

NEGATIVE PARENTAL DISCLOSURES AS MEDIATORS OF COPARENTAL
COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONAL OUTCOMES IN PARENT-CHILD
RELATIONSHIPS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the associations among young adult children's perceptions of coparental communication (i.e. supportive and antagonistic), parents' negative disclosures, and relational outcomes in parent-child relationships (i.e., closeness and satisfaction). Participants included 241 emerging adult children who completed online surveys. As hypothesized, the results revealed that supportive coparental communication is positively associated with young adults' closeness and satisfaction with both parents, whereas antagonistic coparental communication is inversely associated with both outcomes. Parents' negative disclosures to their children mediated the associations between both dimensions of coparental communication and both relational outcomes. For mothers, indirect effects of supportive and antagonistic coparental communication through their own negative disclosures emerged for children's closeness, but not satisfaction. For fathers, however, indirect effects of both forms of coparental communication through mother's negative disclosures emerged for children's closeness and satisfaction. Ultimately, the results underscore the importance of disclosure as an explanatory mechanism for the associations between coparental communication patterns and relational quality in parent-child relationships. The implications of the findings, limitations, and possibilities for future research are discussed.

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Negative Parental Disclosures as Mediators of Coparental Communication and Relational Outcomes in Parent-Child Relationships

Over the last decade, researchers have dedicated much attention to coparental communication as a crucial factor affecting families (Afifi, Schrodt, & McManus, 2009; Beckmeyer, Coleman & Ganong, 2014; Blandon et al., 2013; Caldera & Lindsey, 2006; Feinberg, Kan, & Hetherington, 2007; Gasper et al., 2008; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). Coparental communication represents an important dimension of the coparenting relationship. Shimkowski and Schrodt (2012) explained that coparental communication looks primarily at the degree of support and/or hostility expressed between coparenting partners. Supportive coparental communication involves collaborative parenting, in which partners (or ex-partners) support and uphold the child-rearing efforts of their coparenting partner (Gable, Crnic, & Belsky, 1994). Interactions that consist of anger, competition, or efforts to undermine one's coparenting partner, however, comprise antagonistic coparental communication (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). Coparental communication does not refer to each parent's individual parenting efforts, but rather, to the degree that each coparent supports (or criticizes and undermines) his/her partner in their parenting efforts. As it develops, more research is being dedicated to the many different implications that the coparental relationship can have on both families and individuals.

One of the primary conclusions gathered from the research surrounding coparental communication is that it serves as a factor that mediates the effects of marital conflict on child adjustment and psychological well-being (Schoppe, Manglesdorf, & Frosch, 2001; Shimkowski & Schrodt, 2012). Although we know quite a bit about how coparental communication functions as a risk mechanism in families (e.g., Shimkowski & Schrodt, 2012), much less is known about how coparental communication specifically influences parent-child relationships.

According to Teubert and Pinquart (2010), coparenting can lead to desirable child outcomes, such as high social functioning, positive attachment with parents, and fewer externalizing and internalizing problems in children. Ultimately, healthy coparental communication patterns are an important part of family functioning in both intact and divorced families. Although research has effectively demonstrated a relationship between the coparental relationship and child adjustment, a full body of research demonstrating the connection between coparenting and the parent-child relationship is yet to be developed (Holland & McElwain, 2013; Feinberg, Kan, & Hetherington, 2007; Caldera & Lindsey, 2006). Further research demonstrating the factors impacting the relationship between coparenting and the parent-child relationship could enhance our understanding of those factors that promote healthy family functioning and childhood development.

Given the manner in which various patterns of coparental communication impact both child adjustment and parent-child relationships, identifying the elements that act as a variable linking the two factors together is crucial to developing a more complete understanding of their relationship. One such variable is disclosure. Dolgin (1996) found that there are many reasons parents disclose to their children, including desires to vent, to seek emotional support, and/or feel close to their children. These desires and the outcomes of (in)appropriate parental disclosures become especially important in the aftermath of a divorce, as Koerner and her colleagues (Koerner, Jacobs, & Raymond, 2000; Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, & Raymond, 2002; Koerner, Wallace, Lehman, & Escalante, 2004) have documented a series of harmful effects that inappropriate parental disclosures can have on children, both relationally and psychologically. In general, they demonstrated that disclosures negatively affect adolescent children by diminishing

their relationships with their parents, although some adolescents experienced strengthened relationships with their parents as a result of the same kinds of disclosures.

This leads to the second aim of the present study - contributing further evidence to delineate the precise impact of negative parental disclosures on parent-child relationships. As previously mentioned, there are many reasons that parents disclose information to their children. Researchers have demonstrated that mothers tend to vent or disclose in search of emotional support, and that their disclosures to their children are often an attempt to feel closer to their children (Dolgin, 1996). On one hand, these negative disclosures may create distance due to the negative valence of the information, yet they may also increase intimacy because of the trust afforded to the recipient of the information. Afifi and McManus (2010) found that negative disclosures from parents increased anxiety or worry in children. However, they also found that negative disclosures resulted in reports of greater closeness in parent-child relationships. According to Koerner, Kenyon and Ranking (2010), when mothers disclose negative comments about their ex-husband, younger adolescent behavior is associated with greater social involvement and dating. They suggested that this may be an attempt by daughters to avoid these negative disclosures by limiting contact with their mothers. Given the complex nature of responses to disclosures, negative disclosures may function in distinct ways from other communication behaviors that tie coparental communication to relational quality in parent-child relationships (e.g., feelings of being caught, see Schrodts & Shimkowski, 2013).

Researchers have also demonstrated that disclosures contribute to children's feelings of being caught such that, when negative disclosures occur, children can feel trapped between their parents and may struggle with alliances, which will in turn have an effect on their relational satisfaction and well-being (Schrodts & Afifi, 2007). This has led researchers to develop models

suggesting that motivations for negative disclosures are, in part, affected by interpersonal relationships with the other parents, which can lead to alignment, enmeshment, distancing, and even psychological damage. Given this research, the final aim of this study is to test the extent to which disclosures serve as mediators of emerging adults' perceptions of coparental communication and their reports of satisfaction and closeness with both parents. That is, negative disclosures may function as explanatory mechanisms that help us further understand how the coparenting relationship is associated with relational quality in parent-child relationships.

Theoretical Perspective

Coparenting

Researchers have devoted increased attention to the communication processes that underlie coparenting relationships in families (McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, & Rao, 2004). Coparenting explains the relationship between adults in their specific roles as parents, and their communication in childrearing (Feinberg, 2003). This excludes other elements of the relationship such as financial concerns, romance, and marital concerns unrelated to the children (McHale, Lauretti, Talbot, & Poquette, 2002). Over the past decade, researchers have examined coparenting in both divorced and intact families, and have demonstrated that coparental communication is a crucial element in the psychological, physiological, and relational development of children (Gasper et al, 2008; Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001).

In an effort to synthesize early coparenting research, Feinberg (2003) created an ecological model of coparenting that includes multiple components: joint family management, division of labor, childrearing agreement, and supportive/antagonistic interactions. Each of these components is unique and constitutes an important piece of the coparenting relationship. Joint family management and division of household labor involve the sharing of responsibility by

parents to care for their children. When this fails, the manner in which parents behave can lead to negative outcomes for children, such as poor adjustment, attachment issues, behavior problems in the classroom for preschool and middle school children, and psychological issues such as anxiety (Feinberg, 2003). Parents must also agree on how to raise their children in terms of morals, needs, discipline, and many other factors. This is the childrearing agreement. When persistent disagreements in childrearing occur, Block and colleagues (1981) found that preschool and kindergarten children engage in increased behavioral problems. The final dimension of Feinberg's (2003) framework, which refers to how supportive and/or antagonistic coparents are in their coparental interactions, focuses on how parents affirm and criticize each other in their parenting attempts. Sommer et al. (2000) found evidence that when support is low, it can cause social emotion problems in children.

This study focused specifically on the degree to which supportive and/or antagonistic coparental communication is associated with relational quality in parent-child relationships. Supportive coparenting occurs when parents validate each other as parents. It involves each parent respecting the input of the other, conveying support for and maintaining consistency in upholding the other parent's decisions, and acknowledging the other parent's authority (Gable, Belsky, Crnic, 1995; McHale, 1995). These supportive actions can be either implicit or explicit, but ultimately involve affirming the other parent in his or her childrearing decisions and interactions.

Conversely, antagonistic coparenting is the result of hostile and overly critical actions between parents. In antagonistic coparenting, one parent may undermine the authority of the other parent either directly or indirectly (Gable et al., 1995). This can involve ignoring the request for help by one parent to another, direct criticism of the other parent, and other actions

that present negative affect and damage the overall image and value of the other parent's actions. Some studies have identified antagonistic coparenting by examining conflict episodes during parenting interactions (McHale, 1995). These conflict episodes provide unique insight into larger patterns of coparenting that occur within the interparental relationship.

Although not all marital conflict is directly related to the coparental relationship, researchers have demonstrated that the two factors are associated and predictive of each other. For example, Margolin et al. (2001) found support for coparenting as a mediator of marital conflict and parenting, such that when they controlled for coparenting in the model linking marital conflict and parenting, there were significant reductions in the relationship between the two factors. Shimkowski and Schrodt (2012) found further evidence of this by demonstrating that coparental communication mediated young adults' perceptions of their parents' aggression and demand/withdraw patterns on their mental well-being. Furthermore, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown, and Sokolowski (2007) demonstrated that when parents reported high marital quality, they were more likely to "pull together" rather than undermine each other in coparenting.

Researchers have demonstrated that coparental relationships impact, and are impacted by, the marital relationship, yet they have also demonstrated a connection between marital conflict, coparenting, and relational quality in parent-child relationships. For instance, Amato and Afifi (2006) found that children in high conflict marriages are more likely to feel caught between their parents which, in turn, negatively impacts both the psychological and relational health of children. Interestingly enough, the parent-child relationship is impacted more by the communication between parents and their conflict within the home than by whether or not parents actually divorce (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Conflict after divorce is still predictive of

negative relational outcomes, particularly for the father (Bokker 2006). When divorced fathers experience persistent and destructive conflict with their former spouse, it negatively influences the relationship between the father and child. Conversely, when the communication between two divorced parents is positive, research shows that fathers tend to be more involved in the lives of their children.

The connection between coparenting and the parent-child relationship starts from a young age, as further demonstrated by the associations between coparenting and attachment. Caldera and Linsey (2006) demonstrated that competitive coparenting is associated with parental perceptions of less secure attachment in their children. Specifically, competitive coparenting led children to experience secure attachments to one parent, but insecure attachments to the other. This relationship continues throughout toddlerhood. For example, perceptions of coparenting are associated with the quality of mother-child relationships in children at age three (Holland & McElwain, 2013). Paternal coparenting perceived as positive also has positive implications for both father-son and father-daughter relationships. Although these studies frequently refer to children at young ages, it stands to reason that these associations may remain significant as children age into adolescence and young adulthood. For instance, previous researchers have demonstrated that patterns of coparenting tend to stabilize over time, remaining relatively consistent through the various stages of childhood (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Consequently, although changes in the content of parenting may occur, such as what issues are relevant for the child at pre-adolescent, adolescent, and emerging adulthood time periods, the communication process that adults establish of supporting or undermining each other in their parenting efforts is likely to remain relatively stable.

These communication patterns are likely to impact a child's closeness and satisfaction with their parents for a few reasons. One element that is important to both the psychological and social development of children is emotional security (Davies & Cummings, 1994). However, when children witness chronic and/or destructive conflict between their parents, it can be troublesome for them and can reduce their level of emotional security (Davies & Cummings, 1995; Davies & Cummings, 1998; Shimkowski & Schrodt, 2012). Given that coparental communication patterns tend to stabilize over time, parents who are supportive should consistently express less hostility and more support for each other, thus encouraging and maintaining emotional security in their child. However, antagonistic coparental communication patterns demonstrate higher levels of conflict in the home, damaging the child's sense of emotional security and modeling a relationship that is unable to fulfill the desires of children to see their parents supporting each other in leading the family. Given that these communication patterns are so closely tied to a child's emotional security and response to relationships, the coparental relationship is likely central to children's relationships with their parents.

Consequently, the first set of hypotheses was advanced for consideration:

H1: Young adult children's perceptions of supportive coparental communication positively predict their reports of relational closeness and satisfaction with both parents.

H2: Young adult children's perceptions of antagonistic coparental communication negatively predict their reports of relational closeness and satisfaction with both parents.

Although researchers have demonstrated that coparental communication is able to predict relational and psychological outcomes in children, they have yet to fully identify the explanatory mechanisms that mediate this relationship. That is, researchers can advance our theoretical and pragmatic understandings of effective coparenting by identifying communication behaviors that

help explain how supportive and antagonistic coparental communication facilitate (or impede) relational quality in parent-child relationships. For instance, Schrodts and Shimkowski (2013) found that feeling caught between parents mediated the relationship between coparental communication and children's satisfaction with their mothers, such that supportive coparental communication increases satisfaction with mothers indirectly by reducing feelings of being caught, whereas antagonistic coparental communication decreases satisfaction indirectly by exacerbating feelings of being caught. Thus, feeling caught is one mechanism that links coparental communication to parent-child relationships. Moreover, Schrodts and Afifi (2007) demonstrated that negative disclosures are positively associated with feelings of being caught between parents. Given that feeling caught mediates coparental communication and relational satisfaction with mothers, and that feeling caught is associated with parents' negative disclosures, a second explanatory mechanism that is also likely to mediate the effects of the coparenting relationship on parent-child relationships is disclosure; more specifically, parents' negative relational disclosures about their relationship with each other to the child.

Parents' Negative Disclosures

Self-disclosure is an important part of the parent-child relationship. Researchers have demonstrated meaningful associations among disclosures, children's health, and the relationship between parents and children (e.g., Afifi et al., 2007; Afifi, Afifi & Coho, 2009; Afifi & McManus, 2010; Koerner et al., 2002). For instance, Afifi et al. (2009) found that some disclosure accounts (e.g., self-based and general accounts) caused a decrease in anxiety, while others (e.g., partner based and relationship based accounts) were associated with increased skin conductance levels (SCL). SCL, also known as the galvanic skin response, measures the property of the human body that creates a small conductance representative of arousal in the human body.

This arousal occurs in response to such emotions as fear, anger, and stress. Therefore, when SCL's are higher during disclosures, participants in a study are more aroused (and potentially, more stressed) by the statements being made. This has allowed researchers to differentiate between arousing disclosures and disclosures that do not raise anxiety levels. It is important to note that parents and children often perceive the appropriateness of disclosures differently. When surveyed, parents may report that they believe their disclosures to be appropriate for their children to hear, while the child may report the opposite. In one study, for example, children's perceptions of the appropriateness of disclosures emerged as a stronger predictor of well-being in adolescence than did parents' perceptions of the appropriateness of their own disclosures (Afifi et al., 2007).

Previous research on disclosures has shown conflicting evidence regarding the relationships between disclosure and relational outcomes between parents and their children. For example, Afifi and McManus (2010) discovered that negative disclosures from one parent about the other parent might be associated with closer relationships between the custodial parent and the child. However, Koerner and associates (2002) argued that mother-daughter closeness may be *negatively* associated with mother-to-daughter disclosure.

The valence of these disclosures likely plays a crucial role in the complex associations that disclosures may have with relational outcomes in the parent-child relationship. It is important, then, to distinguish between closeness and satisfaction in light of this complexity. Negative disclosures may enhance closeness due to the fact that the parent trusts the child enough to open up and share negative feelings, yet such disclosures may simultaneously decrease satisfaction because of the valence and content of the information itself. In other words, children may feel closer to their mother and father when they share private (and negative) feelings about

each other, but dissatisfied because of what those negative disclosures mean for their relationships to both parents, as well as what they might mean about the stability of the parents' relationship. Thus, two additional hypotheses were advanced for consideration:

H3: Young adult children's reports of their parents' negative disclosures are positively associated with their reports of relational closeness with both parents.

H4: Young adult children's reports of their parents' negative disclosures are inversely associated with their reports of relational satisfaction with both parents.

Given evidence that coparenting styles impact communication behaviors (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992), it is reasonable to conclude that they would also be associated with the valence and frequency of negative disclosures from one parent about the other parent to the children. Parents who support and encourage each other in their parenting efforts will be less likely to disclose negative feelings about each other to the child, as they are more likely to understand the importance of maintaining a unified front to the child and to experience a greater sense of emotional support in the coparental relationship. For parents who engage in antagonistic and hostile coparenting, however, they may be more likely to disclose negative feelings and opinions to their children because of the spillover effect of their troubled relationship. As these negative disclosures occur, the parent-child relationship may be negatively impacted as the child responds in ways that inhibit the relationship (Koerner, et al., 2004; Koerner, Kenyon, & Ranking, 2006).

One theoretical framework that demonstrates the relationship between coparenting and disclosure is the divorce disclosure model (DDM) proposed by Afifi, Schrod, and McManus (2009). The DDM suggests that negatively valenced disclosures create feelings of being caught that lead to negative effects, such as alignment, enmeshment, distancing, and psychological and

physical damage. The DDM focuses on disclosure in the context of divorce, and argues that the valence of the disclosure is more important than the amount of disclosure.

The model lays out many possible motivations for parental disclosures to their children, including what Afifi and her colleagues (2009) label as the most important – the parents' relationship with each other. This, in part, includes the coparental relationship. It also shows that as negative disclosures become more frequent, the relationship between parents and children is frequently impacted. The DDM argues that as disclosures occur, and arousal increases, adolescents experience a flight or fight response. When a fight or flight response occurs, this causes children to either avoid the topic at hand or confront their parent about it (Afifi et al., 2009). The response can also sometimes manifest in aggression. Either of these responses (i.e., fight or flight) will likely have a negative impact on the quality of the parent-child relationship.

Although the DDM's focus is on families and children of divorce, the implications of the model suggest that negatively valenced disclosures *do* impact the parent-child relationship to some extent, and that the coparental relationship plays a meaningful part in this process. The DDM demonstrates the important role that the parental relationship plays in the actions of parents, especially in terms of disclosures to their children. It seems reasonable to conclude that if there is a relationship between coparental communication and disclosures in divorced families, the same relationship is likely to exist in intact families. Consequently, both previous research and the DDM suggest that patterns of supportive and antagonistic coparental communication will be associated with reports of parents' negative disclosures. Thus, the next set of hypotheses was advanced to test this line of reasoning:

H5: Young adult children's perceptions of supportive coparental communication are inversely associated with their reports of parents' negative disclosures.

H6: Young adult children's perceptions of antagonistic coparental communication are positively associated with their reports of parents' negative disclosures.

Finally, it stands to reason that patterns of coparental communication would create the kind of relational environment where parents who are supportive of each other would be less likely to disclose negative information, whereas those who undermine each other would be more likely to disclose negative information to their children. If these supportive and antagonistic coparental communication patterns are also predictive of relational closeness and satisfaction, then negative disclosures may operate as explanatory mechanisms that illuminate how coparental communication enhances (or diminishes) relational quality in parent-child relationships. Thus, a final hypothesis was advanced to test this line of reasoning:

H7: Young adult children's reports of parents' negative disclosures will mediate the association between coparental communication (i.e., supportive and antagonistic) and relational quality in the parent-child relationship (i.e., closeness and satisfaction).

Method

Participants

The sample included 241 emerging adults with two living parents. Participants included 153 females and 88 males from intact (82.6%, $n = 199$) and divorced (17.4%, $n = 42$) households, ranging in age from 18 to 33 years of age ($M = 19.8$, $SD = 1.9$). Most of the participants were Caucasian (85.1%), although 5.0% were Hispanic, 3.7% were African America, 3.3% were Asian, and 2.9% specified "Other."

For participants whose parents were still married, the average length of the marriage was 24.7 years ($SD = 4.8$). For those whose parents were divorced, the average time since the parents had divorced was 12.5 years ($SD = 5.6$), and the average length of marriage prior to the divorce

was 12.2 years ($SD = 6.6$). A majority of the participants (83.4%, $n = 201$) reported living with both their mother and father, though 7% ($n = 17$) reported living with their biological mother and 5% ($n = 13$) with their mother and stepfather. The remaining reported living with their biological father (1.2%, $n = 3$), with their father and stepmother (1.7%, $n = 4$), or some “other” living arrangement (1.2%, $n = 3$). Finally, participants reported talking an average of 4.9 and 2.7 hours per week with their mother and father, respectively.

Procedures

The data was collected from young adult students at a medium-sized, private university in the Southwest. Surveys were distributed to classes through the instructors (see Appendix). Network sampling was also used as students and fellow members of the university were asked to identify additional participants who would be willing to complete the questionnaire. A link to the online survey was distributed to all participants. Once informed consent was obtained, participants voluntarily completed the online questionnaire in their own personal time. The questionnaire consisted of demographic items and the measures included in this report. In classes where instructors granted permission, students were awarded minimal course credit or extra credit (less than 2%) for their participation in the research.

Measures

Coparental communication. Participants’ perceptions of their parents’ coparental communication were measured using an adapted version of Ahrons’s (1981) Quality of Coparental Communication Scale (QCCS). The original scale is composed of 10 Likert items assessing parents’ perceptions of antagonism (e.g., “When my current spouse and I discuss parenting issues, the atmosphere is one of hostility and anger”) and supportiveness in their coparenting relationship (e.g., “When I need help regarding the children, I seek it from my

current spouse”). In this study, the scale was adapted so that young adult children reported on their parents’ antagonistic coparental communication (four items, e.g., “When my mother and father discuss parenting issues, an argument often results,” “When my mother and father discuss parenting issues, the conversation is stressful and intense”) and supportive coparental communication (eight items, e.g., “My father is a resource to my mother in raising the children,” “When my mother needs help regarding the children, she seeks it from my father”). Responses were solicited using a 5-point scale that ranged from (1) *Strongly disagree* to (5) *Strongly agree*. The validity and reliability of the QCCS are well-established (Ahrons, 1981; Ahrons & Tanner, 2003; Bonach et al., 2005), and in this study, the scale produced acceptable internal reliability with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of .91 and .90 for perceptions of supportive and antagonistic coparental communication, respectively.

Negative disclosures. Participants’ reports of their parents’ negative disclosures were assessed using an expanded version of Schrodts and Afifi’s (2007) parental disclosures scale. The original measure consists of nine items referencing parental disclosures about personal problems (e.g., “My father often talks openly to me about his troubles,” “My mother often talks openly to me about financial problems”) and negative things about their spouse (e.g., “My father talks badly about my mother to me,” “My mother often tells me things about my father that she shouldn’t tell me”). In this study, 13 additional items were added to enhance the content validity of the scale, and separate versions were used for participant reports of both mother’s and father’s disclosures (e.g., “When my mother is lonely, she talks about these feelings with me,” “My mother confides in me about my father,” “My father talks about the frustrations of his relationship to me”). Responses were solicited using a five-point frequency scale that ranged from (1) *Never* to (5) *Very often*. In this study, the negative disclosures scale produced strong

internal reliability with alphas of .94 and .93 for reports of mother's and father's disclosures, respectively.

Relational closeness. Participants' reports of relational closeness with each parent were measured using Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch's (1991) relational closeness measure. The scale consisted of 10 items (e.g., "How openly do you talk with your mother?" and "How close do you feel to your father?"), and responses were solicited using a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*). One reverse-coded item was removed to increase the internal reliability of the scale (i.e., "How careful do you feel you have to be about what you say to your mother/father?"), and thus, the remaining nine items were averaged together so that higher scores represent greater closeness with each parent. Previous researchers have demonstrated the reliability and validity of the relational closeness measure (e.g., Schrodts & Afifi, 2007), and in this study, the measure produced alpha coefficients of .91 and .93 for closeness with mother and father, respectively.

Relational satisfaction. Huston, McHale, and Crouter's (1986) Marital Opinion Questionnaire (MOQ) was adapted to measure participants' satisfaction with their parents. The original 11-item scale was altered to reflect the mother and father as the referents instead of a marital partner. Participants were instructed to think about their relationship with their parents and to report their feelings toward their mother and father, separately, over the last month. Responses to 10 of the items used 7-point semantic differential scales (e.g., "miserable–enjoyable," "empty–full") and an additional item assessed global satisfaction using responses that ranged from 1 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*completely satisfied*). Previous researchers have demonstrated the validity and reliability of using a modified version of the MOQ to measure sibling satisfaction (Phillips & Schrodts, 2015; previous $\alpha = .94$) and family satisfaction (e.g.,

Schrodt & Ledbetter, 2012; previous $\alpha = .92$). In this study, the measure produced alpha coefficients of .97 and .96 for satisfaction with mother and father, respectively.

Data Analysis

The first six hypotheses were tested using Pearson's product-moment correlations. H7 was tested initially using four hierarchical regression analyses, including two sets each for participants' reports of closeness and satisfaction with mother and father, respectively. At step one in each model, relevant control variables were entered as predictors of mother and father closeness and satisfaction, followed by perceptions of supportive and antagonistic coparental communication, mother's negative disclosures, and father's negative disclosures at step two. To test for significant indirect effects, bootstrapping analyses were conducted separately for supportive and antagonistic coparental communication on reports of mother and father closeness and satisfaction using two sets of parallel mediator models. Using Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro for SPSS, these models estimated bias-corrected confidence intervals for the indirect effects based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.

Results

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and Pearson's product-moment correlations for all variables included in this study, are reported in Table 1

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlations for all Variables (N = 241)

| Variables | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|------------|----------|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|---|
| 1. SUP-COP | 3.86 | 0.87 | - | | | | | | | |
| 2. ANT-COP | 2.05 | 0.97 | -.47** | - | | | | | | |
| 3. M-Disc | 2.16 | 0.77 | -.27** | .42** | - | | | | | |
| 4. F-Disc | 1.67 | 0.61 | -.24** | .37** | .56** | - | | | | |
| 5. M-Close | 5.91 | 1.11 | .44** | -.23** | .08 | -.08 | - | | | |
| 6. F-Close | 5.61 | 1.20 | .43** | -.36** | -.15* | .06 | .36** | - | | |
| 7. M-SAT | 6.57 | 1.04 | .47** | -.30** | -.12 | -.20** | .75** | .23** | - | |
| 8. F-SAT | 6.42 | 1.10 | .44** | -.37** | -.31** | -.13* | .25** | .72** | .38** | - |

Note. SUP-COP = supportive coparental communication. ANT-COP = antagonistic coparental communication. M-Disc = mother's negative disclosures. F-Disc = father's negative disclosures. M-Close = closeness with mother. F-Close = closeness with father. M-SAT = satisfaction with mother. F-SAT = satisfaction with father.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to testing H7, preliminary analyses were conducted to determine if there were any relevant control variables that needed to be accounted for in the multiple regression models.

First, there were no significant associations between participant age, number of siblings (as a proxy for family size), and the criterion variables included in this report. There were, however,

significant differences in all four criterion variables (i.e., reports of closeness and satisfaction with mother and father) based on divorce status. Specifically, a series of one-way ANOVAs

revealed that participants from divorced families reported less closeness with both mother,

($M_{mother} = 5.56$, $SD_{mother} = 1.73$), $F(1, 239) = 4.97$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$, and father, ($M_{father} = 5.12$,

$SD_{father} = 1.53$), $F(1, 239) = 8.88$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .04$, than those from intact families ($M_{mother} =$

5.98, $SD_{mother} = .91$; $M_{father} = 5.72$, $SD_{father} = 1.09$). Similarly, participants from divorced families

reported less satisfaction with both mother, ($M_{mother} = 6.18$, $SD_{mother} = 1.70$), $F(1, 239) = 4.17$, $p <$

.05, $\eta^2 = .02$, and father, ($M_{father} = 5.87$, $SD_{father} = 1.60$), $F(1, 239) = 13.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .05$, than those from intact families ($M_{mother} = 6.54$, $SD_{mother} = .84$; $M_{father} = 6.54$, $SD_{father} = .92$). In terms of sex, daughters reported greater closeness with their mother ($M = 6.12$, $SD = 1.02$) than sons ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.16$), $F(1, 239) = 14.76$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Likewise, daughters ($M = 5.76$, $SD = 1.15$) also reported greater closeness with their father than sons ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.24$), $F(1, 239) = 6.00$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$. Consequently, biological sex and divorce status were entered as control variables at step one in each of the hierarchical regression models used to test H7.

Primary Analyses

H1 predicted that young adult children's perceptions of supportive coparental communication would positively predict their reports of relational closeness and satisfaction with both parents. As noted in Table 1, the results indicate that perceptions of supportive coparental communication have a positive association with reports of relational closeness with both mother ($r = .44$, $p < .001$) and father ($r = .43$, $p < .001$). Similarly, the results show that perceptions of supportive coparental communication have a positive association with reports of relational satisfaction with both mother ($r = .47$, $p < .001$) and father ($r = .44$, $p < .001$). Thus, H1 was supported.

H2 predicted that young adult children's perceptions of antagonistic coparental communication would negatively predict their reports of relational closeness and satisfaction with both parents. The results indicate that antagonistic coparental communication has an inverse association with reports of closeness with mother ($r = -.23$, $p < .001$) and father ($r = -.36$, $p < .001$), as well as with reports of satisfaction with mother ($r = -.30$, $p < .001$) and father ($r = -.37$, $p < .001$). Thus, H2 was supported.

H3 predicted that young adult children's reports of their parents' negative disclosures are positively associated with their reports of relational closeness with both parents. The results indicate that mother's disclosures have an inverse association with reports of father closeness ($r = -.15, p < .05$), but not with reports of mother closeness ($r = .08, p > .05$). Likewise, no significant associations emerged between father's disclosures and reports of closeness with either parent. Thus, with the exception of the significant, but negligible association between reports of mother's disclosures and father closeness, H3 was not supported.

H4 predicted that young adult children's reports of their parents' negative disclosures are inversely associated with their reports of relational satisfaction with both parents. The results indicate that mother's negative disclosures are inversely associated with reports of father satisfaction ($r = -.31, p < .001$) but not mother satisfaction ($r = -.12, p > .05$). However, father's negative disclosures are inversely associated with reports of satisfaction with both mother ($r = -.20, p < .01$) and father ($r = -.13, p < .05$). Thus, with the exception of mother's negative disclosures and reports of mother satisfaction, the results largely support H4.

H5 predicted that young adult children's perceptions of supportive coparental communication would be inversely associated with their reports of parents' negative disclosures. The results indicate that perceptions of supportive coparental communication are inversely associated with both mother's disclosures ($r = -.27, p < .001$) and father's disclosures ($r = -.24, p < .001$), and thus, H5 was supported.

H6 predicted that young adult children's perceptions of antagonistic coparental communication would be positively associated with their reports of parents' negative disclosures. The results indicate that perceptions of antagonistic coparental communication are positively

associated with both mother's disclosures ($r = .42, p < .001$) and father's disclosures ($r = .37, p < .001$), and thus, H6 was supported.

Finally, H7 predicted that young adult children's reports of parents' negative disclosures would mediate the association between coparental communication (i.e., supportive and antagonistic) and relational quality in the parent-child relationship (i.e., closeness and satisfaction). In the first regression model, using closeness with mother as the criterion variable, a multiple correlation coefficient was obtained, $R = .53, F(6, 234) = 15.02, p < .001$, accounting for 28.1% of the shared variance in mother closeness. At step one, divorce status ($\beta = .13, t = 2.06, p < .05$) and sex ($\beta = .23, t = 3.74, p < .001$) emerged as significant predictors in the model. At step two, sex ($\beta = .13, t = 2.20, p < .05$) remained a significant predictor, but supportive coparental communication ($\beta = .47, t = 6.48, p < .001$) and mother's negative disclosures ($\beta = .26, t = 3.61, p < .001$) emerged as significant predictors as well.

For the second model predicting closeness with father, the analysis produced a multiple correlation coefficient that was significant, $R = .53, F(6, 234) = 15.47, p < .001$, accounting for 27.0% of the shared variance in father closeness. Again at step one, divorce status ($\beta = .18, t = 2.86, p < .01$) and sex ($\beta = .15, t = 2.31, p < .05$) emerged as significant predictors in the model. At step two, supportive coparental communication ($\beta = .36, t = 4.95, p < .001$), antagonistic coparental communication ($\beta = -0.25, t = -3.68, p < .001$), and father's negative disclosures ($\beta = .30, t = 4.40, p < .001$) emerged as the only significant predictors in the model, although mother's disclosures approached statistical significance ($\beta = -0.14, t = -1.91, p = .057$).

For the third model predicting satisfaction with mother, the analysis produced a multiple correlation coefficient that was significant, $R = .50, F(5, 235) = 15.84, p < .001$, accounting for 25.0% of the shared variance in mother satisfaction. At step one, divorce status ($\beta = .13, t = 2.04,$

$p < .05$) emerged as the only significant predictor in the model. At step two, divorce status ($\beta = -.15, t = -2.22, p < .05$) and supportive coparental communication ($\beta = .50, t = 6.76, p < .001$) emerged as the only significant predictors in the model.

For the fourth and final model predicting satisfaction with father, the analysis produced a multiple correlation coefficient that was significant, $R = .51, F(5, 235) = 16.67, p < .001$, accounting for 26.0% of the shared variance in father satisfaction. At step one, divorce status ($\beta = .23, t = 3.68, p < .001$) emerged as a significant predictor in the model. At step two, supportive coparental communication ($\beta = .35, t = 4.83, p < .001$), antagonistic coparental communication ($\beta = -0.16, t = -2.40, p < .05$), and mother's disclosures ($\beta = -.22, t = -3.12, p < .01$) emerged as the only significant predictors in the model, although father's disclosures approached statistical significance ($\beta = .13, t = 1.95, p = .053$).

To determine if there were significant indirect effects in the model (for H7), bootstrapping analyses were conducted using two sets of parallel mediator models in PROCESS (Hayes, 2013). As noted in Tables 2 and 3, there were significant indirect effects from perceptions of supportive coparental communication to (a) mother closeness through mother's negative disclosures, (b) father closeness through both mother's and father's negative disclosures, and (c) father satisfaction (but not mother satisfaction) through mother's negative disclosures. Likewise, there were significant indirect effects from perceptions of antagonistic coparental communication to (a) mother closeness through mother's negative disclosures, (b) father closeness through father's negative disclosures, and (c) father satisfaction (but not mother satisfaction) through mother's negative disclosures.

Table 2

Indirect Effects of Coparental Communication on Closeness and Satisfaction with Mother through Parents' Negative Disclosures (N = 241)

| Paths | <u>Mother Closeness</u> | | | | <u>Mother Satisfaction</u> | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|----------------------|------------|----------------------------|-----------|----------------------|------------|
| | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | CI (Lower, Upper) | κ^2 | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | CI (Lower, Upper) | κ^2 |
| <i>Supportive Coparental COMM</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 1. SUP-COP→M-Disc→ | -.096* | .040 | -.192, -.032 | .073 | -.026 | .042 | -.104, .062 | .002 |
| 2. SUP-COP→F-Disc→ | .036 | .038 | -.016, .137 | .008 | .039 | .045 | -.022, .158 | .025 |
| <i>Antagonistic Coparental COMM</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 3. ANT-COP→M-Disc→ | .134* | .064 | .024, .281 | .090 | .035 | .066 | -.088, .174 | .003 |
| 4. ANT-COP→F-Disc→ | -.051 | .062 | -.187, .058 | .002 | -.055 | .069 | -.211, .066 | .037 |

Note. COMM = communication. M-Disc = mother's negative disclosures. F-Disc = father's negative disclosures. CI = Bias corrected confidence intervals for unstandardized effects based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.

^aIndirect effect sizes for the serial mediation paths were calculated using the ratio of the indirect to total effect.

**p* < .05.

Table 3

Indirect Effects of Coparental Communication on Closeness and Satisfaction with Father through Parents' Negative Disclosures (N = 241)

| Paths | <u>Father Closeness</u> | | | | <u>Father Satisfaction</u> | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------|----------------------|------------|----------------------------|-----------|----------------------|------------|
| | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | CI (Lower, Upper) | κ^2 | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | CI (Lower, Upper) | κ^2 |
| <i>Supportive Coparental COMM</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 1. SUP-COP→M-Disc→ | .064* | .033 | .010, .143 | .009 | .090* | .042 | .027, .199 | .059 |
| 2. SUP-COP→F-Disc→ | -.086* | .049 | -.215, -.016 | .050 | -.033 | .034 | -.121, .016 | .007 |
| <i>Antagonistic Coparental COMM</i> | | | | | | | | |
| 3. ANT-COP→M-Disc→ | -.068 | .042 | -.150, .015 | .004 | -.116* | .050 | -.230, -.030 | .076 |
| 4. ANT-COP→F-Disc→ | .126* | .050 | .052, .250 | .088 | .048 | .042 | -.016, .158 | .001 |

Note. COMM = communication. M-Disc = mother's negative disclosures. F-Disc = father's negative disclosures. CI = Bias corrected confidence intervals for unstandardized effects based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.

^aIndirect effect sizes for the serial mediation paths were calculated using the ratio of the indirect to total effect.

**p* < .05.

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to test the degree to which young adults' perceptions of their parents' negative disclosures mediated the associations between coparental communication (i.e., supportive and antagonistic) and relational quality in parent-child relationships. Overall, the results supported the theoretical line of reasoning advanced in this report, as negative disclosures mediate part, though not all, of the effect of coparental communication patterns on closeness and satisfaction in the parent-child relationship. In other words, the results demonstrate that the degree to which parents disclose negative information to their children helps explain how supportive and antagonistic coparental communication patterns predict relational quality within the parent-child relationships. Consistent with extant theory, supportive coparenting behaviors were positively associated with relational closeness and satisfaction, whereas antagonistic coparenting behaviors were inversely associated with both outcomes. However, when parents' negative disclosures to their children are positioned as mediators of these associations, there are unique indirect effects that emerge for both forms of coparental communication depending on which parent is disclosing negative information to the child. Consequently, the results of this study extend previous research on coparenting, disclosures, and parent-child relationships by providing at least three implications worth noting.

First, the results extend our understanding of the association between coparental communication and relational quality in parent-child relationships. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Afifi & Schrodt, 2003; Feinberg, 2003; Holland & McElwain, 2013; Shimkowski & Schrodt, 2012), this study found evidence that the coparental relationship does predict outcomes in parent-child relationships. Specifically, the results demonstrated that when parents engage in supportive and cooperative coparental communication, young adult children are more

likely to experience relational closeness and satisfaction with both mother and father.

Conversely, when parents engage in antagonistic or hostile coparental communication, their children are less likely to report relational closeness and satisfaction with both parents. Simply put, the manner in which parents communicate with each other about their children is directly associated with the degree of closeness and satisfaction that children have with their parents.

These findings are consistent with previous research. One possible explanation for these findings could come from the implications of children seeing their parents together, and the sense of security or insecurity that comes from those observations. This explanation may be aided by previous research demonstrating that when parents engage in competitive coparenting, children feel less emotionally secure (Caldera & Linsey, 2006). It is possible that as parents undermine each other, whether implicitly or explicitly, children feel less certain about the family's stability, which could be causing them to feel less close and/or less satisfied in the relationships they have with both mother and father.

A second set of implications to emerge from this study dealt with the relationship between coparental communication patterns and young adult children's perceptions of their parents' negative disclosures. Specifically, when parents engage in supportive coparental communication, they are perceived as being less likely to disclose negative information to their children. Conversely, when parents engage in antagonistic coparental communication, they are perceived as being *more* likely to disclose negative information to their children. These findings are supported by evidence from Dolgin's (1996) research that parents disclose to their children often as a way of venting or seeking emotional support. When communication patterns are supportive, and spouses respect each other and validate each other as parents, they are more likely to be secure in their relationship. This means they may be less likely to seek emotional

support from their young adult child(ren) because they are receiving emotional support in their spousal (and/or coparenting) partnership. On the other hand, when parents undermine each other in their parenting efforts, they may be more likely to feel the need to vent about their partner's behaviors and seek emotional support from a young adult child given that they are not likely receiving the support they need in the coparenting relationship. Thus, parents may be more likely to disclose negative information to their children in an attempt to meet certain emotional and psychological needs that have gone unmet in the coparenting relationship. At the same time, they may also engage in such disclosures in an explicit and direct attempt to undermine the child's relationship with the other coparent (Gable et al., 1995; McHale, 1995). Ultimately, the parent-child relationship can experience spillover effects from the coparental relationship, resulting in behaviors that reflect the coparenting partners' needs. In this study, for instance, these spillover effects can translate into negative disclosures from a mother or father to their child in response to an unsupportive coparental relationship.

Third, and perhaps most notably, the results suggest that negative disclosures do in fact function as mediators of coparental communication and relational quality in parent-child relationships (i.e., closeness and satisfaction). Although not all paths were mediated by emerging adults' perceptions of their parents' negative disclosures, certain indirect effects emerged among reports of both supportive and antagonistic coparental communication to reports of closeness for both parents, as well as to reports of satisfaction with father. Some of these indirect effects emerged as actor effects, in which the individual disclosing the information was the individual for whom the reduction in relational closeness or satisfaction occurred. However, a partner effect emerged in reports of satisfaction with father. This partner effect revealed that perceptions of mother's negative disclosures mediated the associations between perceptions of

supportive and antagonistic coparental communication, and children's satisfaction with their father. The results indicate that when supportive coparental communication occurs, such communication may have a positive indirect effect on young adults' satisfaction with fathers by reducing the degree to which mothers disclose negatively valenced information to their children. Conversely, when the coparental communication patterns are hostile and antagonistic, young adults are likely to report less satisfaction with their father as a function of increased negative disclosures from mother.

On the other hand, the same set of effects does not occur through father's negative disclosures. The implication of this is that mother's communication behaviors impact children's perceptions of their relationships with their father. This is consistent with Bokker's (2005) findings, as he found evidence that in divorced families, mothers can hinder or encourage father-child relationships post-divorce through their actions. The same research demonstrated that when communication between divorced parents is positive, fathers tend to be more involved in the lives of their children. The results of this study expand on those findings by suggesting that father-child relationships are influenced to some degree by not only what the father communicates to the child directly, but also by the actions of the mother as she discloses more or less negative information to the child. Ultimately, disclosures operate as one mediator of the associations between coparental communication patterns and relational quality in parent-child relationships.

Theoretically, the results of this study extend our current knowledge of coparenting and parent-child relationships in meaningful ways. For instance, with regards to disclosures, this study sheds light on the somewhat conflicting findings in previous studies that disclosures can simultaneously bring parents closer to their children and cause more relational distance and

distress (i.e., Afifi & McManus, 2010; Koerner et. al., 2002). Given that disclosure may function as an explanatory mechanism for coparental communication and relational quality in parent-child relationships, the findings of this study suggest that the nature of the coparental relationship may be a distal factor that contextualizes the effects that parental disclosures have on the parent-child relationship. Importantly, the results also extend previous efforts to identify some of the theoretical mechanisms that tie coparental communication and parent-child relationships together (e.g., Schrodtt & Shimkowski, 2013). This study helps us to identify disclosures as one of those mechanisms, furthering our understanding of communication behaviors that function to either enhance or diminish the closeness and satisfaction of parent-child relationships.

Despite these implications, however, the results should be interpreted with caution given the inherent limitations of the research design. The use of self-report measures from emerging adults limits the findings to the perspective of a single family member. Likewise, the homogenous nature of the sample limits the generalizability of the findings to predominantly white, affluent, college-educated emerging adults and their families. A related limitation emerged from the sample given that respondents were primarily from intact families, as only 17% of the sample came from divorced families. This data set left an insufficient sample size to conduct appropriate statistical comparisons between the processes that take place in divorced and intact families. Finally, the cross-sectional and correlational nature of this study prevents statements of causality, and as such, should be interpreted with caution.

With these limitations in mind, the results of this study do extend our understanding of communication processes that enhance or inhibit relational quality in parent-child relationships. Future researchers should test these associations with a larger, more diverse sample. This should include a sample with a large enough sample of both divorced and intact families in order to

conduct an appropriate comparison of the processes that occur in each group. Additionally, future researchers should consider a longitudinal research design, as this would allow researchers to see how these processes unfold over time. By incorporating a more diverse sample and using a longitudinal research design, researchers can expand on this study's initial findings regarding the relationships among coparental communication, negative disclosures, and relational closeness and satisfaction in parent-child relationships.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographics:

DIRECTIONS: In the following spaces, please circle or write the most appropriate response to each question. If there is a separate set of directions, please read those directions carefully and answer each question according to the directions for that section of the questionnaire.

1. What is your age? _____
2. What is your biological sex (please circle one)?
 - 1 Male
 - 2 Female
3. What is your current classification in school?
 - 1 First-year student
 - 2 Sophomore
 - 3 Junior
 - 4 Senior
 - 5 Graduate student
 - 6 Other (please specify): _____
4. What is your ethnicity or race?

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 White | 4 Native American |
| 2 African American | 5 Asian American |
| 3 Hispanic American | 6 Other (please specify): _____ |
5. Who do you currently live with (Or when you lived at home, who were your primary caretakers)?
 - 1 Biological (or Adoptive) Mother
 - 2 Biological (or Adoptive) Father
 - 3 Both mother and father
 - 4 Mother and Stepfather
 - 5 Father and Stepmother
 - 6 Other (please specify): _____
6. If your parents are still married, how long have they been married (in years)?

7. Are both of your biological (or adoptive) parents living (circle)? YES NO
8. Are your biological (or adoptive) parents divorced (circle)? YES NO
 - 8a. If you answered “yes” to question 6a, approximately how long has it been since your parents divorced? _____
 - 8b. If your parents are divorced, how long were they married before they divorced?

9. On average, how often do you talk with your MOTHER during a typical week?
_____ hours _____ minutes
10. On average, how often do you talk with your FATHER during a typical week?

_____ hours _____ minutes

11. How many siblings do you have? _____

12. Please circle the number which *best represents* your birth order:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Instructions: For this section, **please answer each item while thinking about both of your parents (not your stepparent).** The following scale measures the degree to which you feel caught between **your mother and father.** Please circle the response that best represents your feelings using this scale:

| | Never 1 | Seldom 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | Very Often 5 | | | |
|---|------------|-------------|----------------|------------|-----------------|---|---|----|
| | | | | | | N | S | VO |
| 1. How often do you feel caught between your mother and father? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 2. How often does your mother ask you to carry messages for her to your father? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 3. How often does your mother ask you questions about your father that you wish she wouldn't ask? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 4. How often does your father ask you to carry messages for him to your mother? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 5. How often does your father ask you questions about your mother that you wish he wouldn't ask? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 6. How often do you hesitate to talk about your father in front of your mother? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 7. How often do you hesitate to talk about your mother in front of your father? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 8. How often does your mother talk negatively about your father in front of you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 9. How often does your father talk negatively about your mother in front of you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 10. How often do you feel torn between your mother and father? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |
| 11. How often do you feel like if you are loyal to one parent, you are being disloyal to your other parent? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | |

Instructions: This set of questions concerns what your **MOTHER** talks to you about with regard to her relationship with your father. Please use the following scale when responding to each item:

| | Never 1 | Rarely 2 | Sometimes 3 | Often 4 | | | |
|---|------------|-------------|----------------|------------|-------|--|-------|
| | | | | | Never | | Often |
| 1. My mother talks openly to me about her troubles. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 2. My mother talks openly to me about her finances or money. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 3. My mother talks openly to me about her relationship problems. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 4. My mother refrains from talking badly about my father to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 5. My mother talks about the frustrations of her relationship to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 6. When my mother is lonely, she talks about these feelings with me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 7. When my mother is down or sad, she talks to me about these feelings. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 8. My mother tells me about difficulties that she is having with my father. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 9. My mother talks to me about money problems. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 10. My mother confides in me about my father. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| 11. My mother tells me negative things that my father has done. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 12. My mother cries in front of me and tells me that she is sad. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. My mother talks to me about her feelings about divorce in general. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. My mother talks to me about her feelings about marriage in general. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. My mother tells me about her feelings toward my father in general. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. My mother tells me about ill feelings that she has toward my father. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. My mother tells me about conflicts that she is having with my father. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. My mother talks to me about her personal worries. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. My mother lets negative things about my father slip to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 20. My mother tells me about the behaviors of my father that bother her. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. My mother tells me about things that my father does that irritate her. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 22. My mother tells me about things that my father has done that make her angry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Instructions. We would also like to know the extent to which you think that the things that your **MOTHER** tells you about her relationship with your father are appropriate for you to hear. Please circle the most appropriate response using the following scale:

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | | | | | |
|--|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|----|---|----|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | | | |
| | | | | | SD | N | SA | | |
| 1. My mother’s discussions with me about what she is feeling about my father are appropriate for me to hear. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. My mother tells me things about my father that I probably shouldn’t hear. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. The things that my mother tells me about my father are okay for me to hear. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Sometimes the things that my mother tells me about my father are things that are better left unsaid. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. My mother says some things about my father to me that she shouldn’t say. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Some of the things that my mother says to me about my father are embarrassing. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. The things my mother says about my father are in good taste as far as I’m concerned. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. At least some of my mother’s remarks about my father are rude. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Instructions: This set of questions concerns what your **FATHER** talks to you about with regard to his relationship with your mother. Please use the following scale when responding to each item:

| Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | | | | | |
|--|--------|-----------|-------|-------|---|-------|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | | | |
| | | | | Never | | Often | | |
| 1. My father talks openly to me about his troubles. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 2. My father talks openly to me about his finances or money. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 3. My father talks openly to me about his relationship problems. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 4. My father refrains from talking badly about my mother to me. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 5. My father talks about the frustrations of his relationship to me. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 6. When my father is lonely, he talks about these feelings with me. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 7. When my father is down or sad, he talks to me about these feelings. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 8. My father tells me about difficulties that he is having with my mother. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 9. My father talks to me about money problems. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 10. My father confides in me about my mother. | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 11. My father tells me negative things that my mother has done. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 12. My father cries in front of me and tells me that he is sad. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 13. My father talks to me about his feelings about divorce in general. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 14. My father talks to me about his feelings about marriage in general. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 15. My father tells me about his feelings toward my mother in general. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 16. My father tells me about ill feelings that he has toward my mother. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 17. My father tells me about conflicts that he is having with my mother. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 18. My father talks to me about his personal worries. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 19. My father lets negative things about my mother slip to me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 20. My father tells me about the behaviors of my mother that bother him. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 21. My father tells me about things that my mother does that irritate him. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 22. My father tells me about things that my mother has done that make him angry. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Instructions. We would also like to know the extent to which you think that the things that your **FATHER** tells you about his relationship with your mother are appropriate for you to hear. Please circle the most appropriate response using the following scale:

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree | | | | | |
|---|----------|---------------------------|-------|----------------|----|---|----|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | | | |
| | | | | | SD | N | SA | | |
| 1. My father’s discussions with me about what he is feeling about my mother are appropriate for me to hear. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. My father tells me things about my mother that I probably shouldn’t hear. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. The things that my father tells me about my mother are okay for me to hear. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Sometimes the things that my father tells me about my mother are things that are better left unsaid. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. My father says some things about my mother to me that he shouldn’t say. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Some of the things that my father says to me about my mother are embarrassing. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. The things my father says about my mother are in good taste as far as I’m concerned. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. At least some of my father’s remarks about my mother are rude. | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Instructions: In every family there are times when the parents don’t get along. We would like to know about your experiences with your parents’ conflicts. Please respond to the following questions by circling the number that best reflects your knowledge of your parents’ conflict now. “1” is **TRUE**, “2” is “somewhat true” and “3” is **FALSE**.

| | TRUE | Somewhat true | FALSE |
|--|-------------|----------------------|--------------|
| 1. I never see my parents arguing or disagreeing. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. They may not think I know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. My parents are often mean to each other even when I’m around. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. I often see my parents arguing. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. My parents hardly ever argue. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6. My parents often nag and complain about each other around the house. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7. My parents get really mad when they argue. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8. When my parents have a disagreement they discuss it quietly. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9. When my parents have an argument they say mean things to each other. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 10. When my parents have an argument they yell a lot. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11. My parents hardly ever yell when they have a disagreement. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 12. My parents have broken or thrown things during an argument. | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13. My parents have pushed or shoved each other during an argument. | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Instructions: We would like to know about how close you feel with your **MOTHER**. Circle the number that best indicates how close you feel: **1 = “Not at all”, 4 = “Moderately”** and **7 = “Very Much”**.

| | Not at all | | Moderately | | | | Very Much | |
|--|-------------------|---|-------------------|---|---|---|------------------|--|
| 1. How openly do you talk with your mother? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 2. How careful do you feel you have to be about what you say to your mother? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 3. How comfortable do you feel admitting doubts and fears to your mother? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 4. How interested is your mother when you talk to each other? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 5. How often does your mother express affection or liking for you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 6. How well does your mother know what you are really like? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 7. How close do you feel to your mother? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 8. How confident are you that your mother would help you if you had a problem? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 9. If you need money, how comfortable are you asking your mother for it? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 10. How interested is your mother in the things you do? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |

Instructions: Now, we would like to know about how close you feel with your **FATHER**. Circle the number that best indicates how close you feel: **1 = “Not at all,” 4 = “Moderately,”** and **7 = “Very Much.”**

| | Not at all | | Moderately | | | | Very Much | |
|--|-------------------|---|-------------------|---|---|---|------------------|--|
| 1. How openly do you talk with your father? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 2. How careful do you feel you have to be about what you say to your father? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 3. How comfortable do you feel admitting doubts and fears to your father? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 4. How interested is your father when you talk to each other? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 5. How often does your father express affection or liking for you? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 6. How well does your father know what you are really like? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 7. How close do you feel to your father? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 8. How confident are you that your father would help you if you had a problem? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 9. If you need money, how comfortable are you asking your father for it? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| 10. How interested is your father in the things you do? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |

Instructions: We would like to know about your satisfaction with your relationship with your **MOTHER** over the last two months. Use the following words and phrases to describe your satisfaction with your relationship. Circle the number that most closely describes your feeling toward your relationship. A “4” represents a “neutral” feeling.

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------------|
| 1. | Miserable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Enjoyable |
| 2. | Discouraging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Hopeful |
| 3. | Tied down | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Free |
| 4. | Empty | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Full |
| 5. | Boring | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Interesting |
| 6. | Disappointing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Rewarding |
| 7. | Doesn't give me much | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Brings out the best in me |
| 8. | Lonely | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Friendly |
| 9. | Hard | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Easy |
| 10. | Useless | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Worthwhile |
11. All things considered, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with your **mother** over the past two months?
- | | | | | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------|---|---|---------|---|----------------------|---|--|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | |
| | Completely dissatisfied | | | Neutral | | Completely satisfied | | |

Instructions: Now, we would like to know about your satisfaction with your relationship with your **FATHER** over the last two months. Circle the number that most closely describes your feeling toward your relationship. A “4” represents a “neutral” feeling.

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---------------------------|
| 1. | Miserable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Enjoyable |
| 2. | Discouraging | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Hopeful |
| 3. | Tied down | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Free |
| 4. | Empty | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Full |
| 5. | Boring | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Interesting |
| 6. | Disappointing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Rewarding |
| 7. | Doesn't give me much | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Brings out the best in me |
| 8. | Lonely | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | Friendly |

