < .05. In this study, Cronbach’s alphas for Mother’s Differential Affection, Mother’s Differential Control, Father’s Differential Affection, and Father’s Differential Control were .63, .78, .81, and .80 respectively.

*Direct parenting.* Participants completed the 20-item Colorado Parental Child-Rearing Scale (CPCRS; George & Bloom, 1997), which assessed their perceptions of their mothers’ and fathers’ direct parenting practices. Although this study measured perceptions of parenting rather than employing more objective measures of parenting, the term “direct parenting” will be used to describe this construct in order to save space.

The CPCRS contains four 5-item subscales assessing four domains of parenting. The Affection subscale targets parents’ expression of affection, acceptance, enjoyment, helping, support, and praise for their children. The Punitiveness subscale measures parents’ tendencies to punish their children for unwanted behaviour, including their use of scolding, spanking, assigning extra work, or removal of privileges. The Control subscale focuses on parents’ tendencies to actively monitor their children’s behaviour and to set specific limits on their children’s activities outside of the home. The Lax Discipline subscale targets parents’ inability or unwillingness to provide consistent discipline when children engage in unacceptable behaviour.

Respondents also completed a version of the CPCRS modified for this study that was designed to allow respondents to rate their perceptions of their mothers’ and fathers’
parenting of their siblings. Participants responded to the questionnaire regarding their perceptions of the parenting they and their sibling generally received while they were 14 to 15 years old (Grades 9 and 10).

All items on the CPCRS were presented in the past tense, and respondents checked the appropriate box: “Very untrue in my family,” “Fairly untrue in my family,” “Fairly true in my family,” or “Very true in my family.” For this study, the wording of the response options was modified slightly, so that the response options were more specific to one parent. For example, “Very untrue in my family” was changed to “Very untrue of my mother” or “Very untrue of my father.”

Eight direct parenting scores were computed for each respondent: Mother’s Affection, Mother’s Punitiveness, Mother’s Control, Mother’s Lax Discipline, Father’s Affection, Father’s Punitiveness, Father’s Control, and Father’s Lax Discipline. For each score, the mean of the 5 subscale items was used. Items on the Mother’s Affection and Father’s Affection subscales were reverse coded so that higher scores on all subscales indicated more negative parenting: less affection, more punitiveness, more control, and more lax discipline. For each direct parenting score, the minimum possible score was 1 and the maximum possible score was 4. Participants who were missing one of the 8 direct parenting scores were assigned the mean sample score for that particular subscale.

George and Bloom (1997) found that the CPCRS had acceptable one-month test-retest reliability in a sample of 253 undergraduate students who were asked to respond to the scale for the time period when they were 12-13 years old. Test-retest reliability coefficients were .87 for Affection, .80 for Punitiveness, .77 for Control, and .76 for Lax Discipline. Results of a confirmatory factor analysis employing a sample of 310
undergraduate students revealed that the four-factor structure of the CPCRS was stable, and each item loaded highly on only one subscale. In a study of 449 university undergraduates, internal consistency, assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, was acceptable for all four subscales; alphas were .82 for Affection at age 10-13, .86 for Affection at age 15-18, .67 and .70 for Punitiveness for the two age ranges, .66 and .68 for Control, and .63 and .66 for Lax Discipline. In the present study, alphas were .87 for Mother’s Affection, .70 for Mother’s Punitiveness, .71 for Mother’s Control, .77 for Mother’s Lax Discipline, .88 for Father’s Affection, .76 for Father’s Punitiveness, .71 for Father’s Control, and .79 for Father’s Lax Discipline.

With regard to concurrent validity, George and Bloom (1997) found that in a sample of 310 undergraduate students, the four subscales of the CPCRS were correlated in the predicted direction with nine dimensions of psychopathology assessed by the SCL-90 (depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, somatization, anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity, psychoticism, paranoid ideation, hostility and phobic anxiety). Affection was negatively correlated with all nine dimensions of psychopathology. Punitiveness was positively correlated with five dimensions of psychopathology. Control was positively correlated with seven dimensions of psychopathology. Finally, Lax Discipline was positively correlated with three dimensions of psychopathology.

*Exposure to interparental conflict.* Participants completed three subscales of the Children’s Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992), a self-report questionnaire assessing several dimensions of exposure to conflict between parents. The 15 items from the three subscales used in this study (Frequency, Content, and Triangulation) are presented in Appendix A. The Frequency subscale
targets the extent to which children are frequently exposed to interparental conflict. The Content subscale focuses on the extent to which interparental conflict pertains to child-related topics. The Triangulation subscale measures the extent to which the child gets caught in the middle of interparental conflict.

All participants responded to the questionnaire with regard to their exposure to interparental conflict when they were 14 to 15 years old, and then again regarding their sibling’s exposure to interparental conflict when they were 14 to 15 years old. In addition, participants from divorced families responded to the questionnaire with regard to their own and their sibling’s general experiences with interparental conflict prior to their parents’ divorce or separation. However, the responses of participants from divorced families regarding exposure to conflict prior to their parents’ divorce were not analyzed in the present study, so that the reports of exposure to conflict between parents that were analyzed would address the same time period for participants from both family types.

Respondents answered the questions by choosing whether each item was “True,” “Sort of True,” or “False.” For this study, the CPIC questions were modified so that they were in the past tense. Participants completed the three subscales of the CPIC twice. The first version of the questionnaire pertained to their own exposure to interparental conflict. The second version of the questionnaire, which was modified for this study, pertained to their perceptions of their sibling’s exposure to conflict. Participants were asked to respond to this second version as accurately as their knowledge of their sibling would allow. Participants from divorced families completed this questionnaire two additional times, once regarding their own exposure to interparental conflict before their parents’ divorce, and once regarding their perceptions of their sibling’s exposure to interparental
conflict before their parents' divorce.

Six direct exposure to interparental conflict scores were created, comprising mean scores for participants on the three subscales (Frequency, Content, and Triangulation) and mean scores for siblings on the same three subscales (Sibling - Frequency, Sibling - Content, and Sibling - Triangulation). For each score, the mean of the items for that subscale was used. For each direct exposure to conflict score, the minimum possible score was 0 and the maximum possible score was 2. Higher scores indicated more frequent exposure to interparental conflict, more self-related conflict, or more triangulation. Participants who were missing one of the 6 direct exposure to interparental conflict scores were assigned the mean sample score for that particular subscale.

Six differential exposure to interparental conflict scores were created. The three directional difference scores were calculated by subtracting the sibling’s mean score from the participant’s mean score on each subscale. The three directional difference scores were Direction of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict, Direction of Differential Self-Related Conflict, and Direction of Differential Triangulation. The three amount of difference scores were calculated by taking the squared value of the directional difference score for each of the three subscales. The three amount of difference scores were Amount of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict, Amount of Differential Self-Related Conflict, and Amount of Differential Triangulation.

For the directional difference scores, higher positive scores indicated that the participant was exposed to more interparental conflict than the sibling, and higher negative scores indicated that the sibling was exposed to more interparental conflict than the participant. For each directional difference score, the minimum possible score was −2
and the maximum possible score was 2. For the amount of difference scores, higher scores indicated higher amounts of differential exposure to interparental conflict, regardless of which sibling was exposed to more conflict. For each amount of difference score, the minimum possible score was 0 and the maximum possible score was 4. Participants who were missing one of the 6 differential exposure to interparental conflict scores were assigned the mean sample score for that particular subscale.

The CPIC was first tested on a sample of 222 Grade 4 and 5 children, and findings were replicated in a second sample of 114 Grade 5 children (Grych et al., 1992). Internal consistency was assessed using coefficient alpha, and each scale demonstrated acceptable levels of internal consistency in both samples. Alphas for Sample 1 and Sample 2 were .70 and .68 for Frequency, .74 and .82 for Content, and .71 and .62 for Triangulation. Two-week test-retest reliability in a subsample of 44 Grade 5 children was also adequate (.70 for the Conflict Properties factor, which contained the Frequency subscale, and .76 for the Self-Blame factor, which contained the Content subscale).

With regard to external validity, the Conflict Properties factor of the CPIC correlated .30 with the O’Leary Porter Scale (Porter & O’Leary, 1980, as reported in Grych et al., 1992), a parent-report measure of marital conflict, and .39 with the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979, as reported in Grych et al., 1992), a parent-report measure of spousal aggression. Additionally, scores on the CPIC were significantly correlated with children’s self-reported adjustment. Children who scored higher on the Conflict Properties factor (i.e., reported higher levels of intense, frequent, poorly resolved interparental conflict) exhibited higher levels of both internalizing and externalizing problems on parent, teacher, peer, and self-reports. Children who scored higher on the
Self-Blame factor also exhibited higher levels of self-reported internalizing problems. Bickham and Fiese (1997) assessed the utility of the CPIC with older adolescents and young adults aged 17 to 21 years. In a sample of 215 undergraduate students, they found that the CPIC had good internal consistency, with alphas of .95 for the Conflict Properties factor, which contained the Frequency and Triangulation subscales, and .85 for the Self-Blame factor, which contained the Content subscale. Two-week test-retest reliability coefficients were .95 for the Conflict Properties factor and .81 for the Self-Blame factor. With regard to external validity, the Conflict Properties factor was significantly negatively related to a measure of competence. Bickham and Fiese (1997) found the CPIC to be a useful, valid, reliable measure for use with older adolescents and young adults.

In the present study, alphas for the three subscales used were .86 for the Frequency subscale, .88 for the Content subscale, and .82 for the Triangulation subscale.

Present general adjustment. All participants completed the Mental Health Inventory (MHI; Veit & Ware, 1983). The MHI is a 38-item self-report questionnaire designed to measure general psychological distress and well-being in the previous month. Items from this questionnaire are presented in Appendix A. The total score on the MHI provides a single General Present Adjustment score. Additionally, the MHI contains two higher order factors, Psychological Distress and Psychological Well-Being, and five lower order subscales that are subsumed under these two factors. The Psychological Distress factor is composed of the Anxiety, Depression, and Loss of Behavioral/Emotional Control subscales. The Psychological Well-Being factor is composed of the General Positive Affect and Emotional Ties subscales.
For this study, a single General Present Adjustment score was computed by summing the 38 items on the MHI. Sum scores rather than mean scores were used because there are 3 items on the MHI that have only 5 response choices (items 9, 28, and 38), while the remaining 35 items have 6 response choices. Each item had response options from “1” to “6” (“1” to “5” for items 9, 28, and 38). Twenty-one items (2, 3, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, and 38) were reverse coded so that higher scores indicated poorer present general adjustment. If participants were missing scores on any of the 38 items, they were assigned the sample mean score for that item. The minimum possible score was 38 and the maximum possible score was 225.

The MHI was validated using a sample of 5089 adolescents and adults aged 13 to 69 years (M = 32.2 years) from four areas of the United States (Veit & Ware, 1983). Factor analyses revealed that the best solution was a five-factor solution in which factors were allowed to correlate. The five factors identified were the five lower order subscales mentioned above. Additionally, a one-factor solution consisting of a single mental health factor and a two-factor solution containing the two higher order factors both provided a reasonably good fit to the data. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha. Alphas ranged from .83 to .91 for the five subscales and from .92 to .96 for the total score and the two higher order factors. One-year test-retest reliability coefficients calculated for a subsample of 3525 participants ranged from .56 to .64, indicating substantial stability in scores over a one-year period.

In this study, Cronbach’s alpha was .96 for the General Present Adjustment score on the MHI.
Procedure

The procedures followed for this study were approved by the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board and are consistent with the ethical standards of the Canadian and American Psychological Associations.

After completing informed consent procedures via email, participants completed self-report questionnaires and questionnaires regarding their sibling online. The majority of participants received bonus credits in their undergraduate psychology courses for their participation. Participants from outside of the university were given the opportunity to have their name entered in a draw to win $50 in which chances of winning were 1 in 50. In fact, since fewer than 50 respondents from outside the university have participated in the study to this point, the chances of winning the draw will ultimately be greater than 1 in 50. After completing the online questionnaires, participants received a debriefing email that informed them about the nature and hypotheses of the study. All participants completed the questionnaires in the following order: 1) Demographics; 2) MHI; 3) CPCRS (Self); 4) CPIC (Self); 5) CPCRS (Sibling); 6) CPIC (Sibling); 7) SIDE and Unfairness of Mother’s and Father’s PDT.

Planned Analyses

It was planned that a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) would be conducted in order to examine whether perceptions of direct parenting, amount of PDT, perceived unfairness of PDT, direct exposure to interparental conflict, amount of differential exposure to conflict, and adjustment differed for participants from divorced and intact families.

Five hierarchical regression analyses were planned to examine the contributions
of perceptions of direct parenting, direction and amount of PDT, unfairness of PDT, direct exposure to interparental conflict, direction and amount of differential exposure to conflict, and the interactions of each of these variables with family type to the prediction of general present adjustment.

In each hierarchical regression analysis, control variables, including family type, gender, older or younger sibling status, birth order, and absolute age difference between siblings, would be entered in Step 1. In Steps 2 and 3, it was planned that the main effects of the independent variables of interest would be entered. In Step 4, the interactions between family type and the independent variables of interest would be entered. However, when these planned analyses were conducted, in none of these cases were Steps 1 or 4 statistically significant, so only the results for Steps 2 and 3 of each hierarchical regression analysis are presented in the Results section. (Full results for each regression analysis are presented in Appendix C). Due to the lack of significant interactions, which indicated that the relations among the independent variables and the dependent variable (adjustment) were similar in both family types, all hierarchical regression analyses were conducted using the whole sample.

In order to protect against excessive Type 1 errors while maintaining reasonable power (Saville, 2003), the alpha level for the MANOVA and the hierarchical regression analyses was set to .025.
Results

Sample Characteristics

Three hundred and sixty-eight older adolescents and young adults, ranging in age from 17 to 30 years, were included in this study. Participants’ birth order ranged from first-born to seventh-born (M = 1.89, SD = 0.91). They came from families of between 2 and 9 children (M = 2.72, SD = 0.99). Their siblings included 165 females and 199 males; four participants did not report their sibling’s gender. Siblings ranged in age from 6 to 37 years (M = 19.89, SD = 4.17). Siblings’ birth order ranged from first-born to sixth-born (M = 1.73, SD = 0.74).

Participants from divorced families were 0 to 13 years old (M = 7.20, SD = 3.72) when their parents separated or divorced. Only 20.4% of participants from divorced families reported that their parents later got back together, while 55.6% of participants from divorced families reported that one of their parents later remarried. These participants experienced between 1 and 4 parental remarriages (M = 1.48, SD = 0.65), and 36.7% of them reported that one or more of these remarriages ended in divorce. These participants experienced between 1 and 2 parental remarriages that ended in divorce (M = 1.23, SD = 0.43). Following their parents’ divorce, 39.8% of participants lived only with their mothers, 36.1% lived mostly with their mothers, 18.5% lived half with each parent, 2.8% lived mostly with their fathers, and 2.8% lived only with their fathers. Similarly, after the divorce, 38.1% of siblings were reported to have lived only with their mothers, 33.3% mostly with their mothers, 19.0% half with each parent, 5.7% mostly with their fathers, and 3.8% only with their fathers.

Mean scores, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum obtained scores
for participants from intact and divorced families and for the total sample on the control, independent, and dependent variables are presented in Table 2.
Table 2

*Mean Scores on Measured Variables for Young Adults from Intact (n = 256) and Divorced (n = 112) Families and for the Total Sample (N = 368)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Intact</th>
<th>Divorced</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Present</td>
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<td>Mean: 102.56</td>
<td>Mean: 99.42</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD: 25.87</td>
<td>SD: 25.50</td>
<td>SDE: 25.81</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Min.: 52</td>
<td>Min.: 58</td>
<td>Min.: 52</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Max.: 197</td>
<td>Max.: 183</td>
<td>Max.: 197</td>
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<td>SD: 0.60</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Max.: 4.00</td>
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<td>SD: 0.62</td>
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<td>Min.: 1.00</td>
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<td>Max.: 4.00</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Max.: 4.00</td>
<td>Max.: 4.00</td>
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<td>Mean: 2.23</td>
<td>Mean: 2.21</td>
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<td>SD: 0.60</td>
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<td>Min.: 1.00</td>
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<td>Max.: 4.00</td>
<td>Max.: 4.00</td>
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<td>Max.: 4.00</td>
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<td>Min.: 1.00</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Max.: 2.00</td>
<td>Max.: 2.00</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Direction of Father’s Differential Control</td>
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<td>-1.75</td>
</tr>
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<td>Direction of Father’s Differential Affection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direction of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict</td>
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<td>0.26</td>
<td>-1.00</td>
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</table>
### Correlations

Zero-order correlations among the independent, control, and dependent variables are presented in Table B1 in Appendix B.

**Comparing Participants from Intact and Divorced Families**

A MANOVA (N = 368, 112 from divorced families) was used to examine whether young adults from divorced families differed significantly from young adults raised in intact families in their perceptions of 21 variables. These variables included General Present Adjustment, past perceptions of direct parenting (Mother’s and Father’s Affection, Punitiveness, Control, and Lax Discipline), past perceptions of exposure to interparental conflict (Frequency, Content, and Triangulation), past perceptions of amount of PDT (Amount of Mother’s and Father’s Differential Affection and Control), present perceptions of the Unfairness of Mother’s PDT and the Unfairness of Father’s PDT, and past perceptions of amount of differential exposure to interparental conflict (Amount of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict, Self-Related Content of Conflict, and Triangulation).

The multivariate $R^2$ for family type (divorced vs. intact) predicting the dependent variables was statistically significant ($R^2 = .31, F_{21, 346} = 7.29, p < .001$), indicating that participants from divorced families differed significantly from those from intact families on the set of dependent variables. Univariate results revealed that there were significant
effects of family type on perceptions of Mother’s Affection ($F_{1,366} = 13.02$, $p = .001$), Mother’s Control ($F_{1,366} = 20.50$, $p < .001$), Father’s Punitiveness ($F_{1,366} = 8.61$, $p = .004$), Father’s Control ($F_{1,366} = 25.81$, $p < .001$), Frequency (of exposure to interparental conflict) ($F_{1,366} = 16.59$, $p < .001$), Triangulation ($F_{1,366} = 41.48$, $p < .001$), Amount of Father’s Differential Affection ($F_{1,366} = 14.34$, $p < .001$), Unfairness of Mother’s ($F_{1,366} = 11.98$, $p = .001$) and Father’s PDT ($F_{1,366} = 12.60$, $p < .001$), Amount of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict ($F_{1,366} = 15.93$, $p < .001$), and Amount of Differential Triangulation ($F_{1,366} = 5.59$, $p = .019$).

These results indicate that compared to young adults from intact families, young adults from divorced families perceived their mothers to be less affectionate and less controlling and perceived their fathers to be less punitive and less controlling. Young adults from divorced families were more frequently exposed to interparental conflict and more often triangulated (i.e., caught in the middle of parental conflict). They also perceived higher amounts of father’s differential affection and perceived their mother’s and father’s differential treatment to be more unfair than young adults from intact families. Finally, compared with respondents from intact families, participants with divorced parents perceived more differential frequency of exposure to interparental conflict and more differential triangulation.

*Predicting General Present Adjustment*

*Direction and amount of PDT and differential exposure to conflict.* Hierarchical linear regression was used to examine whether direction and amount of parental differential treatment and direction and amount of differential exposure to interparental conflict predicted young adults’ adjustment. Results of this hierarchical regression
analysis are presented in Table 3. (Full results of this hierarchical regression analysis including control variables and family type interactions are presented in Table C1 in Appendix C).

In the first step, Direction of Mother’s and Father’s Differential Affection and Control were entered. Direction of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict, Differential Self-Related Content of Conflict, and Differential Triangulation were also entered in the first step. In the second step, Amount of Mother’s and Father’s Differential Affection and Control were entered. Also entered in the second step were Amount of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict, Differential Self-Related Content of Conflict, and Differential Triangulation. These variables were entered in the second step in order to analyze the contribution of the amount of PDT and differential exposure to interparental conflict to the prediction of adjustment after accounting for the direction of PDT and differential exposure to conflict.

The first and second sets of variables both accounted for a statistically significant proportion of variance in General Present Adjustment ($R^2 = .08$ for Step 1, $p < .001$; $R^2$ change = .09 for Step 2, $p < .001$). In the first step, Direction of Mother’s Differential Affection ($\beta = .19$, $t = 3.49$, $p = .001$) and Direction of Father’s Differential Affection ($\beta = .20$, $t = 3.67$, $p < .001$) predicted unique variance in General Present Adjustment. In the second step, Amount of Mother’s Differential Control ($\beta = .14$, $t = 2.46$, $p = .015$) and Amount of Mother’s Differential Affection ($\beta = .17$, $t = 3.06$, $p = .002$) predicted unique variance in General Present Adjustment. These results indicate that young adults who perceived that they received less maternal and paternal affection than their sibling reported poorer adjustment. In addition, young adults who perceived higher amounts of
mother’s differential control and affection in adolescence reported poorer adjustment.

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direction and Amount of PDT and Differential Exposure to Conflict Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2.42</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<td>Direction of Mother’s Differential Affection (DMDA)</td>
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<td>2.66</td>
<td>-.05</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Direction of Father’s Differential Affection (DFDA)</td>
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<td>2.54</td>
<td>.20*</td>
</tr>
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<td>Direction of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict (DDF)</td>
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<td>4.65</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direction of Differential Self-Related Content of Conflict (DDC)</td>
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<td>Direction of Differential Triangulation (DDT)</td>
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<td>3.29</td>
<td>.04</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Amount of Mother’s Differential Control (AMDC)</td>
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<td>Amount of Differential Triangulation (ADT)</td>
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<td>3.71</td>
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</table>

Note. $R^2 = .08$ for Step 1 ($p < .001$), $\Delta R^2 = .09$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$)

*p < .025

Direct parenting and exposure to conflict. A second regression analysis was conducted to investigate whether direct parenting and direct exposure to interparental conflict predicted adjustment. Results of this regression analysis are presented in Table 4.
(Full results of this hierarchical regression analysis including family type and interactions are presented in Table C2 in Appendix C). Mother’s and Father’s Affection, Punitiveness, Control, and Lax Discipline were entered in a single step in this regression equation. Frequency of Exposure to Conflict, Content of Conflict, and Triangulation were entered in the same step.

This set of variables accounted for a statistically significant proportion of variance in General Present Adjustment ($R^2$ change = .24, $p < .001$). Frequency of Exposure to Conflict ($\beta = .15$, $t = 2.52$, $p = .012$) and Mother’s Affection ($\beta = .28$, $t = 5.21$, $p < .001$) predicted unique variance in General Present Adjustment. There was a trend ($p < .05$) for Father’s Affection predicting General Present Adjustment ($\beta = .12$, $t = 2.15$, $p = .033$). These results indicate that young adults who perceived lower levels of mother’s and father’s direct affection and who reported more frequent exposure to interparental conflict exhibited poorer adjustment.
Table 4

Summary of Regression Analysis for Direct Parenting and Direct Exposure to Conflict

Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<td>Mother’s Lax Discipline (MLD)</td>
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<td>2.38</td>
<td>.04</td>
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</table>

*Note. R² = .24 (p < .001)

*p < .025

Direction of PDT and direct parenting. A third hierarchical regression analysis was conducted in order to examine whether perceptions of the direction of parental differential treatment predicted adjustment after taking into account the effects of direct parenting. Results of this hierarchical regression analysis are presented in Table 5. (Full results of this hierarchical regression analysis including family type and interactions are presented in Table C3 in Appendix C). In the first step, direct parenting variables (Mother’s and Father’s Affection, Punitiveness, Control, and Lax Discipline) were entered into the regression equation. Direction of parental differential treatment variables (Direction of Mother’s and Father’s Differential Affection and Control) were entered in the second step.

Only the first step (direct parenting variables) predicted a statistically significant amount of variance in General Present Adjustment (R² = .22, p < .001). Only Mother’s
Affection ($\beta = .29$, $t = 5.31$, $p < .001$) and Father’s Affection ($\beta = .15$, $t = 2.65$, $p = .008$) accounted for unique variance in the dependent variable. There was a trend ($p < .05$) for Mother’s Punitiveness predicting General Present Adjustment ($\beta = .13$, $t = 2.12$, $p = .035$). As in the previous regression analysis, young adults who perceived lower levels of direct parental affection reported poorer adjustment. Additionally, young adults who perceived higher levels of direct maternal punitiveness reported poorer adjustment.

Table 5

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direct Parenting and Direction of PDT Predicting General Present Adjustment ($N = 368$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Affection (MA)</td>
<td>10.75</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Punitiveness (MP)</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Control (MC)</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s Lax Discipline (MLD)</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s Affection (FA)</td>
<td>5.07</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s Punitiveness (FP)</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s Control (FC)</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s Lax Discipline (FLD)</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Step 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Mother’s Differential Control (DMDC)</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Mother’s Differential Affection (DMDA)</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Father’s Differential Control (DFDC)</td>
<td>-1.87</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Father’s Differential Affection (DFDA)</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $R^2 = .22$ for Step 1 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .01$ for Step 2 ($p = .207$)

*p < .025

In order to examine whether perceptions of direct parenting predicted adjustment over and above the effects of direction of PDT, the regression analysis was repeated after switching the order of the variables entered. In the first step, direction of PDT variables...
were entered (Direction of Mother’s and Father’s Differential Affection and Control). In the second step, direct parenting variables (Mother’s and Father’s Affection, Punitiveness, Control, and Lax Discipline) were entered. Results of this regression analysis are presented in Table 6.

When the variables were entered in this order, both the first step (direction of PDT) and the second step (direct parenting) accounted for a statistically significant proportion of the variance in General Present Adjustment ($R^2 = .07$, $p < .001$ for direction of PDT; $\Delta R^2 = .16$, $p < .001$ for direct parenting). Direction of Mother’s ($\beta = .18$, $t = 3.33$, $p = .001$) and Father’s ($\beta = .21$, $t = 3.85$, $p < .001$) Differential Affection accounted for unique variance in General Present Adjustment, as did Mother’s Affection ($\beta = .28$, $t = 4.92$, $p < .001$). In addition, there was a trend for Father’s Affection predicting General Present Adjustment ($\beta = .12$, $t = 2.08$, $p = .039$).

These results indicate that participants’ perceptions of receiving less affection than their siblings from their parents and their perceptions of receiving low levels of direct parental affection are associated with poorer adjustment. Both sets of variables (direct parenting and direction of PDT) accounted for significant variance in General Present Adjustment when entered into the regression equation first, but only the direct parenting variables accounted for significant variance when entered second. As all three sets of variables (Mother’s and Father’s Affection, Direction of Mother’s and Father’s Differential Affection, General Present Adjustment) are significantly correlated at the zero-order level, this result suggests that the relation between perceived levels of the direction of past PDT and adjustment is mediated by direct parenting.
Table 6

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direction of PDT and Direct Parenting Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Direction of Mother’s Differential Control</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(DMDC)</td>
<td>Direction of Mother’s Differential Affection</td>
<td>10.75</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(DMDA)</td>
<td>Direction of Father’s Differential Control</td>
<td>-3.47</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(DFDC)</td>
<td>Direction of Father’s Differential Affection</td>
<td>9.65</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(DFDA)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td>Mother’s Affection (MA)</td>
<td>10.36</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother’s Punitiveness (MP)</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother’s Control (MC)</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother’s Lax Discipline (MLD)</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father’s Affection (FA)</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father’s Punitiveness (FP)</td>
<td>0.79</td>
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<td>Father’s Control (FC)</td>
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<td>2.32</td>
<td>.05</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father’s Lax Discipline (FLD)</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $R^2 = .07$ for Step 1 (p < .001); $\Delta R^2 = .16$ for Step 2 (p < .001)

*p < .025

Direct exposure to conflict and direction of differential exposure to conflict. A fourth hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of direction of differential exposure to interparental conflict on adjustment, after taking into account the effects of direct exposure to conflict. Results of this hierarchical regression analysis are presented in Table 7. (Full results of this hierarchical regression analysis including family type and interactions are presented in Table C4 in Appendix C). In the first step of the regression equation, direct perceptions of interparental conflict (Frequency, Content, Triangulation) were entered. Direction of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict, Direction of Differential Self-Related Content of Conflict, and
Differential Triangulation were entered in the second step. Only the first set of variables (direct exposure to interparental conflict) predicted significant variance in General Present Adjustment ($R^2 = .09, p < .001$). Only Frequency predicted unique variance in General Present Adjustment ($\beta = .22, t = 3.47, p = .001$).

Table 7

**Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direct Exposure to Interparental Conflict and Direction of Differential Exposure to Conflict Predicting General Present Adjustment ($N = 368$)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE_B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency (F)</td>
<td>9.51</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content (C)</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation (T)</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict (DDF)</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Differential Self-Related Content of Conflict (DDC)</td>
<td>-4.68</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Differential Triangulation (DDT)</td>
<td>-4.47</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. $R^2 = .09$ for Step 1 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .01$ for Step 2 ($p = .124$)*

*p < .025

In order to examine whether direct exposure to interparental conflict accounted for significant variance in adjustment after taking into account the effects of direction of differential exposure to conflict, the regression analysis was repeated after switching the order of the variables entered. In the first step, direction of differential exposure to interparental conflict variables were entered (Direction of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict, Direction of Differential Self-Related Conflict, and Differential Triangulation). In the second step, direct exposure to conflict variables (Frequency, Content, and Triangulation) were entered. Results of this regression analysis are
presented in Table 8.

Only the second set of variables accounted for a significant proportion of variance in General Present Adjustment (R² change = .09, p < .001). Again, only Frequency uniquely predicted General Present Adjustment (β = .19, t = 2.89, p = .004).

Table 8

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direction of Differential Exposure to Interparental Conflict and Direct Exposure to Conflict Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Differential Frequency of Exposure to Conflict (DDF)</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Differential Self-Related Content of Conflict (DDC)</td>
<td>-3.23</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Differential Triangulation (DDT)</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency (F)</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content (C)</td>
<td>5.77</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation (T)</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. R² = .01 for Step 1 (p = .250); ΔR² = .09 for Step 2 (p < .001)

*p < .025

Direction of PDT and unfairness of PDT. A fifth hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of perceived unfairness of PDT on adjustment after taking into account the effects of direction of PDT. Results of this hierarchical regression analysis are presented in Table 9. (Full results of this hierarchical regression analysis including family type and interactions are presented in Table C5 in Appendix C). In the first step, direction of PDT variables (Direction of Mother’s and Father’s Differential Affection and Control) were entered into the regression equation. In the second step, Unfairness of Mother’s PDT and Unfairness of Father’s PDT were entered.
The first set of variables (direction of PDT) and the second set of variables (perceived unfairness of PDT) predicted statistically significant proportions of variance in General Present Adjustment ($R^2 = .07$ for the first set; $R^2$ change = .07 for the second set, both $p$ values < .001). In the first step, Direction of Mother's ($\beta = .18$, $t = 3.33$, $p = .001$) and Father's Differential Affection ($\beta = .21$, $t = 3.85$, $p < .001$) predicted unique variance in General Present Adjustment. In the second step, Unfairness of Mother's ($\beta = .21$, $t = 3.80$, $p < .001$) and Father's PDT ($\beta = .13$, $t = 2.41$, $p = .016$) predicted unique variance in General Present Adjustment. These results suggest that perceived unfairness of mother's and father's parental differential treatment contributed uniquely to the prediction of young adults' adjustment over and above the effects of direction of parental differential treatment.

Table 9

**Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direction of PDT and Unfairness of PDT Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE B$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Mother's Differential Control (DMDC)</td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.39</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Father's Differential Control (DFDC)</td>
<td>-3.47</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Mother's Differential Affection (DMDA)</td>
<td>10.75</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Father's Differential Affection (DFDA)</td>
<td>9.65</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Step 2 | Unfairness of Mother's PDT (UM) | 22.26 | 5.86 | .21* |
|        | Unfairness of Father's PDT (UF) | 13.15 | 5.45 | .13* |

*Note. $R^2 = .07$ for Step 1 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .07$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$)

*p < .025

This hierarchical regression analysis was repeated in order to test whether
perceived unfairness of PDT moderated the relation between direction of PDT and adjustment. In the final step of this regression analysis, interactions between Direction of Mother’s Differential Affection and Unfairness of Mother’s PDT, Direction of Mother’s Differential Control and Unfairness of Mother’s PDT, Direction of Father’s Differential Control and Unfairness of Father’s PDT, and Direction of Father’s Differential Affection and Unfairness of Father’s PDT were entered. These interaction terms did not account for a significant proportion of variance in General Present Adjustment. The results of this regression analysis are presented in Table C5 in Appendix C.

In order to examine whether direction of PDT accounted for a significant amount of variance in adjustment after taking into account the effects of perceived unfairness of PDT, the regression analysis was repeated after switching the order of the variables entered. In the first step, Unfairness of Mother’s PDT and Unfairness of Father’s PDT were entered. In the second step, direction of PDT variables were entered (Direction of Mother’s and Father’s Differential Affection and Control). The results of this regression analysis are presented in Table 10.

Both the first step (perceived unfairness of PDT) and the second step (direction of PDT) accounted for significant variance in General Present Adjustment ($R^2 = .11, p < .001$ and $R^2$ change $= .03, p = .007$ respectively). In the first step, Unfairness of Mother’s ($\beta = .24, t = 4.66, p < .001$) and Father’s PDT ($\beta = .15, t = 2.81, p = .005$) uniquely predicted General Present Adjustment. In the second step, Direction of Mother’s ($\beta = .13, t = 2.51, p = .013$) and Father’s Differential Affection ($\beta = .16, t = 3.02, p = .003$) uniquely predicted General Present Adjustment. These results suggest that Direction of Mother’s and Father’s Differential Affection contributed uniquely to the prediction of
General Present Adjustment over and above the effects of Unfairness of Mother’s and Father’s PDT.

Table 10

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Unfairness of PDT and Direction of PDT Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfairness of Mother’s PDT (UM)</td>
<td>26.23</td>
<td>5.64</td>
<td>.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfairness of Father’s PDT (UF)</td>
<td>15.32</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Mother’s Differential Control (DMDC)</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Father’s Differential Control (DFDC)</td>
<td>-2.86</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Mother’s Differential Affection (DMDA)</td>
<td>7.94</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direction of Father’s Differential Affection (DFDA)</td>
<td>7.42</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>.16*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. R² = .11 for Step 1 (p < .001); ΔR² = .03 for Step 2 (p = .007)*

*p < .025
Discussion

Using a family systems framework, this study considered young adults’ current psychological adjustment in light of their experiences of how they and their siblings were parented during adolescence. Drawing on previous research based largely on intact families, this study included young adults who experienced their parents’ divorce during childhood and focused on parenting quality, parental differential treatment, perceived fairness or unfairness of differential treatment of siblings, and siblings’ differential exposure to conflict between their parents. The use of an online questionnaire, which incorporated demographic information, self-reported adjustment, and measures of these parenting constructs, yielded a relatively large sample with which to examine the hypothesized relations among these constructs and to compare the perceptions of young adults from divorced and intact homes.

The discussion of the study’s findings has been organized to first focus on similarities and differences in the experiences of young adults raised in intact families and those who experienced their parents’ divorces during childhood. Next, the relations among parenting quality, parental differential treatment (PDT), perceived unfairness of PDT, exposure to conflict between parents, differential exposure to conflict, and current adjustment will be considered. Third, the clinical practice implications of this study’s findings will be explored. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the current study will be discussed with a view toward directions for future research in this field.

Family-Type Comparisons

As anticipated, young adults who experienced their parents’ divorce during childhood differed in some of their perceptions of past family experiences compared with
young adults raised in intact families. In summary, many of these differences were consistent with the study’s hypotheses and the divorce literature. Compared with young persons raised in intact families, those who experienced their parents’ divorce felt they received less affection from their mothers, that their fathers engaged in more differential affection directed toward them and their siblings, and that their parents’ differential treatment was more unfair. Young adults from divorced families were more frequently exposed to conflict between their parents and more frequently caught in the middle of their parents’ conflicts than young adults from intact families. Young persons with divorced parents also perceived greater differences between themselves and their siblings with regard to how frequently each sibling was exposed to conflict between parents and caught in the middle of parents’ disagreements than young persons with continuously married parents.

A few of the differences between young adults from intact and divorced families, however, were contrary to expectation. Young adults who experienced their parents’ divorces during childhood perceived that in middle adolescence, their fathers were less punitive towards them and that both of their parents were less controlling towards them than young adults raised in intact families.

Young adults from intact and divorced families were similar in their perceptions of several family experiences and did not differ in their present adjustment. They agreed in their perceptions of mother’s punitiveness, mother’s and father’s lax discipline, father’s affection, amount of mother’s and father’s differential control, and amount of mother’s differential affection. Although young adults with divorced parents reported more exposure to conflict and more experiences of being caught in the middle of their
parents' disagreements, young adults from both types of families perceived similar levels of *self-related* conflict between parents. Both groups also perceived similar differences between themselves and their siblings with regard to how much self-related conflict each sibling witnessed.

*Parenting quality.* Compared with young persons raised in intact families, those with divorced parents felt less affection and less control from their mothers and less punitiveness and less control from their fathers during adolescence. The finding that young persons with divorced parents perceived less affection from their mothers was consistent with the hypothesis that young adults from divorced families would report receiving poorer quality parenting than those from intact families. However, the findings for mother's and father's control and father's punitiveness were contrary to expectation. These findings may simply reflect divorced parents' experiencing more stress than married parents (Booth & Amato, 1991). As single parents without the support of the other parent, divorced parents may have less time and energy to devote to parenting. For this reason, they may appear more distant and less affectionate, but also less punitive and controlling, because they also attend less to their children's misbehaviour. Considered from this perspective, the lower levels of punitiveness and control may in fact represent poorer monitoring and less consistent discipline by single versus married parents. These findings are consistent with past research reporting that, on average, the parenting of divorced parents is less authoritative (i.e., characterized by less affection and less firm control) than that of married parents (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Divorced parents may be temporarily less capable of providing high-quality parenting due to their own psychological distress following the divorce (Dreman, 2000; Hetherington &
Stanley-Hagan, 1999; Lamb et al., 1997).

Direct exposure to conflict. As expected, young adults from divorced families reported witnessing more frequent conflict between their parents and being more often caught in the middle of their parents’ arguments than young persons raised in intact families. Even after the divorce had occurred, these adolescents from divorced families continued to feel exposed to more frequent conflict between their parents than children of continuously married parents. Divorced parents may be more likely to place their children in the middle of their conflicts than married parents, since divorced parents may no longer communicate directly with each other as often, but rather rely on their children to pass messages between them (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1991). Past research has shown that conflict between ex-spouses tends to decrease considerably following divorce (Kelly, 2000); however, approximately one quarter of divorced families continue to be characterized by high levels of interparental conflict and triangulation (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

Furthermore, it must be considered that young adults offering retrospective accounts of conflict between their divorced parents may be more sensitive to this conflict and more likely to notice its occurrence than young adults from intact families. Conflict between their parents may also have more meaning for them because of the divorce. Therefore, it is possible that this finding reflects a greater likelihood to report conflict as well as an actual difference in the occurrence of conflict. As parents who go on to divorce typically engage in higher levels of conflict than those who remain married, and since many divorced couples continue to fight with some frequency (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999), it is likely that this difference has an objective basis.
Amount of PDT. Young adults with divorced parents perceived that their fathers engaged in more differential affection than did young persons from intact families. After divorce, fathers, particularly non-custodial fathers, may develop more individualized relationships with each of their children, perhaps spending more one-on-one time with each child. Depending on the ages and other characteristics of their children, fathers may also have more visitation time with one child than another. Due to these divergent father-child relationships, children may notice the differences between their own relationships with their fathers and their siblings’ relationships with their fathers, particularly differences in fathers’ affection directed towards each sibling.

Alternatively, divorced fathers may experience more stress and more demands than married fathers, and may therefore have fewer resources to devote to making a conscious effort to be equally affectionate toward each of their children (Crouter et al., 1999). Past research has indicated that increased parental stress due to marital conflict is related to increased levels of parental differential treatment (Crouter et al., 1999; Deal, 1996; Jenkins et al., 2003; Volling & Elins, 1998). In addition, one previous study found that parental differential treatment occurred more often in divorced than intact families (Barrett Singer & Weinstein, 2000)

Perceived unfairness of PDT. Young adults who experienced their parents’ separations or divorces were more likely to perceive the parental differential treatment they experienced in middle adolescence to be unfair than young persons raised in intact families. This may occur because divorced parents often experience more stress and more demands than married parents. Divorced parents may have less time and energy to devote to consciously trying to treat all of their children equitably, and may be more
likely to react to their children differently based on each child’s individual characteristics (Henderson et al., 1996). For example, a stressed parent may be more affectionate with a child who is typically cheerful and outgoing, and less affectionate with a child who is typically shy and withdrawn. Children may perceive this parental differential treatment as unfair, since their parents appear to be favouring the personality of one child over another.

Additionally, if children from divorced families perceive greater amounts of parental differential treatment, as was the case for father’s differential affection, they may also simply perceive parental differential treatment as more unfair because it is more pronounced. Particularly in high conflict divorced families, it is also possible that one parent may suggest to the children that the other parent’s behaviour is unfair, and therefore one parent’s opinion may colour children’s perceptions of the other parent.

*Amount of differential exposure to conflict.* Compared to young adults raised in intact families, those who experienced parental divorce reported that in their families, there were greater differences between them and their siblings with regard to how frequently each sibling was exposed to conflict between their parents. There were also greater differences between them and their siblings with regard to how often each sibling was caught in the middle of disagreements between parents. These findings may simply reflect the fact that conflict between parents and triangulation occur more frequently in divorced than in intact families, and, therefore, there is a greater possibility that each child is exposed to different amounts of conflict. For example, it is likely that both siblings in an intact family are infrequently exposed to interparental conflict and infrequently caught in the middle of this conflict, which results in small differences
between siblings with regard to their exposure to conflict between parents. In a divorced family in which higher levels of conflict are occurring, however, one sibling may be more frequently exposed to conflict between parents or more frequently placed in the middle of this conflict than the other sibling.

These findings may also reflect high stress levels experienced by divorcing parents. High levels of parental stress may cause parents to react more instinctively to personality differences between siblings (Henderson et al., 1996), which may lead them to put less effort into hiding their conflicts with the other parent from both siblings. For example, a sibling who is very outgoing and talkative with both parents may find herself caught in the middle of parents’ conflicts more often than a sibling who is shy, withdrawn, and less involved with his parents. In addition, parents may try to avoid fighting frequently in front of a sibling who is sensitive and tearful, while they may put less effort into avoiding fighting in front of a sibling who appears resilient and relatively unaffected by conflict.

Adjustment. Unexpectedly, young adults from intact families and young adults from divorced families were not significantly different from each other in their current psychological adjustment. The difference between the two groups was in the expected direction, however, with young persons from divorced families exhibiting, on average, somewhat poorer adjustment than those from intact families. This finding may have occurred due to sample characteristics. The divorce literature has consistently documented, on average, poorer academic outcomes for young persons raised by divorced parents than those raised in intact families. Only university students participated in this study, and less highly achieving young persons were not represented. Young
adults from divorced families who go on to attend university may be more well-adjusted than young persons with divorced parents who do not pursue higher education.

Additionally, in this study, young persons from divorced families had parents who had separated or divorced by the time they were 13 years old. By young adulthood, the potential detrimental effects of divorce on adjustment may have dissipated, and the majority of young adults from divorced families could be expected to show similar adjustment to young adults raised in intact families. Indeed, in the long term, most children show resilient adaptation following their parents’ divorce, and the majority of children from divorced families develop into competent, well-adjusted adults (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999).

**Predicting General Present Adjustment**

*Direction and amount of PDT and differential exposure to conflict.* As hypothesized, the amount of mother’s differential control and affection was found to predict young adults’ current adjustment. In addition, as predicted, the direction of mother’s and father’s differential affection predicted participants’ adjustment. Contrary to expectations, the amount of father’s differential control and affection did not significantly predict young adults’ adjustment, nor did the direction of parents’ differential control (perceiving that one’s parents were more controlling towards oneself than towards one’s sibling). Also contrary to expectations, neither the amount nor the direction of differential exposure to interparental conflict significantly predicted adjustment.

Young persons who perceived higher amounts of their mothers’ differential treatment in their families, regardless of which sibling was favoured, were more likely to
exhibit poorer adjustment. This finding is consistent with Boyle et al.'s (2004) research, which found that the adjustment of all siblings was poorer in families in which mothers engaged in greater amounts of PDT. On the other hand, the amount of father's differential treatment was not related to young adults' adjustment. It may be that the parenting of mothers is more salient to children, since overall they may be likely to spend more time with their mothers than with their fathers (Gunn & Braver, 2001; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001). For this reason, they may be particularly likely to notice and to be influenced by their mothers' differential parenting of them and their siblings.

Experiencing less affection than one's sibling from both parents was related to poorer current adjustment. This finding is consistent with the findings of numerous other studies reporting that receiving less preferential parental treatment in the domain of affection is associated with more negative adjustment (Dunn et al., 1990; McGuire et al., 1995; McHale et al., 1995; Sheehan & Noller, 2002; Stocker, 1993).

Interestingly, perceptions of receiving relatively more control from both parents than one's sibling were unrelated to current adjustment. Children or adolescents may expect their parents to be equally affectionate towards them and their siblings, based on the widely accepted notion that parents should love all their children equally. Conversely, they may expect their parents to direct different amounts of control toward each sibling based on each sibling's developmental needs and individual characteristics. As McHale and Pawletko (1992) discussed, children may perceive different forms of differential parental treatment differently. In particular, these researchers suggested that parental differential treatment in the domain of warmth may negatively influence
children's adjustment.

Young adults’ current psychological adjustment did not appear to be influenced by being exposed to more or less conflict between their parents than their siblings. Children and adolescents may be more influenced by their own direct exposure to conflict between their parents, a more salient family experience, rather than by subtle differences between the conflict to which they, versus their sibling, are exposed. It may be quite difficult for children or adolescents to notice when or how much their sibling is exposed to conflict between parents if they themselves do not witness this conflict.

There were no significant interactions between family type (intact vs. divorced) and parental differential treatment or differential exposure to interparental conflict. This finding suggests that these family experiences influence young adults’ adjustment similarly whether they grew up in an intact or a divorced family. In both family types, experiencing greater amounts of mother’s differential control and affection, regardless of which sibling was favoured, was associated with poorer adjustment in young adulthood. Receiving relatively less affection from mothers and fathers than one’s sibling in middle adolescence was also related to poorer adjustment in young adulthood.

*Direct parenting and direct exposure to conflict.* As hypothesized, mother’s affection and the frequency with which participants were exposed to interparental conflict predicted current adjustment. In addition, there was a trend for father’s affection predicting adjustment. Contrary to expectations, however, mother’s and father’s control, punitiveness, and lax discipline were unrelated to adjustment in young adulthood, as were perceptions of being caught in the middle of conflict between parents and perceptions of being exposed to self-related conflict.
Young adults who reported receiving less affection from their mothers and fathers and who reported witnessing more frequent conflict between their parents in middle adolescence were more likely to report poorer present adjustment. This finding is consistent with previous research demonstrating that frequent interparental conflict negatively influences children’s adjustment (Cummings & Davies, 2001; Davies & Cummings, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 1990). In addition, previous studies have found that receiving more affection from parents is associated with better adjustment, while receiving less affection from parents is associated with poorer adjustment (Dunn et al., 1990; McGuire et al., 1995; McHale et al., 1995; Sheehan & Noller, 2002; Stocker, 1993).

With regard to affection, children and adolescents may expect their parents to be affectionate toward them, regardless of their personalities or their behaviour. Therefore, if a parent directs little affection toward a child, this may be particularly detrimental to the child’s adjustment. The finding may be stronger for mothers, since mothers may be expected to be more outwardly affectionate toward their children than fathers. For this reason, children may be most reactive and feel most rejected when they receive little affection from their mothers.

The living arrangements of young adults and their siblings following their parents’ divorce may also help explain why mother’s affection was a stronger predictor of adjustment than father’s affection. Young adults from divorced families and their siblings showed very similar patterns of living arrangements following their parents’ divorce, which suggests that most sibling pairs continued to live together. In addition, approximately 70% of sibling pairs spent all or most of their time living with their
mothers. Since most children or adolescents spent the majority of their time with their mothers, it is not surprising that overall their mother’s parenting had a stronger influence on young adults’ adjustment than their father’s parenting.

Unexpectedly, parents’ punitiveness, control, and lax discipline did not significantly predict young adults’ adjustment. Some young persons may view lax discipline positively, since they may feel that their parents allowed them more freedom or trusted them to learn from their mistakes. Other young persons may view lax discipline negatively, as they may feel that their parents paid little attention to them or their misbehaviour. For this reason, lax discipline may not have a uniformly negative or positive effect on young adults’ adjustment.

Parents’ control over their children may be interpreted as parents caring about and monitoring their children’s activities or, alternatively, as parents being too controlling and allowing their children little autonomy. Therefore, perceiving their parents as being “controlling” may have a positive effect on the adjustment of some young persons and a negative effect on the adjustment of others. From a developmental perspective, one would expect young adults to be able to reflect meaningfully on the ultimate value of their parents’ parenting practices.

Parents’ punitiveness may be viewed as justified by some young adults, who may have expected to be punished by their parents for their misbehaviour. In fact, for those young persons who misbehaved frequently in adolescence, their reports of the past punitiveness of their parents may reflect their parents’ use of consistent disciplinary techniques. Other young adults may think that their parents’ punitiveness was overly harsh or excessive. Hence, perceptions of parents’ punitiveness may demonstrate a
different relation with adjustment depending on young persons’ views of the appropriateness of the punishments their parents used during the young persons’ adolescence.

How frequently one was exposed to conflict between parents - but not whether conflict was self-related or whether one was caught in the middle of parents’ conflict - predicted poorer adjustment. It may be that frequent exposure to conflict between parents has the greatest impact on young adults’ well-being, and the effects of self-related conflict and triangulation may be subsumed under the broader category of frequency of conflict.

Again, no significant interactions emerged between family type and parenting quality or exposure to conflict between parents. This finding suggests that parenting quality and exposure to conflict have similar effects on adjustment for young persons from intact families and young persons from divorced families. However, young adults from divorced families may be at higher risk for poor adjustment than those from intact families, since young adults from divorced families reported receiving less affection from their mothers and being exposed to more frequent conflicts between their parents in middle adolescence.

**Direction of PDT and direct parenting.** Contrary to expectations, the direction of parental differential treatment, or perceiving that one received less affection and more control from one’s parents than one’s sibling, did not influence adjustment after the effects of direct parenting quality (affection, punitiveness, control, and lax discipline) were taken into account. Receiving less direct affection from mothers and fathers was associated with poorer adjustment. In addition, there was a trend indicating that
perceiving one's mother as more punitive was related to poorer adjustment.

Interestingly, direct parenting predicted adjustment after taking into account the effects of the direction of PDT. Perceiving that one received less affection from both parents than one's sibling was related to poorer adjustment. In addition, receiving little affection from mothers predicted poorer adjustment, and there was a trend indicating that experiencing little affection from fathers predicted poorer adjustment.

Direct parental affection, the direction of differential parental affection, and adjustment were all significantly correlated at the zero-order level; however, only direct parenting predicted adjustment after taking into account the effects of the direction of PDT, not vice versa. Therefore, it appears that direct parenting mediated the relation between the direction of PDT and adjustment. Perceptions that one received less affection from one's parents than one's sibling appeared to negatively influence young adults' adjustment through their relation with low levels of direct affection from parents. In other words, participants who reported receiving less affection from their parents in adolescence than their sibling did were also more likely to report receiving little direct affection from their parents, which then predicted poorer adjustment.

Poor quality parenting may occur along with high levels of parental differential treatment in families in which parents are experiencing stress. These parents may neither be able to devote as much energy to providing their children with warm, consistent parenting, nor to treating all of their children equally. For example, past studies have found significant relations between increased parental stress due to marital conflict and increased levels of parental differential treatment (Crouter et al., 1999; Deal, 1996; Jenkins et al., 2003; Volling & Elins, 1998), and between higher levels of interparental
conflict and poorer quality parenting (more negativity and coercion, less warmth) (Henderson et al., 1996). Other stressors including single parenthood, family chaos, parental depression, and low socioeconomic status (Asbury, Dunn, Pike, & Plomin, 2003; Jenkins et al, 2003) have also been reported to be related to higher levels of parental differential treatment.

Past research has reported that, after taking into account the effects of direct parenting quality, the effects of parental differential treatment on adjustment are small (Feinberg & Hetherington, 2001). In this study, young adults reported on differential and direct parenting experienced when they were 14 to 15 years old and on their present adjustment. The time lapse between differential and direct parenting and adjustment may explain why the direction of differential parenting was not significantly associated with adjustment. Differential parenting may be more strongly related to children’s or adolescents’ concurrent adjustment, since they are experiencing it in their daily lives, whereas the effects of past differential parenting may no longer be as relevant for predicting adjustment in young adulthood.

In addition, due to developmental maturation and their increased capacity for self-reflection, young adults may be more understanding and sympathetic toward their parents and the challenges they faced trying to raise children. Many young adults may now be more accepting of the different parenting styles their parents used with them and with their siblings, which may help explain the lack of a relation between differential parenting and adjustment after taking into account the effects of direct parenting.

No significant interactions emerged between family type and direct parenting or the direction of differential parenting, suggesting that young adults from both intact and
divorced families were similarly affected by these family experiences. However, as in
the previous analysis, young adults from divorced families may be at somewhat higher
risk for poor adjustment due to perceiving that they received less affection from their
mothers in middle adolescence.

Direct exposure to conflict and direction of differential exposure to conflict.
Contrary to hypothesis, the direction of differential exposure to interparental conflict (i.e.,
perceiving that one was exposed to more conflict between parents than one’s sibling) did
not significantly predict young adults’ adjustment after taking into account the effects of
direct exposure to conflict between parents. The direction of differential exposure to
conflict did not significantly predict adjustment even when entered into the hierarchical
regression analysis before direct exposure to conflict.

Regardless of which set of variables (direct exposure to conflict or differential
exposure to conflict) was entered in the first step, only direct frequency of exposure to
conflict was uniquely associated with adjustment. Young persons who were more
frequently exposed to conflict between their parents exhibited poorer adjustment. It may
be that children and adolescents are not highly sensitive to or highly aware of the amount
of conflict to which their sibling is exposed, so the construct of differential exposure to
conflict may not be relevant for predicting their adjustment. It is also possible that
frequent exposure to conflict between parents is significantly related to poorer
adjustment, regardless of whether one’s sibling is exposed to such conflicts more or less
frequently. In addition, it is conceivable that children and adolescents may be less likely
to compare themselves to their siblings in the domain of exposure to parents’ conflict
than in the domain of direct parenting quality.
Interactions between family type and direct exposure to conflict and the direction of differential exposure to conflict between parents were not found. Therefore, it appears that frequent exposure to conflict is related to poorer adjustment for young adults from both intact families and divorced families. However, since young adults from divorced families reported being more frequently exposed to conflict between their parents than did young adults from intact families, even after their parents’ divorce, young persons from divorced families may be at greater risk for poor adjustment due to witnessing frequent conflict between their parents.

*Direction of PDT and perceived unfairness of PDT.* As hypothesized, perceived unfairness of PDT was related to adjustment, even after accounting for the effects of the direction of PDT. However, contrary to expectation, perceived unfairness of PDT did not moderate the relation between the direction of PDT and adjustment.

Young adults who perceived their mothers’ and fathers’ differential treatment to be more unfair reported poorer adjustment, which is consistent with the findings of past studies (Kowal et al., 2002; McHale et al., 2000). PDT that is perceived to be unfair appears to be more detrimental to adjustment than PDT that is seen as justified, which, in fact, has been found to have somewhat positive effects on adjustment (Kowal et al., 2002; McHale et al., 2000). For example, a young adult may perceive that his parents’ being more controlling toward him than toward his sibling was fair, because he misbehaved more than his sibling did during adolescence.

The direction of PDT was also related to adjustment after accounting for the effects of perceived unfairness of PDT. Young adults who perceived that their mothers and fathers were less affectionate with them than with their siblings reported poorer
Unexpectedly, unfairness of PDT did not moderate the relation between direction of parental differential treatment and adjustment. This result suggests that perceptions of receiving less affection from parents than one’s sibling may have a negative impact on adjustment regardless of whether this differential treatment is perceived as fair or unfair. For example, a child may understand that his younger sibling needs more parental affection, attention, and reassurance than he does if his younger sibling is very sensitive, shy, or cries easily. Despite knowing that this differential treatment is justified, however, the child may still feel resentful and jealous of his sibling and somewhat rejected by his parents, which may lead to poorer adjustment.

Similarly, Kowal et al. (2002) reported that although the perceived fairness of PDT partially moderated the relation between PDT and children’s adjustment, some direct relations between PDT and adjustment remained. As McHale and her colleagues suggested (2000), receiving more negative parental treatment than one’s sibling, even if this treatment is perceived as fair, may still be associated with poorer adjustment, including poor self-esteem. Even when PDT is viewed as justified, children or adolescents may still not be able to help feeling jealous or resentful if they perceive that their parents treat their siblings more positively than themselves (McHale & Pawletko, 1992).

Perceptions of the direction of parents’ differential control did not significantly predict adjustment. This finding may have occurred because the items used to measure parents’ differential control did not assess uniformly negative or uniformly positive forms of control. Past research has found that receiving more negative parental control than
one’s sibling, such as coercion (Brody et al., 1992b; Dunn et al., 1990; Sheehan & Noller, 2002; Stocker, 1993), is associated with poorer adjustment, while receiving more positive parental control than one’s sibling, such as monitoring (Anderson et al., 1994), is associated with more positive adjustment.

Four items on the SIDE assessed parents’ differential control. One item (“Our mother/father blamed us for what another family member did”) clearly assesses a negative, coercive form of control. The other three items (“Our mother/father was strict with us,” “Our mother/father punished us for our misbehaviour,” and “Our mother/father disciplined us (for example, punished or scolded”), however, could be interpreted as reflecting either positive forms of parental control (consistent, firm discipline) or negative forms of parental control (excessive, harsh discipline). For this reason, the direction of the differential parental control construct, as assessed by the SIDE, may not show consistently positive or negative relations with psychological adjustment.

In addition, different forms of PDT may have different effects on young adults’ adjustment (McHale & Pawletko, 1992). Differential parental affection may influence adjustment negatively, whereas differential parental control may be viewed as justified based on the different developmental levels and needs of each sibling.

Implications for Clinical Practice

The findings of this study may be helpful for mental health professionals working with parents and, particularly, divorcing families. Based on the results of this study, clinicians would be advised to discuss with parents the importance of directing high levels of warmth and affection towards all of their children, particularly in stressful circumstances such as separation or divorce. It would be helpful for parents to know that
divorced parents may have difficulty maintaining high levels of affection for their children, but that making an effort to do so will likely have positive effects on their children's adjustment, even in later life.

Parents could also be advised to attempt to treat all of their children equitably, especially in the domain of affection. They might want to carefully observe how they act with each of their children and think about why they are treating each child a certain way. If they feel that some forms of differential treatment are necessary or beneficial in their family, it might be useful for parents to have a discussion with their children about why one sibling may be treated somewhat differently than another sibling due to each sibling's age, needs, or other reasons. An open, honest discussion may help children to understand the reasons for parental differential treatment and to see it as fair and justified. Parents could also be educated regarding children's potentially heightened sensitivity to parental differential treatment following divorce. During stressful times, when children may be concerned about the stability of their relationship with each parent, children may be particularly likely to notice and react to differences in how parents treat each sibling.

Finally, as much research has already shown, the present findings underline that parents should be advised to avoid exposing their children to interparental conflict. Clinicians may be able to help parents find ways to facilitate the private discussion of issues of conflict outside of their children's presence.

Strengths and Limitations

One strength of this study is its relatively large sample size (N= 368), which allowed for a statistical examination of many predictors of young adults' general present adjustment. However, despite the large size of the overall sample, the number of young
men from divorced families who participated was rather low (n = 32). This is most likely due to the nature of the sample, as more female than male university students tend to enrol in psychology courses.

Another strength of the present study is that it investigated perceptions of parental differential treatment, differential exposure to interparental conflict, and the unfairness of parental differential treatment in one sample. Little research has examined all three of these constructs at once, particularly in the context of divorced and intact families. In addition, this study investigated differences between young adults from intact and divorced families with regard to their perceptions of these family experiences. In past studies, participants from intact and divorced families have usually been grouped together, and differences between them have not been frequently examined.

The online methodology of this study had several strengths. It was convenient for participants, who could complete the online questionnaires in their own homes at any time they chose. It is likely that the web-based nature of this study attracted a larger number of participants than would otherwise have participated. Since the young adults who participated did not have to complete the questionnaires in person or see the researchers face to face, they may have benefited from a sense of anonymity that allowed them to feel more comfortable and to be more open when answering the questions. However, the online methodology also had limitations. Since the researchers did not observe the participants completing the questionnaires in person, it was difficult to ascertain that the participants took the process seriously. Participants may have felt less obligation to the researchers to answer the questions honestly, since the researchers did not know who they were and did not see their faces. In addition, participants may have
rushed through the study without reading the questions carefully, in order to receive their bonus points in the shortest possible time. These questions raised by the relatively new online research process remained unanswered for this and other similar studies.

There are several additional limitations to the present study. First, participants were asked to rate their experiences with parenting and exposure to interparental conflict retrospectively. Participants were 17 to 30 years old, so they were asked to remember events that occurred between 2 and 16 years in the past. However, the average young person was reporting on events occurring 4 to 5 years ago. These recollections may be subject to faulty or biased memory. For example, participants who are currently more poorly adjusted or who have poor present relationships with their parents or siblings may be more likely to remember negative past family experiences. It may also simply be difficult for young adults to accurately remember events that occurred when they were 14 to 15 years old. However, participants’ recollections of past family experiences may have more of an influence on their present adjustment than more objective measures of these experiences.

Another limitation of this study is that a single rater completed all questionnaires. Participants were asked to complete questionnaires regarding parenting received by their siblings and conflict witnessed by their siblings. It may have been difficult for them to answer these questions accurately. Their perceptions of their sibling may also have been influenced by the quality of their current relationship with their sibling. Use of a single rater may also have inflated the correlations among variables (Avolio, Yammarino, & Bass, 1991). For instance, participants who report positive present adjustment may also be more likely to remember positive past family experiences, simply due to a “rosy
afterglow" effect, in which past events are remembered in a more positive light. Again, it may be that participants’ subjective perceptions of past events are more important for predicting their present adjustment than the objective characteristics of these events.

Another related limitation is that only one sibling’s adjustment was measured. It was not possible to study actual sibling differences in present adjustment, only the target participants’ present adjustment. In other studies, relations among PDT, differential exposure to interparental conflict, and sibling differences in adjustment have been examined. However, it is interesting to note that young adults’ perceptions of PDT, particularly differential affection, and the unfairness of PDT, were nevertheless related to their own present adjustment in the current study.

This study examined the relation between perceptions of past family experiences and present adjustment concurrently, rather than longitudinally. Therefore, it is not possible to draw conclusions regarding cause and effect or time precedence. It is possible that negative past family experiences cause poor present adjustment; however, it is also possible that poor present adjustment causes young adults to remember their past family experiences as being more negative than they actually were. Alternatively, some other factor may lead to both negative perceptions of past family experiences and poor adjustment in young adulthood.

A further limitation of the present study is its use of a sample of young adults. It is possible that the relations among parenting, exposure to conflict, and adjustment may be stronger in childhood or adolescence. In childhood and adolescence, these family experiences may be more salient, as they are occurring in everyday life, and therefore they may have a larger effect on adjustment. Particularly for young children, who spend
most of their time with their families and for whom parents may have the greatest impact on their lives, adjustment may be strongly predicted by family experiences such as direct parenting, PDT, and exposure to conflict between parents. In young adulthood, many factors influence adjustment, and past family experiences may be only a minor, distal predictor. However, most past studies of PDT and adjustment have employed samples of children or adolescents, so the present study attempts to extend the findings of previous research into a later developmental period, young adulthood.

This study employed a fairly homogeneous sample of primarily Caucasian university students from lower- or upper-middle class family backgrounds. The use of this sample may attenuate potential differences between young adults from intact and divorced families, as young adults from middle-class divorced families who go on to attend university may be somewhat distinct from other young adults from divorced families.

Directions for Future Research

The current findings, considered in the context of the divorce and parenting literature, stimulate ideas for future research. Such research could examine the adjustment of both siblings in a sibling pair or of all siblings in divorced families, rather than just one sibling as in the present study. In addition to having children or adolescents complete questionnaires, it would be useful to employ multiple raters. Parents and teachers could complete measures of children’s adjustment; children could complete measures of direct parenting, PDT, and exposure to conflict between parents. It would also be helpful to use multiple methods to assess the constructs of interest, including qualitative interviews or home observations of interactions among family members in
addition to self-report questionnaires.

Ideally, a prospective longitudinal study employing a large sample of families with more than one child would be conducted to examine the relations among these family experiences and children’s adjustment. Families in which parents later divorced could be compared with families in which parents remained married on the relevant variables. A prospective longitudinal study would allow an examination of whether divorce leads to increased levels of PDT and children’s exposure to interparental conflict, or whether families who later divorce are more likely to exhibit high levels of these factors even prior to divorce. Additionally, this type of study could provide support for a causal relation between past family experiences and present adjustment. It would be useful to conduct such a study using a heterogeneous sample containing families from a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Future research could also examine how PDT may influence family relationships, including parent-child, sibling, and spousal relationships, by asking each member of these relationships to rate relationship quality. In divorced families, future research could examine how a cooperative or conflicted relationship between ex-spouses may be related to PDT and children’s exposure to interparental conflict. It would be useful to measure parents’ perceived stress levels in divorced and intact families to assess whether higher levels of parental stress occur in divorced families and whether parental stress is associated with higher levels of PDT and poor parenting quality. Additionally, it might be informative to study other predictors of sibling differences in adjustment beyond PDT and differential exposure to interparental conflict. One potential predictor of adjustment differences between siblings may be peer relationship quality, which may be particularly
relevant for siblings in adolescence.

Conclusions

Within its limitations, this study added to our knowledge of differences between young adults from intact families and those from divorced families in their perceptions of past family experiences. In addition, this study contributed to our knowledge of how perceptions of family experiences occurring in middle adolescence influence adjustment in young adulthood. This study is one of only a few studies to examine the relations among direct parenting quality, parental differential treatment, perceived unfairness of PDT, direct and differential exposure to interparental conflict, and adjustment in both intact and divorced families.

Several important differences emerged between young adults from intact families and those from divorced families. Compared to young persons raised in intact families, young persons who experienced their parents’ divorce perceived less affection from their mothers, less control from their mothers and fathers, and less punitiveness from their fathers. They also perceived greater differences between themselves and their siblings with regard to how much affection each sibling received from their fathers, and they perceived their mother’s and father’s parental differential treatment as more unfair. In addition, they reported being more frequently exposed to conflict between parents, being more caught in the middle of their parents’ conflicts, and greater differences between them and their siblings with regard to how frequently they were exposed to and caught in the middle of this conflict.

Despite these differences, there were also similarities between the perceptions of past family experiences of young persons from intact families and those of young persons
from divorced families. The two groups did not differ in their perceptions of their fathers’ affection, their mothers’ punitiveness, and both parents’ lax discipline. They perceived similar levels of both parents’ differential control and of mother’s differential affection directed at themselves and their siblings. They were also similar in their perceptions of being exposed to self-related conflict between parents and differences between siblings with regard to exposure to this self-related conflict. Finally, young adults from divorced families did not differ significantly from young adults from intact families on their current adjustment.

Young adults’ current adjustment was influenced by perceptions of several different past family experiences. Particularly salient was that young persons who perceived little affection from their parents exhibited poorer adjustment. Additionally, young adults who perceived that there were greater differences between them and their sibling with regard to how much affection and control each sibling received from their mother, regardless of which sibling was favoured, were more poorly adjusted. Those who perceived that they received relatively less affection from both of their parents than their siblings also reported more negative adjustment. In addition, poorer adjustment was associated with young adults’ perceptions that their parents’ differential treatment of them and their siblings was more unfair. Finally, young persons’ perceptions that they were frequently exposed to conflict between their parents were related to poorer current adjustment.

As differences between divorced and intact families are often overemphasized, it is noteworthy that the relations between perceptions of family experiences in middle adolescence and adjustment in young adulthood appeared to be similar for young persons
from both types of families. However, young adults from divorced families perceived that they received less affection from their mothers, that they were exposed to more frequent conflict between their parents, and that their parents’ differential treatment of them and their siblings was more unfair than young adults from intact families. In the end, it appears that young persons with divorced parents may be at higher risk for poorer adjustment in young adulthood due to these family experiences in middle adolescence, but that these family experiences do not inevitably predict poorer adjustment. It is hoped that the findings of this study can add to the body of literature that elucidates positive developmental trajectories and guides supportive practices for young persons who experienced their parents’ divorces during childhood.
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Appendix A

Demographics

Your gender: Male / Female
Your date of birth (month/date/year):
Your birth order: (1 means you are the first-born child, 2 means you are the 2nd-born, 3 means you are the 3rd born, etc.)
Total number of children in your family (including yourself):
Ethnicity:
SES of family of origin: working class / lower middle class / upper middle class / upper class
Parents’ Marital Status: Have your parents ever separated or divorced? Yes / No

The following questions will only be answered by participants from divorced families:
If yes, how old were you when your parents separated or divorced?
Did your parents ever get back together? Yes / No
Did either of your parents ever remarry? Yes / No
If yes, how many parental remarriages have you experienced?
If your parents ever remarried, did any of these remarriages end in divorce? Yes / No
If yes, how many of these remarriages ended in divorce?
After your parents separated or divorced, who did you live with? Only with my mother / Mostly with my mother / Half with my mother, half with my father / Mostly with my father / Only with my father

IMPORTANT: If you have more than one sibling, please read the following instructions to determine which sibling to answer the questions about:

1. If you have only one sibling who is 19 years of age or older, please respond to the questionnaires about this sibling.
2. If you have more than one sibling who is 19 years of age or older, please respond to the questionnaires thinking about the sibling who is closest to you in age.
3. If you do not have a sibling who is 19 years of age or older, please respond to the questionnaires thinking about the sibling who is closest to you in age.

Your sibling’s gender: Male / Female
Your sibling’s date of birth (month/date/year):
Your sibling’s birth order: (1 means he/she is the first-born child, 2 means he/she is the 2nd-born, 3 means he/she is the 3rd born, etc.)

The following question will only be answered by participants from divorced families:
After your parents separated or divorced, who did your sibling live with? Only with our mother / Mostly with our mother / Half with our mother, half with our father / Mostly with our father / Only with our father
Children’s Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) – measure of own past exposure interparental conflict and perceptions of sibling’s past exposure to interparental conflict

Preamble:
The following questions are about your experiences (your perceptions of your sibling’s experiences) with family arguments or disagreements. Please respond to these questions thinking about how things were generally in your family while you were 14 to 15 years old (Grades 9 and 10).

Participants from divorced families were also asked:
Please respond to these questions thinking about how things were in your family before and up until your parents separated or divorced.

T = True
ST = Sort of True
F = False

Frequency
*1. I never saw my parents arguing or disagreeing
(My sibling never saw our parents arguing or disagreeing)
2. My parents may not have thought I knew it, but I was aware that they argued or disagreed a lot
(Our parents may not have thought my sibling knew it, but he/she was aware that they argued or disagreed a lot)
3. My parents were often mean to each other even when I was around
(Our parents were often mean to each other even when my sibling was around)
4. I often saw my parents arguing
(My sibling often saw our parents arguing)
*5. My parents hardly ever argued
(My sibling would say that our parents hardly ever argued)
6. My parents often nagged and complained about each other around the house
(My sibling would say that our parents often nagged and complained about each other around the house)

Content
7. My parents often got into arguments about things I did in school
(Our parents often got into arguments about things my sibling did in school)
8. My parents’ arguments were usually about something I did
(Our parents’ arguments were usually about something my sibling did)
9. My parents usually argued or disagreed because of things that I did
(Our parents usually argued or disagreed because of things that my sibling did)
10. My parents often got into arguments when I did something wrong
(Our parents often got into arguments when my sibling did something wrong)
Triangulation

11. I felt caught in the middle when my parents argued
   (My sibling got caught in the middle when our parents argued)
*12. I didn’t feel like I had to take sides when my parents had a disagreement
   (My sibling wasn’t pressured to take sides when our parents had a disagreement)
13. My mom wanted me to be on her side when she and my dad argued
   (Our mom wanted my sibling to be on her side when she and our dad argued)
14. I felt like I had to take sides when my parents had a disagreement
   (My sibling felt pressured to take sides when our parents had a disagreement)
15. My dad wanted me to be on his side when he and my mom argued
   (Our dad wanted my sibling to be on his side when he and our mom argued)

Note: Items marked with an asterisk should be reverse scored.

Sibling Inventory of Differential Experiences (SIDE; Daniels & Plomin, 1985) – measure of perceptions of past parental differential treatment and its perceived fairness

These questions are about your and your sibling’s relationships with your mother and your father. Please respond to these questions thinking about how things were generally in your family while you were 14 to 15 years old (Grades 9 and 10).

If both of you were treated about the same, circle the number “3”
If you were treated a particular way more often, circle “4” or “5,” depending on how much more.
If your sibling was treated a particular way more often, circle “2” or “1,” depending on how much more.

Example: The first question asks if your mother/father was stricter with you or with your sibling. If she/he was much more strict with you, circle “5.” If she/he was much more strict with your sibling, circle “1.” If she/he was about the same towards both of you, circle “3.”

1. Our mother/father was strict with us (Differential Control DC)
2. Our mother/father was proud of the things we did (Differential Affection DA)
3. Our mother/father enjoyed doing things with us (DA)
4. Our mother/father was sensitive to what we thought or felt (she/he understood us) (DA)
5. Our mother/father punished us for our misbehaviour (DC)
6. Our mother/father showed interest in the things we liked to do (DA)
7. Our mother/father blamed us for what another family member did (DC)
8. Our mother/father tended to favour one of us (DA)
9. Our mother/father disciplined us (for example, punished or scolded) (DC)

1 = Toward my sibling much more
2 = Toward my sibling somewhat more
3 = Same toward both of us
4 = Toward me somewhat more
5 = Toward me much more

Perceived Fairness of Parental Differential Treatment (Kowal, Krull, & Kramer, 2004)

For each question, please think about whether you NOW believe that the way your mother/father treated you compared to how he/she treated your sibling in this particular area was FAIR or UNFAIR? For example, if your mother/father treated you both similarly, was this FAIR or UNFAIR? Or, if your mother/father treated you differently from how he/she treated your sibling, was this FAIR or UNFAIR?
- participants will be asked to circle FAIR or UNFAIR for each item on the SIDE

Colorado Parental Child-Rearing Scale (CPCRS; George & Bloom, 1997) – measure of perceptions of past direct parental treatment of self and sibling

These questions are about your own and your sibling’s relationships with your mother and your father. Please respond to these questions thinking about how things were generally in your family while you were 14 to 15 years old (Grades 9 and 10).

Factor I – Affection
1. My mother/father was very affectionate with me/my sibling
2. My mother/father enjoyed talking things over with me/my sibling
3. My mother/father comforted me/my sibling and helped me/my sibling when I/he or she had troubles
4. My mother/father was happy when she/he was with me/my sibling
5. My mother/father smiled at me/my sibling very often

Factor II – Punitiveness
1. My mother/father punished me/my sibling by making me/my sibling do extra work
2. My mother/father scolded and yelled at me/my sibling
3. My mother/father threatened to spank me/my sibling
4. My mother/father lost her/his temper with me/my sibling when I/my sibling didn’t help around the house
5. My mother/father forbade me/my sibling to do things I/my sibling especially enjoyed when I/my sibling was bad

Factor III – Control
1. My mother/father wouldn’t let me/my sibling roam around because something might happen to me/him or her
2. My mother/father worried that I/my sibling couldn’t take care of myself/himself or herself
3. My mother/father worried about me/my sibling when I/he or she was away
4. My mother/father did not approve of my/my sibling’s spending a lot of time away from home
5. My mother/father asked me/my sibling to tell her/him everything that happened when I/my sibling was away from home
Factor IV – Lax Discipline
1. My mother/father let me/my sibling off easy when I/he or she misbehaved
2. My mother/father was consistent about punishing me/my sibling when she/he felt I/my sibling deserved it (REVERSE SCORED)
3. My mother/father let me/my sibling get away without doing work she/he told me/my sibling to do
4. My mother/father found it difficult to punish me/my sibling
5. My mother/father excused my/my sibling’s bad conduct

1 = Very untrue of my mother/father
2 = Fairly untrue of my mother/father
3 = Fairly true of my mother/father
4 = Very true of my mother/father

Mental Health Inventory (MHI; Veit & Ware, 1983) – measure of present general adjustment

The following questions are about how you feel and how things have been with you generally within the past month. For each question, please circle the letter for the one answer that comes closest to the way you have been feeling.

1. How happy, satisfied, or pleased have you been with your personal life during the past month? (General Positive Affect; G)
   a. Extremely happy, could not have been more satisfied or pleased.
   b. Very happy most of the time.
   c. Generally satisfied, pleased.
   d. Sometimes fairly satisfied, sometimes fairly unhappy
   e. Generally dissatisfied, unhappy
   f. Very dissatisfied, unhappy most of the time.

2. How much of the time have you felt lonely during the past month? (Emotional Ties; E)
   a. all          b. most        c. a good bit        d. some          e. a little
   f. none

3. How often did you become nervous or jumpy when faced with excitement or unexpected situations during the past month? (Anxiety; A)
   a. always       b. very often   c. fairly often      d. sometimes     e. almost never  f. never

4. During the past month, how much of the time have you felt that the future looks hopeful and promising? (G)
   a. all          b. most        c. a good bit        d. some          e. a little
   f. none

5. How much of the time, during the past month, has your daily life been full of things
that were interesting to you? (G)
a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
f. none

6. How much of the time, during the past month, did you feel relaxed and free of
tension? (G)
a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
f. none

7. During the past month, how much of the time have you generally enjoyed the things
you do? (G)
a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
f. none

8. During the past month, have you had any reason to wonder if you were losing your
mind, or losing control over the way you act, talk, think, feel or of your memory?
(Loss of Behavioural/Emotional Control; B)
a. no, not at all
b. maybe a little
c. yes, but not enough to be concerned or worried about it
d. yes, and I have been a little concerned
e. yes, and I am quite concerned
f. yes, and I am very much concerned about it.

9. Did you feel depressed during the past month? (Depression; D)
a. yes, to the point that I did not care about anything for days at a time
b. yes, very depressed almost every day
c. yes, quite depressed several times
d. yes, a little bit depressed now and then
e. no, never felt depressed at all

10. During the past month, how much of the time have you felt loved and wanted? (E)
a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
f. none

11. How much of the time, during the past month, have you been a very nervous person?
(A)
a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
f. none

12. When you got up in the morning, this past month, about how often did you expect to
have an interesting day? (G)
a. always  b. very often  c. fairly often  d. sometimes  e. almost never  f. never

13. During the past month, how much of the time have you felt tense or "high-strung"?
(A)
a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
   f. none
(During the past few months, how much of the time has your sibling seemed tense or
"high-strung").

14. During the past month, have you been in firm control of your behaviour, thoughts,
   emotions, feelings? (B)
a. yes, very definitely
b. yes, for the most part
c. yes, I guess so
d. no, not too well
e. no, and I am somewhat disturbed
f. no, and I am very disturbed

15. During the past month, how often did your hands shake when you tried to do
   something? (A)
a. always  b. very often  c. fairly often  d. sometimes  e. almost never  f. never

16. During the past month, how often did you feel that you had nothing to look forward
   to? (B)
a. always  b. very often  c. fairly often  d. sometimes  e. almost never  f. never

17. How much of the time, during the past month, have you felt calm and peaceful? (G)
a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
   f. none

18. How much of the time, during the past month, have you felt emotionally stable? (B)
a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
   f. none

19. How much of the time, during the past month, have you felt downhearted and blue?
   (D)
a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
   f. none

20. How often have you felt like crying during the past month? (B)
a. always  b. very often  c. fairly often  d. sometimes  e. almost never  f. never

21. During the past month, how often did you feel that others would be better off if you
   were dead? (B)
a. always  b. very often  c. fairly often  d. sometimes  e. almost never  f. never
22. How much of the time, during the past month, were you able to relax without difficulty? (A)
   a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
   f. none

23. During the past month, how much of the time did you feel that your love relationships (loving and being loved) were full and complete? (E)
   a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
   f. none

24. How often, during the past month, did you feel that nothing turned out for you the way you wanted it to? (B)
   a. always  b. very often  c. fairly often  d. sometimes  e. almost never  f. never

25. How much have you been bothered by nervousness, or your “nerves,” during the past month? (A)
   a. extremely so, to the point where I could not take care of things
   b. very much bothered
   c. bothered quite a bit by nerves
   d. bothered some, enough to notice
   e. bothered just a little by nerves
   f. not bothered at all by this

26. During the past month, how much of the time has living been a wonderful adventure for you? (G)
   a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
   f. none

27. How often, during the past month, have you felt so down in the dumps that nothing could cheer you up? (B)
   a. always  b. very often  c. fairly often  d. sometimes  e. almost never  f. never

28. During the past month, did you ever think about taking your own life? (B)
   a. yes, very often
   b. yes, fairly often
   c. yes, a couple of times
   d. yes, at one time
   e. no, never

29. During the past month, how much of the time have you felt restless, fidgety, or impatient? (A)
   a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little
30. During the past month, how much of the time have you been moody or brooded about things? (D)
   a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little  f. none

31. How much of the time, during the past month, have you felt cheerful, light-hearted? (G)
   a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little  f. none

32. During the past month, how often did you get rattled, upset, or flustered? (A)
   a. always  b. very often  c. fairly often  d. sometimes  e. almost never  f. never

33. During the past month, have you been anxious or worried? (A)
   a. yes, extremely so, to the point of being sick or almost sick
   b. yes, very much so
   c. yes, quite a bit
   d. yes, some, enough to bother me
   e. yes, a little bit
   f. no, not at all

34. During the past month, how much of the time were you a happy person? (G)
   a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little  f. none

35. How often during the past month did you find yourself having difficulty trying to calm down? (A)
   a. always  b. very often  c. fairly often  d. sometimes  e. almost never  f. never

36. During the past month, how much of the time have you been in low or very low spirits? (D)
   a. all  b. most  c. a good bit  d. some  e. a little  f. none

37. How often, during the past month, have you been waking up feeling fresh and rested? (G)
   a. always, every day
b. almost every day  
c. most days  
d. some days, but usually not  
e. hardly ever  
f. never wake up feeling rested  

38. During the past month, have you been under or felt you were under any strain, stress, or pressure? (D)  
a. yes, almost more than I could stand or bear  
b. yes, quite a bit of pressure  
c. yes, some, more than usual  
d. yes, some, but about normal  
e. no, not at all
Appendix B

Table B1

Zero-order Correlations Among Control, Independent, and Dependent Variables ($N = 368$)

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* p < .025, ** p < .01
Appendix C

Table C1

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direction and Amount of PDT and Differential Exposure to Conflict Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368)

(Interactions Included)

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*Note. \( R^2 = .01 \) for Step 1a (\( p = .614 \)); \( R^2 = .01 \) for Step 1b (\( p = .122 \)); \( \Delta R^2 = .08 \) for Step 2 (\( p < .001 \)); \( \Delta R^2 = .08 \) for Step 3 (\( p < .001 \)); \( \Delta R^2 = .02 \) for Step 4 (\( p = .763 \))

\*p < .025
Table C2

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direct Parenting and Direct Exposure to Conflict Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368) (Interactions Included)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
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<th>β</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.00</td>
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<td>Triangulation (F)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Mother’s Affection (MA)</td>
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<td>2.04</td>
<td>.28*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Mother’s Punitiveness (MP)</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2.54</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Mother’s Control (MC)</td>
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<td>2.33</td>
<td>.06</td>
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<td>4.24</td>
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Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1 (p = .122); $\Delta R^2 = .24$ for Step 2 (p < .001); $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for Step 3 (p = .776).

*p < .025
Table C3

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direct Parenting and Direction of PDT Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368) (Interactions Included)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>β</th>
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<td>Father’s Control (FC)</td>
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<td>.07</td>
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*Note. R² = .01 for Step 1 (p = .122); ΔR² = .21 for Step 2 (p < .001); ΔR² = .01 for Step 3 (p = .238); ΔR² = .03 for Step 4 (p = .485).

*p < .025
Table C4

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direct Exposure to Interparental Conflict and Direction of Differential Exposure to Conflict Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368) (Interactions Included)

<table>
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<th>Variable</th>
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<th>β</th>
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<tr>
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<td>3.18</td>
<td>.06</td>
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Note. $R^2 = .01$ for Step 1 ($p = .122$); $\Delta R^2 = .08$ for Step 2 ($p < .001$); $\Delta R^2 = .01$ for Step 3 ($p = .124$); $\Delta R^2 = .02$ for Step 4 ($p = .279$).

*p < .025
Table C5

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Direction of PDT and Unfairness of PDT Predicting General Present Adjustment (N = 368) (Interactions Included)*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Step</th>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>β</th>
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<tr>
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<td>.06</td>
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<td>-.07</td>
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*Note. R² = .01 for Step 1 (p = .122); ΔR² = .07 for Step 2 (p < .001); ΔR² = .07 for Step 3 (p < .001); ΔR² = .01 for Step 4a (p = .515); ΔR² = .01 for Step 4b (p = .639).*

*p < .025