

**The Intergenerational Transmission of Relationship Patterns: How We
Understand Relationships Makes the Difference**

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to investigate factors in the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns that might contribute to resilience in offspring relationship cognitions, expectations, and current relationship functioning despite (or perhaps, due to) witnessing interparental conflict. Questionnaires measuring interparental conflict, relationship cognitions, relationship communication behaviors, and current relationship satisfaction were administered to 119 young adult offspring at a single time point. Offspring also completed an audiotaped structured interview in which they described their parents' relationship which was later coded for coherence, or how cohesive, organized, and integrative an account they gave regarding the nature of their parents' relationship. A questionnaire measuring marital conflict and resolution was also administered to offspring participants' mothers. Offspring's optimism about marriage was tested as a mediator in the association between interparental conflict, resolution, and offspring's current relationship satisfaction. It was also predicted that offspring's high coherence about parental relationships would buffer offspring's relationship cognitions from the influence of interparental conflict, and that offspring's high coherence would facilitate the positive association between witnessing interparental conflict resolution and offspring's optimism about marriage. Other moderators were also tested. Results confirmed the prediction that offspring's high coherence regarding parental relationships would facilitate an association between witnessing interparental conflict resolution and offspring's increased optimism about marriage, which was associated with offspring's current relationship satisfaction. However, offspring's optimism about marriage and current relationship functioning were more vulnerable to the influence of interparental conflict when offspring displayed high coherence regarding parental relationships. Additional findings regarding differences in pathways dependent upon the informant of interparental conflict, the moderating role of supportive maternal relationships, and gender differences are highlighted. My findings suggest that offspring's optimism about marriage is a consistent pathway through which family of origin experiences can influence offspring's current relationship functioning. Further, the current study's findings suggest that offspring's increased awareness of interparental conflict and resolution can be beneficial or harmful to their own expectations regarding a future marriage depending upon the amount (and perhaps type) of conflict or resolution the offspring witnessed or their mother reported. Alternate mediation pathways within the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns are discussed.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Bowen's family systems theory suggests that individuals' experiences within their families shape their own understanding of the world and their behaviors within it (Bowen, 1978). Consistent with this model, much attention has already been paid to the negative effects of parental divorce and conflict upon offspring's romantic relationships; however, one of the main goals in this proposed study is to add to this existing research by determining the adaptive and resilient characteristics of offspring who do not follow their parents' footsteps and are therefore able to break with family patterns of relational discord. Past research on relationship processes has found that individuals who are able to maintain healthy dating relationships tend to have higher well-being and are less likely to encounter severe relationship distress later in life, as highlighted in Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach's (2000) review of the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction. My proposed study aims at deconstructing what Bowen called the "multigenerational transmission process" through examination of several intergenerational pathways of influence in predicting relationship satisfaction in young adults. Specifically, I ask, "How do offspring perceive their parents' relationships, and how does this perception play a role in the functioning of their own romantic relationships?"

Background and Foundation for Proposed Study

The increase of divorce rates in the United States and other Western countries over the past 50 years has called for many psychological studies that explore the nature, effects, and associations of marital dissolution (Pryor & Rogers, 2001). Many of these investigations have focused on the impact of parental divorce upon offspring. Research on parental divorce quickly

evolved into the examination of at least two foci: children's adjustment and well-being following parental divorce, and the impact of parental divorce upon their own likelihood toward entering unstable relationships. In brief, some studies examining children's adjustment following parental divorce have found increases in adjustment problems, internalizing disorders, and social difficulties in offspring following parental marital dissolution (e.g., Amato & Keith, 1991a; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Hetherington, 1999; Zill, Morrison, & Coiro, 1993).

However, studies such as Amato and Booth's (2001) examination of the legacy of interparental discord and Amato and Keith's (1991b) study of parental divorce's impact upon the well-being of offspring, have stressed the unique effects of interparental conflict upon offspring functioning, separately from parental divorce. These authors assert that many, if not the majority, of the maladaptive effects upon offspring that researchers have linked to parental divorce actually can be attributed to the accompanying interparental conflict. Unfortunately, many studies examining the effects of parental divorce upon offspring often do not account for interparental conflict (e.g., Amato, 1996; Franklin, Janoff-Bulman, & Roberts, 1990; Jacquet & Surra, 2001; Zill et al., 1993). Thus, a growing number of studies have begun to consider the role of interparental conflict more in its own right and, in so doing, better capture the complexity of effects that parental relationships can have upon offspring. These studies have found greater interparental conflict to be associated with offspring's attachment insecurity and maladjustment (without comparison to the effects of parental divorce) (Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2002), lower self-esteem, greater fear of intimacy, and lower romantic relationship satisfaction in offspring (in individuals with high-conflict intact families, compared to those with divorced families) (Kirk, 2002). Interparental conflict also has been associated with higher

perceived risk in intimacy, particularly for female offspring, as a result of post-divorce interparental conflict (Morris & West, 2001). A meta-analysis by Amato and Keith (1991b) found most support for a “family conflict perspective,” which highlights the conflict that parents often experience before and during the separation period of the divorce process and the impact of such conflict upon their offspring. In fact, their analysis found lower psychological adjustment and self-esteem in children from high-conflict intact families than those from divorced families.

How do these potential difficulties that offspring experience with conflictual and/or divorced parents affect their own adult romantic relationships? Multiple studies have assessed associations between parental divorce and offspring’s own romantic relationship functioning (e.g., Amato, 1996; Amato & DeBoer, 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991b; Buehler, Anthony, Krishnakumar, Stone, Gerard, & Pemberton, 2000; Wolfinger, 2000; Hetherington, 2003a; D’Onofrio, Turkheimer, Emery, Harden, Stlutske, Heath, Madden, & Martin, 2007). Many studies examining the intergenerational transmission of relationship discord found an association between parental divorce and earlier offspring marriage (Amato, 1996) and higher offspring divorce rates (Amato, 1996; Wolfinger, 2000). The mechanics of this association have been examined from many angles. Hetherington’s (2003a) Virginia Longitudinal Study of Divorce and Remarriage (VLSDR) identified five types of marriages that would be more or less likely to lead to marital instability: pursuer-distancer, disengaged, operatic, cohesive-individuated, and traditional marriages. This study found that “pursuer-distancer” marriages had the greatest risk for marital instability and “traditional” marriages had the least risk for instability. Intriguingly, the study found that offspring from families in which there had been high interparental conflict were the most likely to be in “pursuer-distancer” marriages themselves, regardless of whether

their parents were divorced. Furthermore, as Hetherington states on page 322, it was “not so much the frequency of disagreements and conflicts that predicted divorce but how they were resolved.” However, Hetherington concluded that parental divorce also was unique in its influence upon offspring relational instability in that it carried with it particular complications regarding financial support, parenting practices, and attitudes about commitment. Parental divorce also increased offspring’s likelihood of displaying conflictual behaviors in their own relationships, compared to interparental conflict without divorce.

Hetherington’s findings links the quality of parental relationships with their offspring’s own approach to relationships and marriage as well as the outcomes of their own relationships and marriages. Along these lines, many studies have endorsed a “behaviorist-modeling” perspective (e.g., Whitton, Waldinger, Schulz, Allen, Crowell, and Hauser, 2008b), which suggests that offspring observe parental relationship behaviors and then carry out those same behaviors in their own relationships, thus theoretically becoming more prone to marital conflict and divorce if their parents were also conflictual and/or divorced. Behaviors that offspring may imitate from their parents’ marriages may include negative relationship communication behaviors (Sanders, Halford, & Behrens, 1999; Amato, 1996). Amato and Booth (2001) developed the observational learning hypothesis based on their findings that offspring’s recollections of interparental conflict (rather than the divorce itself) mediated half of the association between their parents’ parental marital discord and their own marital discord. They highlighted several parental marital behaviors, such as being critical of the partner and stonewalling, as most likely to predict conflictual offspring marriages.

Communication Behaviors

Perhaps due to their relative ease of measurement in research, problematic communication behaviors in relationships have remained the focus of most studies supporting the behaviorist-modeling perspective of the intergenerational transmission of relational discord. The aforementioned study completed by Hetherington (2003a) found that the “pursuer-distancer” marriage type was most likely to produce a conflictual and unstable marriage, primarily because the communication styles present in those marriages are highly incompatible. Hetherington’s marital typologies mirror relationship communication qualities identified by Christensen and Sullaway’s (1984) Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ) which determines frequencies of demand-withdraw and mutual constructive communication in couples during conflict. Christensen and Shenk (1991) found that demand-withdraw communication behavior is most destructive to couples’ relationships, a pattern that is similar to Hetherington’s troubled “pursuer-distancer” couples. Gottman (1993) also identified three typologies of “stable” couples, which included “validators,” “volatiles,” and “avoiders,” and also identified two groups of “unstable” couples: “hostile” and “hostile-detached.” Gottman’s typologies were identified through their problem-solving discussions and the display of positive and negative affect. The latter two groups of couples were most likely to eventually divorce, and were, again, most similar to “pursuer-distancer” and “demand-withdraw” typologies. Furthermore, Sanders and colleagues (1999) investigated the impact of a history of parental divorce upon communication behavior in a premarital sample, finding that women with a history of parental divorce were more likely to display high levels of negative verbal and non-verbal communication behaviors, as compared to those without a history of parental divorce. Similarly, Caspi and Elder (1988) found that

offspring that observed interparental marital conflict displayed a problematic interpersonal style in their own marriages later in life. Further, Levy, Wamboldt, and Fiese (1997) found that women's and men's reports of conflict in their family of origin were associated with their own perceptions of their communication patterns and observer ratings of their actual relationship communication. Most recently, a longitudinal study by Whitton and colleagues (2008b) linked displays of hostility and positive engagement between parents and their adolescent offspring to similar displays of hostility and positive engagement in those adolescent offspring's own marriages later in life. Many of these studies, however, such as those of Sanders and colleagues (1999) and Amato (1996), failed to account for parental marital conflict in addition to parental divorce in their analyses, and many, such as Levy, Wamboldt, and Fiese (1997), relied solely upon single-informant retrospective data.

These studies emphasize the enormous impact of negative communication behaviors in relationships, but also suggest that the use of positive communication behaviors can be just as influential. However, assuming that offspring are simply observing their parents' relationship behaviors and then enacting them in their own relationships does not do justice to the complexity of human interactions. Many researchers argue that the transmission of relational discord is not as simple as imitating problematic parental marital behaviors; this purely behavioral theory neglects the schemata that offspring might develop from observation of their parents' relationship interactions and trajectory and from their own relationships with their parents.

Social Cognition

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1977), when applied to the intergenerational transmission of relational discord, makes room for the goals that individuals have for their

interactions with their partners and the beliefs they might hold about relationships in general. Such a theoretical framework suggests that these social cognitions about relationships also may mediate the association between interparental conflict and offspring's relationship functioning and trajectory, in addition to behavioral patterns.

Segrin, Taylor, and Altman (2005) applied social cognitive theory to offspring with divorced parents in terms of inhibitory and disinhibitory effects upon their own relationship functioning. These researchers found that parental divorce could have an inhibitory effect on offspring's own relationships by encouraging a negative perception of marriage, or alternately, have a disinhibitory effect upon offspring by fostering a sensitization toward divorce, thereby increasing the chances of earlier and more impulsive marriages with divorce as an accepted "solution." Segrin and colleagues (2005) found that parental divorce was linked with offspring's reports of increased interparental conflict, more negative attitudes toward marriage, a greater likelihood of marriage to a previously divorced individual, and a decreased chance of being in a close relationship.

Optimism about marriage. How individuals think about relationships is likely to affect not only how they interact with their partners, but how optimistic they are about the future of their long-term relationships, how they view commitment in relationships, and their selection of romantic partners. Studies examining such social cognitions have found that offspring who reported high interparental conflict also had more negative expectations about their own future marriages compared with those from less conflictual families-of-origin (e.g., Jennings, Salts, & Smith, 1991). Another study found that offspring who experienced parental divorce endorsed more negative expectations about marriage compared with offspring from never-divorced homes

(Boyer-Pennington, Pennington, & Spink, 2001). Additional studies have further explored offspring's optimism concerning their future committed relationships, finding that college-aged offspring whose parents had divorced were less optimistic about their own success in future marriage and also more distrustful of a future spouse compared to those with never-divorced parents (Franklin et al., 1990).

Similarly, Srivastava, McGonigal, Richards, Butler, and Gross (2006) examined “optimists” (those who cognitively expect positive outcomes in general) and their romantic partners and found that both optimists and their partners reported greater relationship satisfaction. This pathway was mediated by the optimists' greater perceived support from their partners. The authors found that these more optimistic individuals viewed their partners as engaging more constructively during conflict conversations, leading them to report feeling as if the conflict was more resolved one week later (compared to less optimistic individuals). This finding emphasizes the impact of positive cognitions about resolving conflict in relationships. Such positive cognitions may encourage a greater sense of self-efficacy and manageability of stressors in a relationship, thereby promoting an increased dedication to the relationship. It is important to question here whether offspring are considering their parents' marriage at all when they think of their own relationships and marriage or if they are more likely to be considering their own personal relationship history. Carnelly and Janoff-Bulman (1992) found that individuals' experiences in their own dating relationships predicted optimism about future romantic relationships but that individuals' parents' relationships predicted optimism about future marriage. This finding suggests that we might compartmentalize our expectations about relationships depending upon our frame of reference—the idea of marriage may still be highly

influenced by our parents' relationships, regardless of our own experience in dating relationships thus far.

Relationship efficacy and confidence. An individual's degree of self-efficacy and confidence in relationships also have been found to play important roles in the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns. Segrin and Taylor (2006) found parental divorce to be more indicative of lower appraisals of partner relational efficacy (i.e., weakened belief in the partner's ability to sustain a lifelong marriage) for men and diminished beliefs one's own ability to sustain a lifelong marriage for both men and women. A recent study by Whitton, Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman (2008a) found that parental divorce was associated with lower relationship confidence in women, even after controlling for parental conflict levels and premarital relationship adjustment. These authors also found that women with divorced parents entered into relationships with lower levels of confidence in the future of those marriages, which may lead to lower levels of commitment in those relationships, compared to women with continuously-married parents.

Attitudes toward marriage, divorce, and commitment. A number of studies have investigated commitment levels in offspring of divorced or conflictual parents, positing that parental conflict and/or parental divorce encourage disrupted and pessimistic beliefs and attitudes toward marital commitment in offspring. Hetherington (2003a) showed that women from divorced families in her longitudinal study were more likely to consider marriage an "imperfect institution" that is often short-lived, and thus may be more likely to divorce their own partners. A recent study has found lower levels of relationship commitment in engaged women with divorced parents (Whitton et al., 2008a). Intriguingly, Amato and DeBoer (2001) found

that children from divorced homes with low levels of conflict were significantly more likely to divorce themselves when their own marriages were distressed than were children from divorced homes with high levels of conflict, non-divorced homes with high levels of conflict, and non-divorced homes with low levels of conflict. The authors concluded that children who experience parental divorce without the precursors of parental conflict (or in other words, without much warning) experience a disruption their beliefs in the stability and permanence of marriage which then weakens their beliefs in commitment by sensitizing them to the option of leaving a dissatisfying marriage, much like the disinhibitory effects described by Segrin and colleagues (2005). In contrast, experiencing high levels of parental conflict sends the message to offspring that it is acceptable to leave a marriage only when they experience much distress and discord.

The studies discussed above add dimension to how offspring might conceptualize and internalize their understandings of their parents' relationships into their perceptions of relationships and marriage in general. These relationship schemata most likely link with the relationship behaviors offspring display in their own relationships and marriages. These schemata, however, appear very dependent upon each individual offspring's unique experience of his or her parents' relationship and the particular qualities that they themselves possess.

Resilience and Adaptation in Offspring in Response to Family Stressors

There are many findings that paint a very different, more hopeful picture of the effects of parental divorce and conflict than much of the research previously discussed. Most of this perspective can be traced to research focusing on the effects of parental divorce upon offspring's adjustment—particularly, the very *diverse* effects that parental divorce and discord can have upon offspring. For example, Riggio (2004) and Shulman and colleagues (2001) have

highlighted positive outcomes in offspring related to experiencing parental divorce.

Hetherington's (2003b) work on social support and the adjustment of children following parental divorce and remarriage focuses almost entirely upon the diversity of effects observed in offspring in response to interparental conflict and family transitions. For example, she states, "resilience is the normative outcome for children who are faced with the stresses and adaptive challenges associated with their parents' marital transitions" (p.224). Hetherington goes on to list several characteristics of children who have weathered conflictual parents or family transitions that might protect them from exhibiting many of the ill effects associated with parental divorce and conflict. These include a higher intelligence, internal locus of control, a supportive, well-adjusted partner, and a supportive personal relationship with an adult, family member, or parent.

Hetherington and Kelly (2002) describe six "clusters" of offspring adjustment 11 years following parental divorce. These included the largest "good-enough" cluster, made up of adolescents that scored in average ranges on externalizing and internalizing behaviors, social and cognitive competence, and self-esteem. Several "multi-problem" clusters were identified, where adolescents suffered from high depression and/or high antisocial behavior. Finally, three competent clusters were identified, named the "opportunistic-competent" cluster, the "caring-competent" cluster, and the "competence at a cost" cluster. Of particular interest are the "caring-competent" and "competence at a cost" clusters, whose adolescents were viewed by others as highly competent, caring, and well-liked, but unlike the "opportunistic-competent" adolescents, who had learned from navigating interparental conflict to "play to the higher power," the "caring-competent" adolescents were typically females who had formed a close and supportive relationship with one parent, typically their mothers, and conflict was typically lower in their

families. Interestingly, the “competence at a cost” adolescents were the highest achievers of the study and displayed multiple positive attributes but had lower self-esteem and higher anxiety than the other adolescents (Hetherington, 2003b). Hetherington found that these “competence at a cost” adolescents were often assigned responsibilities that forced them to mature earlier than other adolescents (e.g., care of younger siblings, household chores) and as such were also often in the role of “confidante” to their divorced mother. Hetherington explains that when these responsibilities and roles were age-appropriate and did not overly interfere with their regular development, these adolescents typically evolved into “caring-competent” individuals. However, when these responsibilities and roles were burdensome and inappropriate and fostered a lack of control over external events (e.g., becoming the confidante of an emotionally needy and overwhelmed parent), these adolescents felt a pervasive sense of failure and “unrelenting standards” behind their outward show of achievement and resilience.

Hetherington and Kelly’s (2002) “clusters” of adolescent adjustment paired with Hetherington’s (2003b) offspring characteristics of resilience suggest that there may be several routes to resilience and positive adjustment in offspring following parental separations and/or conflict. Two that stand out are the quality of a child’s relationship with one or both parents and his or her level of understanding regarding his or her parents’ marital relationship and conflict. Other potential moderators may include offspring characteristics, such as gender and parental marital history, as discussed below.

Supportive parent-offspring relationships as a moderator. Strong supportive relationships with parents may buffer individuals from stressors such as parental conflict and divorce. Past research has made clear that one of the possible detrimental long-term effects of

parental divorce upon offspring is poorer relationships with both parents; this is particularly true with fathers (Amato & Booth, 1996; Zill et al., 1993). Further, research by Conger, Cui, Bryant, and Elder (2000) and that previously cited by Hetherington and Kelly (2002) shows that parent-child nurturance predicts offspring's interpersonal competence in romantic relationships. Amato and Booth (1996) found that the combination of a low-quality parent-offspring relationship early on with a low-quality marital relationship when the offspring were 10 years old predicted low parental affection for offspring when the offspring were 18 years old. Divorce was found to exacerbate this loss of a parent-offspring supportive relationship for fathers. Steinberg, Davila, and Fincham (2004) have also found evidence of a mediational model in which parent-offspring attachment insecurity explained the relationship between offspring's negative perceptions of interparental conflict and negative expectations about marriage and relationships. Further, Katz and Gottman (1997) found that parental warmth, parental praise, and inhibition of parental rejection buffered young children from the effects of interparental conflict and divorce. Hines' (1997) review of the literature on the role of the parent-offspring relationship in divorce-related family transitions (including parental remarriage) and adolescent development concluded that a positive parent-offspring relationship (specifically, that between parents and their adolescent offspring) could protect offspring from the negative effects of parental divorce.

Many parents, especially mothers, are able to maintain close and supportive relationships with their children even in the midst of marital conflict and divorce; these solid relationships may serve as protective and consistent models for such offspring that remind them of the potential stability of relationships (thus reinforcing positive and optimistic cognitions about relationships) and serve as foundations for positive and constructive interpersonal skills (thus

modeling the necessary behavioral skills for maintaining healthy relationships). In fact, Conger and colleagues (2000) found that observational ratings of nurturant-involved parenting in the family of origin were associated with offspring's own behaviors with their romantic partner that were warm, supportive, and low in hostility; these behaviors mediated the relationship between family-of-origin parenting and offspring's relationship quality. As evidenced by Hetherington's (2003b) "caring-competent" versus her "competent-at-a-cost" adolescent clusters, an appropriately supportive and close relationship with a parental figure following a parental breakup can be protective for offspring, whereas an inappropriately enmeshed or particularly distant relationship with a parent can be detrimental to an offspring's adjustment and coping with interparental conflict and divorce.

Coherence as a moderator. A number of studies have shown that social cognitions related to relationships are not always entirely negatively affected by parental marital dissolution or interparental conflict. For example, Shulman, Scharf, Lumer, and Maurer (2001) portray social cognitions formed as a result of parental divorce as protective factors in that integrative perceptions of parental divorce in young Israeli adults were related to fewer problems and higher levels of friendship, enjoyment, and intimacy in their relationships. Similarly, Segrin and Taylor (2006) found that couples with a history of parental divorce appeared more accurate in appraising each other's relational efficacy in comparison with couples without a history of parental divorce. Finally, Mazur, Wolchik, Virdin, Sandler, and West (1999) found that positive illusions regarding hypothetical divorce events (in children whose parents had divorced within the past 2 years) protected children from self-reported depression and mother-reported externalizing behaviors.

However, Kelly and Emery (2003), in their review of the literature detailing offspring's adjustment following parental divorce, point out that few children are adequately informed by their parents during the process of separation and divorce and are often left to struggle with the meaning of their family's breakup on their own. Similarly, a study by Dunn, Davies, O'Connor, and Sturgess (2001) reports that 45% of children are given one-line explanations regarding their parents' divorce and 23% had no discussion with their parents regarding the "how and why" of their parents' divorce. Ducibella (1995) argues that how parents inform their offspring of their divorce may affect their offspring's sense of well-being, such as their locus of control and fear of abandonment. In his review of the literature, Ducibella found that only 13 articles out of 3,000 concerning parental divorce addressed the issue of how offspring are informed of their parents' divorce. Of those 13, only two specifically speak to this issue. Kelly and Emery (2003) state that the painful memories that often accompany a parental divorce are often linked with a sense of "loss of control," eerily similar to Hetherington's hypothesis about the development of the "competent at a cost" adolescent cluster whose adolescent members experienced increased anxiety and a sense of failure at their inability to understand or prevent their parents' divorce. This "loss of control" might then shape offspring's cognitions about relationships and marriage in general, and through such cognitions, might affect their approach to their own romantic relationships. A quality that might ameliorate such a feeling is a flexible, informed cognitive conceptualization of life events and experiences that makes such events and experiences—especially negative ones—more understandable to the individual, and thus less threatening.

A sense of coherence about life events might buffer individuals from stressors in such a way, thereby providing a sense of manageability of stressors because they are understandable

and predictable. Many definitions of coherence can be found throughout several academic disciplines, corresponding to various types of coherence. The linguistic idea of coherence relates to the surface-level organization of spoken and written language that enables humans to effectively communicate with each other. Deborah Tannen, in her introduction to *Coherence in Spoken and Written Discourse* (1984), states that coherence is the “underlying organizing structure making... words and sentences into a unified discourse that has cultural significance for those who create or comprehend it” (p. xiv). Tannen explains that the presence of coherence in discourse establishes “order from chaos”—or in other words, coherence gives evidence of an underlying theory behind spoken and written thought. Another conceptualization of coherence is measured through Antonovsky and Sourani’s “Family Sense of Coherence” scale, which evaluates how an individual perceives his or her family to work together as a unit. Antonovsky and Sourani assert that a high sense of family coherence—or a high level of agreement and mutual understanding about the world, family life events, and experiences between family members—can help family members confront and adapt to stressful life changes.

The current study explored the role of a different type of coherence in the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns. I was interested in how well an individual might understand and be able to verbally describe the dynamics of their family and the hidden motivations, thoughts, and feelings of their family members, and how this increased verbalized understanding might buffer offspring from negative outcomes related to parental divorce and interparental conflict. I explored the concept of narrative coherence, or how much an individual appears to understand and is able to coherently express his or her family’s particular “rules”—why is the family the way that it is? How do family members interact with each other, and what

do those interactions mean? I am interested in an individual's ability to construct an "empirically-supported" belief system based upon his or her family's characteristics (significant familial histories, events, personalities, identity as a family), past events, and the stability of those descriptions throughout the entire description of the family, through the analysis of a narrative. Thus, it is possible that the presence of such narrative coherence relates to how much an individual might understand about "why" family-related events and experiences occurred (Fiese & Sameroff, 1999).

Such coherence is best measured through personal narratives describing life experiences and these narratives typically emerge in late adolescence and early adulthood (McAdams, 2001) and over time, gradually develop greater causal and thematic coherence, allowing the individual to identify how one event may be meaningfully related to another (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). McAdams (2001) suggests that narrative coherence is essential to identity formation and strongly influential in an individual's future goals and expectations. The concept of narrative coherence has been applied to understanding individuals' experiences within the family and in intimate relationships. For example, the display of a high level of coherence, or organized thought, is required for an individual to be classified as "secure" in the Adult Attachment Interview (e.g., Main, 1996). A coherent understanding of one's relational and familial history has also been found to be a resilient quality in individuals with traumatic relational histories. "Earned secures," or those who have experienced major relational traumas and yet retain a coherent understanding of these events, appear nearly indistinguishable from "classic" secures who have not experienced relational traumas (e.g. Pearson, Cohn, Cowan & Cowan, 1994). Further, researchers increasingly have focused on this apparent element of resilience in the face of relational trauma;

Fiese and Sameroff (1999) have developed a coding system that attempts to measure relational coherence, or how individuals interpret their family's dynamics and internalize those perceptions in order to create meaning in their own lives and relationships. Their system, more so than Antonovsky and Sourani's (1988) Family Sense of Coherence Scale, assesses how an individual's narrative about his or her family of origin corresponds to the "completeness" of his or her understanding of their family-of-origin's dynamic. To be considered highly coherent in this system, one must demonstrate mastery of 3 narrative qualities. These include: 1) *internal consistency*—the speaker must follow a consistent theory in their descriptions of family characteristics; 2) *organization*—the narrative should flow comfortably with few tangents and is easily followed by the listener; 3) *flexibility*—the speaker must evidence the ability to consider the perspective of others in addition to their own perspective in the telling of a story.

Past literature has emphasized the importance of coherence in family resilience (e.g., Antonovsky & Sourani, 1988; McCubbin, Thompson, Thompson, & Futrell, 1999); however, no empirical research linking interparental conflict, divorce, and offspring's relationship cognitions and functioning has ever operationalized and evaluated the role of offspring's sense of narrative coherence about his or her parents' relationship as a potential buffer against the influence of interparental strife. Thus, it is possible that if a child is able to develop a coherent understanding of parental discord, then the association between parental discord and the child's later relational problems is likely to be weaker.

Offspring gender as a moderator. Finally, past research has found conflicting evidence for the influence of offspring gender in the transmission of intergenerational relational patterns. With regard to offspring gender, a 1994 review by Tasker and Richards found evidence of a

“sleeper effect” for female offspring in that parental divorce appeared to impact them more negatively than male offspring later in life, rather than during and immediately following the parental divorce. In contrast, males appeared to have more observable adjustment problems during and immediately following their parents’ divorce (if it occurred during childhood). These findings are supported by those of Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1982), who found that male offspring were more likely to respond to parental divorce with conduct problems and female offspring with internalizing problems. Further, the same study reported findings that females were more likely to enter into involved relationships and marriage earlier as a function of parental divorce, as opposed to males with divorced parents.

In fact, most studies that have noted gender differences in their analyses have found that female offspring suffer the most negative effects of parental divorce and conflict. Female offspring have been found to report less trust and satisfaction and more ambivalence and conflict in their own relationships than male offspring as a result of parental divorce (Jacquet & Surra, 2001). Another study that focused specifically upon gender differences in relation to family-of-origin functioning found that female offspring’s relationship communication behaviors were more likely than male offspring’s to be influenced by their family-of-origin (Levy, Wamboldt, & Fiese, 1997). Morris and West (2001) reported that an interaction between being female and exposure to moderate interparental conflict at a young age produced a higher likelihood of perceiving intimate relationships as risky. Relationship cognitions have also been found to differ between male and female offspring of divorced parents; Whitton and colleagues (2008a) found that engaged women with divorced parents were more likely to endorse lower relationship commitment and confidence.

Several studies have failed to find gender effects in the association between parental divorce and offspring adjustment and outcomes. Amato's review of the literature in 2000 found inconclusive evidence that the effects of parental divorce are stronger for one gender over the other; likewise, Toomey and Nelson (2001) failed to find gender differences in their study of how family conflict impacts young adults' attitudes toward dating relationships.

In response to these diverse findings, Kelly and Emery (2003) highlight the confounding nature of research attempting to find gender effects in the impact of parental divorce upon offspring, noting that a "complex interaction" exists between offspring gender, age at parental divorce, adjustment to parental divorce, custody arrangements, quality of parental relationships following divorce, and amount of interparental conflict that all serve to work against clear findings regarding the impact of offspring gender.

Review of a Pilot Study

Willett and colleagues (2008) conducted a pilot study of 229 undergraduate subjects from the University of Tennessee in which participants completed questionnaires measuring perceived parental conflict, various social cognitions relating to marriage and relationships, relationship commitment and satisfaction, and communication patterns, among others. Participants also completed an audio-taped structured interview with a project investigator in which they answered open-ended questions concerning their parents' relationship and their own romantic relationship; these interviews were later coded by trained research assistants for coherence of the narrative, relationship expectations, and commonalities between parental and offspring relationships (the coding process is described below). This study used a path analysis within a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework estimated in AMOS to examine the

contributions of offspring's social cognitions and learned behaviors in the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and current relationship satisfaction in offspring. In this study, the social cognition of optimism about marriage mediated the relationship between perceived interparental conflict and current relationship satisfaction, over and above the learned behavior of communication patterns. This study deconstructed this relationship further by creating new path models with the different components of the conflict properties scale of the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict questionnaire (CPIC) as predictors, which included resolution, frequency, and intensity of parental conflict, and found that optimism about marriage mediated the relationship between parental conflict resolution and offspring's current relationship satisfaction, again while controlling for communication patterns. Therefore, findings suggested that the *resolution* of interparental conflict, as opposed to the frequency and intensity of conflict, is what may be most influential to offspring relationship functioning.

Additionally, three research assistants were trained to code audiotaped interviews in which participants discussed their parents' relationship and their own current relationship in a structured format. These three research assistants were trained in the Family Narrative Consortium coding system, which assesses for coherence, or how well an individual is able to construct and organize a story (Fiese et al., 1999). The research assistants coded 72 narratives for coherence, which was made up of 3 separately coded constructs: internal consistency, narrative organization, and narrative flexibility (described previously). Research assistants also coded for relationship expectations, which assesses whether the study participant appears to view relationships as manageable, reliable, and safe, as evidenced through their narrative. Participants' narratives concerning parental relationships and their own relationships were coded for

coherence and relationship expectations separately. Analyses found that offspring's increased narrative coherence was associated with higher optimism about marriage, more constructive communication patterns, and increased dedication commitment in relationships. Further, lower interparental conflict was associated with more positive relationship expectations in offspring related to their parent's relationship. Lastly, offspring's high narrative coherence regarding their parents' relationship and their own relationship buffered offspring's relationship expectations from being influenced by interparental conflict. For offspring with low coherence, more negative relationship expectations were associated with increased interparental conflict.

This pilot study contained several limitations. Firstly, though the sample was fairly large, it was made up of undergraduate students, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings to a more ethnically and economically diverse population. Additionally, some of the measures used in this pilot study (such as one measuring offspring's perceived degree of control over the future of their relationships) displayed low internal reliability and therefore were less nuanced in their contributions to the hypothesized model. Further, the exploration of the role of narrative coherence and relationship expectations was limited to the small number of participants who completed the structured interviews, preventing the inclusion of these variables in the path analyses of the hypothesized model. Finally, the pilot study only contained offspring's input regarding their family-of-origin experiences, preventing the comparison of their reports of interparental conflict to the parents' reports of their own marital conflict.

Overview of Current Study

This study adds to the progressing literature through its examination of multiple routes of influence on the intergenerational transmission of relational patterns. Given the promise of our

pilot study, the current study was designed to improve upon the pilot study's methodology and, with the financial assistance of the Randy Gerson Memorial Grant, gather a more representative sample from a community population. In addition, few previous studies have included the parents' perspectives when considering the intergenerational transmission of relational discord; often the offspring's own recollections of parental conflict have been the only windows into parental relationship functioning. The current study presents both offspring's and a parent's perspectives (the offspring's mother figure) of family-of-origin relationships in an effort to examine how closely parent and offspring perspectives mirror or differ from each other. Finally, the current study facilitates the examination of potential sources of resilience and adaptation that offspring may possess –namely, how qualities of coherence and a supportive relationship with a parent may play a role in buffering offspring from being negatively affected by their parents' conflictual relationships.

Specifically, the current study examined the relations between parental divorce, interparental conflict and resolution (both offspring and parent-reported), offspring's social cognitions (optimism about marriage, beliefs about commitment, and relationship confidence/efficacy), learned behaviors (communication patterns), narrative coherence, supportive relationships with parents, and offspring's current relationship satisfaction in a comprehensive multi-directional model designed to identify how these constructs work singularly and in tandem to in an effort to better understand the intergenerational transmission of relational discord.

My hypotheses were as follows:

- 1) Based upon the pilot study findings which emphasized the role of interparental conflict resolution over interparental conflict, I predicted that the social cognitions of optimism about marriage, relationship commitment, and relationship confidence would mediate the relationship between interparental conflict *resolution* and offspring's current relationship satisfaction. We predicted that these mediating relationships would remain even while accounting for the influence of positive communication behaviors within relationships. I repeated these analyses using parental reports of marital conflict resolution in an effort to see if these relationships changed or remained the same. This hypothesis is illustrated in Figure 1.¹
- 2) I also expected offspring's narrative coherence about his/her parents' relationship would interrupt the negative intergenerational transmission of relational discord. Specifically, at high levels of offspring coherence about parental relationships, I predicted there would be a lack of association between interparental *conflict* and offspring's social cognitions about relationships and relationship communication behaviors. Further, I predicted that offspring who witnessed increased interparental *resolution* and who also displayed high levels of coherence about parental relationships would report more positive attitudes about marriage, which would then be associated with increased satisfaction in their own relationships. This hypothesis is illustrated in Figure 2.
- 3) I predicted that a supportive relationship with a parent would also serve to interrupt the negative intergenerational transmission of relational discord. Specifically, at high levels of parental support, I hypothesized that there would be a lack of association between

¹ All tables and figures are located in the Appendix.

interparental *conflict* and offspring's social cognitions about relationships and relationship communication behaviors. Further, I predicted that offspring who witnessed increased interparental conflict *resolution* and who also experienced high levels of parental support would report more optimism about marriage, which would then be associated with increased satisfaction in their own relationships. This hypothesis is illustrated in Figure 2.

4) Previous research suggests that gender and parental divorce (versus parental conflict without parental divorce) might moderate this model. Therefore:

a. I investigated overall differences due to gender and parental divorce in the mediation models with both interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution (mother- and offspring-reported) as predictors. This general hypothesis is illustrated in Figure 2.

b. Secondly, I predicted that gender would moderate the effect of interparental conflict resolution upon offspring's relationship efficacy and commitment beliefs.

Specifically, I predicted that females, rather than males, would experience higher relationship efficacy beliefs and more positive beliefs about commitment as a result of witnessing increased interparental conflict *resolution*. This prediction is based on research by Whitton and colleagues (2008a) who found that engaged women with divorced parents were more likely to endorse lower relationship commitment and confidence. Perhaps by witnessing increased interparental conflict resolution, females might be buffered from the negative effects of interparental conflict. This hypothesis is illustrated in Figure 3.

- c. Lastly, I also expected that males and females would be differentially affected by the perceived support of their parents. Namely, females, rather than males, will endorse more optimism about marriage if they perceive one or both of their parents to be supportive. This hypothesis is based upon previous findings showing females to be more affected not only by parental strife than males, but also to benefit from supportive parental relationships (e.g., Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). This hypothesis is illustrated in Figure 4.

Chapter 2

Method

Participants

Data were drawn from a community-recruited sample of 119 offspring participants and their mothers. There were 4 cases in which only mother data was collected due to offspring participant ineligibility because of romantic relationship dissolution or dropout due to our inability to reach him/her following mother participation. To be eligible, offspring participants had to be in a romantic dating relationship of at least 3 months in duration. The average length of offspring participants' relationships was 22.5 months, or nearly 2 years, with a range of 3 months to 96 months (8 years). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 30 years of age, with an average age of 22.4 years. The sample had a roughly equal gender distribution (48.7% female) and most of the sample was white (88.2%). Other ethnicities represented in the sample included participants of African-American descent (3.4%), Asian descent (3.4%), Hispanic descent (1.7%), and those who identified as "other" (3.4%). 56.8% of offspring reported a yearly income of less than \$10,000, with 35.6% reporting an yearly income between \$10,000 and \$24,999 and the remaining 7.6% reporting a yearly income between \$25,000 and \$74,999. 60.5% of offspring participants reported having completed "some college" and 16.5% reported that they had earned a college degree at the time of their participation. 65.5% of the offspring participants were full-time university students at the time of participation and 7.6% reported they were part-time students. 49 (or 39.8%) of offspring participants reported a divorce in their parental marital history (including those that reported their parents were currently separated), and of those with

divorced parents, the average age at parental divorce was 9.3 years of age, with 75% of participants reporting that they were age 14 or younger at parental divorce.

The mother-figure participants' ages ranged from 38 to 69. They were predominately white (91.1%), with 3.3% of Asian descent, 4.1% of African-American descent, and 1.6% who reported their race as "other" represented in the sample. Equal percentages (25%) of mother participants reported a yearly household income between \$50,000 and \$74,999 and between \$75,000 and \$99,900. 28.9% reported a yearly household income of less than \$49,999 and 19.8% reported a yearly household income of over \$100,000. 92.4% of mothers who participated in the study were offspring participants' biological or adoptive mothers, 1.7% were offspring participants' stepmothers, and 2.5% were offspring participants' grandmothers.

Procedure

Recruitment. Participants were recruited to participate in a study of family influences on relationships from the city of Knoxville and its neighboring counties. Fliers with information about the purpose of the study, eligibility criteria, and contact information for the study were posted in community centers, such as supermarkets, apartment complexes, healthcare facilities, and restaurants in the recruitment area. Fliers were also posted around the University of Tennessee campus and at other community college campuses in the Knoxville area. The study was also advertised on a social networking site. Participants were encouraged to tell their eligible peers about the study. Participants' mothers were compensated \$10 (in cash) via mail following completion of their telephone survey; offspring participants were compensated \$40 (in cash) at the end of their in-person data collection session. This study was approved by the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board.

Eligibility. To participate in the study, offspring and mother-figure participants had to be fluent in English. Offspring study activities were conducted at the study site located on the University of Tennessee campus; however, in certain cases in which offspring participants were not able to attend an on-site data collection session ($n = 3$), they were allowed to complete their questionnaire and structured interview over the telephone. In these cases, their compensation was mailed to them. To be eligible, offspring participants were required to be unmarried, not engaged to be married, between 18 and 30 years of age, and involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship lasting at least 3 months prior to the time of their participation in the study. Lastly, offspring participants had to have a willing mother figure that was present for most of their childhood and adolescence that was willing to answer a short questionnaire over the phone. We only contacted mothers (rather than fathers) of participants due to study compensation limitations and in response to past research that has found wives to be the best “barometers” of marital distress (Gottman, 1994). To provide the most diverse sample possible and to prevent cross-sampling, only one member of an offspring couple was permitted to participate and each mother-figure was permitted to participate only once (i.e., the mother could not participate again with another offspring).

Study protocol. Trained undergraduate research assistants screened potential offspring participants over the phone to determine their eligibility to participate in the study. Information gathered during this initial telephone contact also included the offspring participants’ mother’s contact information, the name of their father figure and his relation to them (e.g., biological, adoptive, or stepfather) and their judgment of their mothers’ willingness to answer questions about this father figure. Eligible offspring participants were next given information to provide to

their mothers regarding their mother's telephone interview, which took place prior to the offspring lab visit in an effort to reduce attrition. After the offspring participants left a message at the study phone number verifying their mother's informed assent to be contacted by the study staff, research assistants then called the offspring participants' mothers, performed the verbal consent procedure, and recorded their questionnaire responses over the phone, taking approximately 30 minutes in all. If the mothers had access to a computer, they were directed to a SurveyMonkey website where they could follow along with the questionnaire items to ensure the accuracy of their understanding of the questionnaire items. Mothers' compensation was mailed in an envelope within a week of the completion of their phone survey, along with a letter of thanks, the researchers' contact information, and a list of community referrals. Following the mother's telephone interview, the offspring participants were again contacted by telephone to schedule their study visit, which involved informed consent, a questionnaire, and audiotaped structured interview, taking an average of 45 minutes to an hour in total. Participants were asked to refer to the same parental figures in all relevant questionnaires, one of which must be the mother figure taking part in the study with the participant and the father figure identified at screening. This was to ensure that both offspring and mother participants were reporting on the same parental figures in their questionnaires and interviews. Offspring participants were compensated at the end of their data collection session and were given a list of community referrals as well as a copy of their consent form.

Measures Administered to Mother Participants

An example of each measure is included in the Appendix.

Biographical information. This form asked for basic demographic information necessary to provide a description of the study's sample (e.g., current age, education level, family income, ethnicity, relationship status, the length of the current relationship, if divorced, for how long and date of divorce; number of divorces and re-marriages).

Mothers' report of relationship conflict. The Parents' Perception of Interparental Conflict (PPIC) was adapted from the subscales of interparental conflict frequency, intensity, and resolution subscales of the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict scale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) for the purpose of this study. The measure is composed of 18 items and produced a Cronbach's alpha of .95 in the current study. An example item is, "Our children often saw my partner and I argue or disagree." Higher values indicate increased interparental conflict intensity and frequency and decreased resolution. Mothers were directed to report on their relationship with the father figure indicated by the offspring participant at screening that was present during the offspring's childhood and adolescence, and were asked to consider their relationship with that father figure as it was during their offspring's adolescence, rather than currently, when responding (i.e., the time the offspring was living in the home).

Mothers' report of relationship conflict resolution. This measure is an isolated subscale from the previously described (above) scale of mothers' report of relationship conflict. This subscale is made up of 6 items adapted from the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict scale. This resolution subscale achieved an alpha of .91 in the current study. An example item is, "When my partner and I argued or disagreed, we usually worked it out." Higher values indicate decreased conflict resolution. As with the conflict measure, mothers were directed to report on their relationship with the father figure indicated by the offspring participant

at screening that was present during the offspring's childhood and adolescence, and were asked to consider their relationship with that father figure as it was during their offspring's adolescence, rather than currently, when responding (i.e., the time the offspring was living in the home).

Measures Administered to Offspring Participants

Biographical information. This form asked for basic demographic information necessary to provide a description of the study's sample (e.g., current age, education level, relationship status, the length of the participant's current relationship, his/her parents' marital status, how old he/she was when his/her parents divorced (if they divorced)).

Optimism about marriage. The Marriage Expectations Survey (ATMS; Boyer-Pennington, Pennington, & Spink, 2001) is used to assess expectations and optimism regarding marriage. Nine items used in the survey are from the Attitudes toward Marriage Scale, a self-report questionnaire that measures the expectations regarding the quality of one's own future marriage (Wallin, 1954). Two items used in the survey are from a revised version of the 1954 ATMS (Kinnaird & Gerrard, 1986). Example items include, "How happy do you think you will be if you marry?" and "Do you ever have doubts about your chance of having a successful marriage?" The revised version of the ATMS has a Cronbach's alpha of .88 and a test-retest reliability score of .87 (Boyer-Pennington, et al., 2001). The Cronbach's alpha for the current study was .86.

Current relationship satisfaction. The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007) was developed to be a highly precise measure of satisfaction in romantic relationships. Example items include, "Our relationship is strong" and "I really feel like part of a team with my

partner.” The short version of the scale is composed of 16 items, and has demonstrated strong convergent validity with existing measures of relationship satisfaction and a Cronbach’s alpha of .98. The Cronbach’s alpha for offspring’s responses in the current study was .95. Offspring participants were asked to report on their current relationship.

Relationship confidence/efficacy. The Confidence Scale (CS) was developed by Stanley, Hoyer, and Trathen (1994) to measure individuals’ confidence in the future of their relationship. Participants rate their level of agreement with 10 items (e.g., “I believe we can handle whatever conflicts will arise in the future”) on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The CS has demonstrated internal consistency and evidence of construct validity (e.g., Kline, Stanley, et al., 2004; Stanley et al., 2001). In the study presented by Whitton and colleagues (2008a), the CS had a Cronbach’s alpha of .83. The Cronbach’s alpha for the current study was .88. Offspring participants were asked to report on their current relationship.

Beliefs about relationship commitment. The Commitment Index (CI) was developed by Stanley and Markman (1992) and assesses beliefs about commitment in romantic relationships. Specifically, it contains 2 subscales that each measures beliefs about a type of commitment: morality of divorce and meta-commitment (dedication). In addition to the summed scale score, two subscales of this measure were used in this study: Morality of Divorce (example item: “Divorce is wrong”) and Meta-Commitment, or dedication commitment (example item: “I try hard to follow through on all of my commitments”). Each subscale consists of 6 questions; higher values on the overall scale indicated increased importance of commitment to the individual, higher values on the Morality of Divorce subscale indicated higher agreement with the amorality of divorce, and higher values on the Meta-commitment subscale indicated higher

dedication commitment beliefs. This measure has a good reliability coefficient, with alphas ranging from .79 (meta-commitment) to .94 (morality of divorce), and good concurrent validity with other measures of commitment and satisfaction (Stanley & Markman, 1992). In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for the overall scale was .80, the Cronbach's alpha for the Morality of Divorce subscale was .85, and the Cronbach's alpha for the Meta-Commitment subscale was .73.

Current relationship communication behaviors. The Mutual Constructive Communication subscale of the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) measured the use of positive communication behaviors during relationship conflict, made up of the difference between the reported frequency of 3 positive communication behaviors and 4 negative communication behaviors. The overall measure from which this subscale was taken, the CPQ, is a 35-item self-report measure designed to assess the communication patterns of couples during conflict. The items measure communication during three phases of couple conflict: (a) pre-problem discussion, (b) during discussion of a relationship problem, and (c) post-problem discussion. Each item is rated on a Likert-type scale that ranges from *very unlikely* (1) to *very likely* (9). Christensen and Sullaway (1984) reported that the Mutual Constructive Communication Subscale produced inter-partner agreement of .80 and correlated .79 with partners' relationship satisfaction. Offspring participants were asked to report on their current relationship.

Perceived interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution. The Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) is a 48-item scale assessing children's views of 9 dimensions of interparental conflict: frequency, intensity,

resolution, content, perceived threat, coping efficacy, self-blame, triangulation, and stability. The items load onto three factors: Conflict Properties, Threat, and Self-Blame. The “Conflict Properties” factor was used in the current study, which contained 3 subscales: interparental conflict frequency, intensity, and resolution. Higher values on the Conflict Properties factor indicated increased interparental conflict and decreased interparental conflict resolution. The CPIC has demonstrated adequate internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alphas for the 3 scales well over the .70 recommended for research use. Test-retest correlations over a two-week period are also acceptable, ranging from .68 (Threat) to .76 (Self-Blame). The acceptable concurrent and criterion validity of the CPIC have also been demonstrated in comparison to measures of parent-rated marital conflict and child adjustment. In the current study, the Cronbach’s alpha for the Conflict Properties factor was .96 and the Cronbach’s alpha for the Interparental Conflict Resolution subscale was .92. When responding, participants were asked to consider their primary parental figures (which included the mother figure participating with them in the study), and were asked to report on their parents’ interactions during their adolescence, rather than currently.

Supportive relationships with parents. The 6-item “Support” subscale of the 25-item Quality of Relationship Inventory (QRI; Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991) was used to assess the amount of perceived support in offspring’s relationships with each of their parents separately (Mother and Father support). Responses are given on a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 = Not at all, to 4 = Very Much. Based on test-retest reliability, internal consistency using Cronbach’s alpha reported by the original publication of the overall measure was in the .80s and .90s. In the current study, the Cronbach’s alpha for the measure of maternal perceived support was .71 and the alpha for the measure of paternal perceived support was .84. As in previous measures,

participants were asked to consider their primary parental figures (which included the mother figure participating with them in the study). An error in questionnaire production led to this measure being omitted from the first 50 participant questionnaire packets. Efforts were made to contact these participants via telephone to gather their responses, resulting in 108 offspring participants that completed the maternal support questionnaire and 106 offspring participants that completed the paternal support questionnaire.

Structured interviews. Participants completed a structured audiotaped interview with a trained research assistant in which they were prompted to describe their primary parental figures' relationship (which included their participating mother figure and the father figure they reported on in their study questionnaire). The structured interview questions are included in the Appendix. Research assistants recorded these interviews using a digital voice recorder, which allowed the transfer of the audio data to a secure computer hard drive where the interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents and de-identified. This transcribed narrative form of the structured interviews was used for the procedure of coding, as the portion of the coding system used in this study relies on coding only the narrative structure.

These narratives were coded for narrative coherence by 4 trained undergraduate coders (2 male, 2 female), using the same coding system developed by Fiese and colleagues (1999) used in the pilot study. This system is based upon the framework that individuals are influenced by intergenerational processes that both bind families together across generations and allow individuals to break from problematic familial patterns. The system was developed to help test systemic theories of the way individuals make sense of these processes through multiple generations and how they interpret them. The coding system also allows a reflection of the ways

individuals construct their beliefs about relationships based upon their family interactions and memories.

The narrative coherence scale was coded for this study. The narrative coherence scale is made up of three constructs (internal consistency, organization, and evidence of flexibility in the narrative, described previously), coded individually and then averaged together for each narrative: internal consistency, organization, and flexibility of the narrative. This scale is designed to measure how an individual makes sense in his or her narrative of his or her parents' relationships, how the individual organizes his or her thoughts, and the willingness and/or ability of the individual to consider differing perspectives. It is possible for individuals to vary across these constructs of narrative coherence.

The 4 coders were trained over a period of 6 months using 74 narrative transcripts from the previously described pilot study, which used the same structured interview format (structured interview questions are shown in the Appendix). This allowed us to check the new codes against the previous codes decided on by the pilot study's coders. During the training period, coders met with me twice weekly to discuss their coding decisions. During these sessions, their understanding of each code's criteria was refined and they gradually developed a "group" conceptualization of what each numerical code required of a given narrative. Once the group had achieved reliability of at least .70 on each coherence construct (and on the overall total scale), they began coding the narratives from the current study. Coding reliability was determined through calculating an intra-class correlation coefficient, which is a statistic designed to estimate the reliability of sets of ratings (Bartko, 1976).

Each construct (Internal Consistency, Organization, and Flexibility) was coded on a numerical scale of 1 through 5, higher numbers indicating increased evidence of coherence regarding parental relationships. Each construct was described explicitly in the coding manual, with examples and requirements to be met within each narrative for each numerical code for each construct. The coding procedure proceeded as follows: independently, the research assistants were asked to read the transcripts of the structured interviews, which were assigned weekly. Each research assistant then (independently) coded each of the 3 constructs related to narrative coherence. Coders met with the author twice weekly. During these meetings, the research assistants, as a group, came to a consensus on codes in which there was a “split” (two research assistants coded 1 number, and the other two coded another number for the same scale) or in cases where at least one research assistant was more than 1 number away from the other research assistants’ ratings. In instances in which only 1 research assistant was a single digit off from the rest of the group, the codes were not discussed and left “as is.” These discussed/approved codes were recorded in the study database and were used in analyses. For these discussed codes, inter-rater reliability for narrative internal consistency was .90; for narrative organization, .86; and for narrative flexibility, .92. For use in analyses, the 4 research assistants’ codes for the 3 coherence constructs were averaged together, yielding an overall narrative coherence score that accounted for the internal consistency, organization, and flexibility of each narrative across coders. The alpha for the averaged internal consistency, organization, and flexibility scores (across coders) was .92.

The research assistants’ original (undiscussed) codes were recorded in a separate database to verify their continued inter-rater reliability. This database yielded the following intra-

class correlation coefficients for each coherence construct: internal consistency: .80; organization: .60; flexibility: .75. This database yielded an alpha for the 3 combined subscales (averaged narrative coherence score) of .86. It is worth noting that the research assistants encountered the most disagreement when coding for narrative organization, and thus the codes for narrative organization were the most likely to be discussed during group coding meetings.

Chapter 3

Results

Data Analytic Strategy

Study hypotheses 1 through 4 were examined using path analyses within a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework estimated in AMOS. This allowed me to both isolate each variable's unique contribution to the model as well as examine the manner in which all of the variables contribute to the model. Further, path analyses are considered the best way to examine moderated mediation effects (Mackinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004). When interaction effects were examined, predicting variables were mean centered. Interactions (when significant) were probed by subtracting the standard deviation from the moderator values (to examine the interaction at high levels of the moderator) and by adding the standard deviation to the moderator values (to examine the interaction at low levels of the moderator) (Aiken & West, 1991). Portions of hypothesis 4 were further examined using multiple regression analyses due to power considerations. The design of our study called for both mother and offspring participation; our data collection yielded a total of 119 pairs of mother-offspring completed data and 4 in which only mother's data was collected. In these 4 instances, the offspring participant either became ineligible between initial recruitment and his/her data collection session (which followed the mother's data collection session) or was unreachable after the mother's data collection session. Missing data was accommodated in AMOS through full information maximum likelihood estimation (FIMLE), which uses all available data to calculate parameter estimates, thereby not excluding missing data (Kline, 2005). Further, FIMLE has been found to be less biased and more efficient than other techniques of accommodating missing data (Arbuckle, 1996). FIMLE

allowed a total sample size of 123 offspring and their mothers for models including mother-reported predictors, and a total sample size of 119 for models containing only offspring-reported indicators; these sample sizes remain adequate for SEM (Kline, 2005). Fit indices used to evaluate the path models included χ^2 , Comparative Fit Index (*CFI*), and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (*RMSEA*). A model is considered a good fit when $\chi^2 / df < 2.0$, *CFI* > .95 and *RMSEA* < .06 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). An *M*-test of the indirect effects was used to further evaluate any significant mediation effects (MacKinnon, et al., 2004). Descriptive statistics, including means, ranges, and standard deviations of all study scales are presented in Table 1. Tables 4 through 11 contain Pearson correlations between all variables used in the study.

Measurement Model of Interparental Conflict

As one of the objectives of this study was to develop a multi-informant construct of interparental conflict, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using both mother and offspring report of interparental conflict. Specifically, 3 mother-reported indicators of interparental conflict (interparental conflict frequency, intensity, and resolution) and 3 offspring-reported indicators of interparental conflict (frequency, intensity, and resolution) were used in the CFA model (see Table 3 for correlations between these 6 interparental conflict indicators). Indicators within type of informant (mother, offspring) were allowed to covary (Model 1). This CFA resulted in poor model fit (see Table 2 for fit indices). Therefore, additional constraints were added across informant, connecting mothers' report of interparental conflict frequency with offspring's report of interparental conflict frequency, and so on (Model 2). This model provided a modestly adequate fit to the data (see Table 2 and Figure 5); however, as the less than ideal

CFA model fit indicated that differences existed between mother and offspring report of interparental conflict, it was decided to proceed through the remainder of the analyses examining mother and offspring report of interparental conflict in separate models.

Mediation by Social Cognitions about Relationships (Hypothesis 1)

Models 3 and 4 tested the first hypothesis, which stated that offspring's social cognitions of attitudes about marriage, relationship efficacy, beliefs about commitment, and the offspring's use of positive relationship communication behaviors would mediate the association between mother and offspring report of interparental conflict resolution and offspring's current relationship satisfaction. These mediation effects were examined in Model 3 in the association between offspring report of interparental conflict resolution and offspring's current relationship satisfaction. This model provided a good fit to the data (see Table 2).² However, though offspring's more positive attitudes about marriage ($\beta = .32, p < .01$), higher relationship efficacy ($\beta = .18, p < .05$), and increased use of positive relationship communication behaviors ($\beta = .44, p < .01$) predicted increased current relationship satisfaction, none of the mediators were significantly associated with offspring's report of interparental conflict resolution. Therefore, mediation was not found in Model 3.

Model 4 replaced offspring's report of interparental conflict resolution with mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution. This model also provided a good fit to the data (see

² To provide a more stringent test of mediation, for each of the discussed models, an additional model was estimated which included the direct path between the independent variable of interparental conflict / resolution and the dependent variable of offspring's current relationship satisfaction, for many of which resulted in a just-identified model. Therefore model comparisons could not be made. However, neither offspring nor mother report of interparental conflict or interparental conflict resolution were significantly related to offspring's current relationship satisfaction, suggesting full mediation in the models in which mediation occurred.

Table 2). In this model, mothers' report of increased interparental conflict resolution was significantly associated with offspring's report of more positive attitudes about marriage ($\beta = -.22, p < .01$), which was then associated with offspring's increased relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .32, p < .01$) (see Figure 6). An *M*-test of the indirect effects showed that offspring's attitudes toward marriage mediated the association between mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution and offspring's relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.20$, 95% confidence limits = $-.05 - .34$). Additionally, this model revealed significant associations between offspring's higher relationship efficacy and the use of positive relationship communication behaviors with offspring's increased relationship satisfaction.

Moderation by Offspring's Coherence about Parental Relationships (Hypothesis 2)

Models 5 through 10 tested the first portion of the second hypothesis, which examined the buffering effect of offspring's coherence about parental relationships in the association between interparental conflict and offspring's social cognitions about relationships and their use of positive relationship communication behaviors. Model 5 tested the association between offspring's report of interparental conflict, offspring's social cognitions and positive relationship communication behaviors, and offspring's current relationship satisfaction, with the interaction of interparental conflict and offspring's coherence about parental relationships predicting each social cognition mediator. Model fit was good (see Table 2). The interaction between offspring's coherence about parental relationships and their perceptions of interparental conflict significantly predicted offspring's attitudes toward marriage ($\beta = -.26, p < .01$) (see Figure 7). Therefore, 2 additional models (Models 6 and 7) were estimated in which high and low levels of coherence about parental relationships were included as interaction terms (see Table 2 for fit indices).

These models revealed that at high levels of coherence about parental relationships, witnessing less interparental conflict was associated with more positive attitudes about marriage in offspring ($\beta = -.35, p < .01$), which was then positively associated with offspring's increased current relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .32, p < .01$) (see Figure 8). An *M*-test of the indirect effects showed that at high levels of coherence about parental relationships, offspring's attitudes toward marriage mediated the association between witnessing interparental conflict and offspring's current relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.11$, 95% confidence limits = $-.05 - -.17$).

Model 8 replicated the previous model by replacing the predicting variable with mothers' report of interparental conflict. This model provided a good fit to the data (see Table 2). The interaction between offspring's coherence about parental relationships and their mothers' report of interparental conflict significantly predicted offspring's attitudes toward marriage ($\beta = -.19, p < .05$), replicating the interaction found with offspring's perception of interparental conflict (see Figure 9). Therefore, 2 additional models (Models 9 and 10) were estimated in which high and low levels of coherence about parental relationships were included as interaction terms (see Table 2 for fit indices). These models revealed that at high levels of coherence about parental relationships, mothers' report of less interparental conflict was associated with offspring's more positive attitudes about marriage ($\beta = -.33, p < .01$), which was then positively associated with offspring's increased relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .32, p < .01$) (see Figure 10). An *M*-test of the indirect effects showed that at high levels of coherence about parental relationships, offspring's attitudes toward marriage mediated the association between mothers' report of interparental conflict and offspring's current relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.12$, 95% confidence limits = $-.04 - -.20$).

Models 11 through 14 explored the second portion of the second hypothesis, which tested the buffering effect of offspring's coherence about parental relationships in the association between both offspring and mother report of interparental conflict resolution and offspring's social cognitions about relationships and their use of positive relationship communication behaviors. Model 11, which used offspring's perception of interparental conflict resolution as the predictor, provided a good fit to the data (see Table 2). The interaction between offspring's coherence about parental relationships and their perceptions of interparental conflict resolution significantly predicted offspring's attitudes toward marriage ($\beta = -.27, p < .01$) (see Figure 11). Therefore, 2 additional models (Models 12 and 13) were estimated in which high and low levels of coherence about parental relationships were included as interaction terms. These models revealed that at high levels of coherence about parental relationships, witnessing more interparental conflict resolution was associated with more positive attitudes about marriage in offspring ($\beta = -.36, p < .01$), which was then positively associated with offspring's increased current relationship satisfaction ($\beta = .32, p < .01$) (see Figure 12). An *M*-test of the indirect effects showed that at high levels of coherence about parental relationships, offspring's attitudes toward marriage mediated the association between witnessing interparental conflict resolution and offspring's current relationship satisfaction ($\beta = -.34, 95\%$ confidence limits = $-.15 - -.52$).

Model 14 replicated the previous model by replacing the predicting variable with mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution. This model provided a good fit to the data (see Table 2). However, the interaction between offspring's coherence about parental relationships and mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution did not significantly predict

offspring's social cognitions about relationships or their use of positive relationship communication behaviors.

Moderation by Supportive Parental Relationships (Hypothesis 3)

Models 15 through 20 tested the first portion of the third hypothesis, which stated that supportive relationships with parents might buffer offspring from the negative effects of interparental conflict. Model 15 tested the association between offspring's report of interparental conflict, offspring's social cognitions and positive relationship communication behaviors, and offspring's current relationship satisfaction, with the interaction of interparental conflict and perceived maternal support predicting each mediator. Model fit was good (see Table 2).

However, the interaction between offspring's perception of interparental conflict and their perceived maternal support did not significantly predict offspring's social cognitions about relationships or their use of positive relationship communication behaviors. Model 16 replicated Model 13 by replacing offspring's perceived maternal support with their perception of paternal support. This model also provided a good fit to the data (see Table 2), however, the interaction between offspring's perception of interparental conflict and their perceived paternal support did not significantly predict offspring's social cognitions about relationships or their use of positive relationship communication behaviors.

Model 17 replicated the previous 2 models by replacing offspring's report of interparental conflict with mothers' report of interparental conflict and the interaction between mothers' report of interparental conflict and offspring's perception of maternal support. This model provided a good fit to the data (see Table 2). The interaction between mothers' report of interparental conflict and offspring's perceived maternal support significantly predicted offspring's beliefs

about commitment ($\beta = -.23, p < .05$). We conducted some post-hoc analyses to explore the effects of the 2 subscales of the commitment measure. When the commitment measure was broken down into its 2 subscales (Morality of Divorce and Meta-Commitment), the interaction term only predicted offspring's beliefs about the morality of divorce ($\beta = -.22, p < .05$) (see Figure 13). Therefore, 2 additional models (Models 18 and 19) were estimated in which high and low levels of perceived maternal support about relationships were included as interaction terms (see Table 2 for fit indices). These models revealed that when offspring experience more supportive relationships with their mothers, there is an association between interparental conflict and offspring's beliefs about the morality of divorce ($\beta = -.27, p < .05$) (see Figure 14). These post-hoc analyses suggest that when offspring have supportive relationships with their mothers and the more interparental conflict is reported by their mother, the less offspring believe that divorce is morally wrong. As there was no significant association between offspring's beliefs about the morality of divorce and their current relationship satisfaction, no moderated mediation effect was found.

Model 20 investigated the same concept as Model 15, but with an interaction term of mothers' report of interparental conflict and offspring's perception of paternal support. The model provided an adequate fit to the data, though not as ideal as the previous interaction models (see Table 2). The interaction between mothers' report of interparental conflict and offspring's perception of paternal support did not predict offspring's social cognitions about relationships or their use of positive relationship communication behaviors.

Models 21 through 26 investigated the second portion of the third hypothesis, which stated that supportive relationships with parents combined with witnessing increased

interparental conflict resolution would lead to more positive attitudes about marriage in offspring, which would then be associated with offspring's increased relationship satisfaction. Model 21 explored this question using offspring's perception of interparental conflict resolution. This model provided a good fit to the data (see Table 2). However, the interaction between offspring's perception of interparental conflict resolution and their perception of maternal support did not predict offspring's social cognitions about relationships or their use of positive relationship communication behaviors. Model 22 replicated this model by using offspring's perception of paternal support in the interaction term. This model provided a good fit to the data (see Table 2). However, like the previous model, the interaction between offspring's perception of interparental conflict resolution and their perception of paternal support did not predict offspring's social cognitions about relationships or their use of positive relationship communication behaviors.

Models 23 through 26 replicated Models 21 and 22 by replacing offspring's perception of interparental conflict resolution with mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution. Model 23 included the interaction between mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution and offspring's perception of maternal support. The resulting model provided a good fit to the data (see Table 2). The interaction between mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution and offspring's perception of maternal support significantly predicted offspring's beliefs about commitment ($\beta = -.21, p < .05$). When the commitment measure was broken down into its 2 subscales (Morality of Divorce and Meta-Commitment) post-hoc, the interaction term only predicted offspring's beliefs about the morality of divorce ($\beta = -.20, p < .05$) (see Figure 15). Therefore, 2 additional models (Models 24 and 25) were estimated in which high and low levels

of perceived maternal support about relationships were included as interaction terms (see Table 2 for fit indices). These models revealed that when offspring experience more supportive relationships with their mothers, there is a negative association between interparental conflict resolution and offspring's beliefs about the morality of divorce ($\beta = -.36, p < .01$) (see Figure 16). Specifically, when offspring have supportive relationships with their mothers and the more interparental conflict resolution is reported by their mother, the more offspring believe that divorce is morally wrong. As there was no significant association between offspring's beliefs about the morality of divorce and their current relationship satisfaction, no moderated mediation effect was found.

Finally, Model 26 replicated Model 23 by using offspring's perception of paternal support in the interaction term. This model provided an adequate fit to the data (see Table 2). The interaction between mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution and offspring's perception of paternal support did not predict offspring's social cognitions about relationships or their use of positive relationship communication behaviors.

Moderation by Gender and Parental Divorce (Hypothesis 4)

Gender differences in mediation models. A multiple group model strategy was used to examine whether relationships varied across gender in the original mediation models tested in Hypothesis 1 (Models 2 and 3), with both interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution as predictors. First, models were run with paths free to vary across groups. Then, paths were constrained to be equal across groups. Constraining paths to be equal across groups did not cause a significant decrement in model fit in all models, suggesting that the findings were similar across gender (Offspring's perception of interparental conflict resolution as predictor:

$\Delta\chi^2(14) = 19.24, p > .05$; Offspring's perception of interparental conflict as predictor: $\Delta\chi^2(14) = 15.45, p > .05$; Mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution as predictor: $\Delta\chi^2(14) = 21.07, p > .05$; Mothers' report of interparental conflict as predictor: $\Delta\chi^2(14) = 19.62, p > .05$).

Influence of parental divorce in mediation models. A multiple group model strategy was used to examine whether relationships varied as a result of parental divorce in the original mediation models, with both interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution as predictors. Similar to the analyses examining gender differences, models were run with paths free to vary across groups. Then, paths were constrained to be equal across groups. Constraining paths to be equal across groups did not cause a significant decrement in model fit in all models, suggesting that the findings were similar for individuals with non-divorced and divorced parents (Offspring's perception of interparental conflict resolution as predictor: $\Delta\chi^2(14) = 6.39, p > .05$; Offspring's perception of interparental conflict as predictor: $\Delta\chi^2(14) = 6.86, p > .05$; Mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution: $\Delta\chi^2(14) = 8.99, p > .05$; Mothers' report of interparental conflict: $\Delta\chi^2(14) = 8.28, p > .05$).

Gender differences in the role of relationship efficacy and commitment beliefs.³ To test the prediction that females would report higher relationship efficacy and commitment beliefs as the result of witnessing increased interparental conflict resolution, two models were tested with different interaction terms. An interaction term was created with offspring gender and offspring's perception of interparental conflict resolution predicting offspring's relationship efficacy beliefs. Regression analyses showed that the interaction between offspring's perception

³ Due to limited power, these analyses were performed using regression analyses in SPSS.

of interparental conflict resolution and gender was significant ($\beta = -.27, p < .05$). Therefore, offspring's report of interparental conflict resolution was regressed onto offspring's relationship efficacy beliefs separately for females and males. Results showed that females, rather than males, were reported increased relationship efficacy beliefs in association with witnessing interparental conflict resolution (Females: $\beta = -.30, p < .05$; Males: $\beta = .06, p > .05$).

Another interaction term was created with offspring gender and offspring's perception of interparental conflict resolution predicting offspring's commitment beliefs. The interaction term did not significantly predict offspring's commitment beliefs, so no moderation effect by gender was found in this association.

Gender differences in the influence of supportive parental relationships. To test the hypothesis that females would experience more positive attitudes about marriage (rather than males) as the result of experiencing a supportive relationship with a parent, an interaction terms were created with offspring gender and offspring's perception of both maternal and paternal support. None of the interaction terms significantly predicted offspring's attitudes toward marriage, so no moderation by gender was found in this association.

Summary of Findings

Hypothesis 1 was partially confirmed, in that offspring's attitudes toward marriage fully accounted for the association between mothers', but not offspring's, report of interparental conflict resolution and offspring's current relationship satisfaction. Hypothesis 2 was also partially confirmed, in that offspring with high coherence about parental relationships reported more positive attitudes about marriage as a result of witnessing interparental conflict resolution, which was associated with increased relationship satisfaction. This same facilitative effect was

not found when mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution was used as a predictor. However, contrary to predictions, offspring's higher coherence about parental relationships did not reduce the association between interparental conflict and offspring's social cognitions about relationships—rather, at levels of high coherence about parental relationships, offspring's attitudes about marriage were more likely to be affected by interparental conflict, impacting their current relationship satisfaction; furthermore, this result was replicated using mothers' report of interparental conflict. Hypothesis 3, which examined the moderating effect of supportive parental relationships, was not confirmed, in that supportive parental relationships did not buffer offspring's relationship cognitions from interparental conflict. However, post-hoc analyses suggested that offspring who reported supportive relationships with mothers who also reported more interparental conflict were more likely to have more relaxed beliefs about the morality of divorce. Alternatively, additional post-hoc analyses showed that offspring who reported supportive relationships with their mothers who also reported more interparental conflict *resolution* were more likely to have more rigid beliefs about the morality of divorce.

Differences due to gender and parental divorce were not found in the overall mediation models, but gender differences were found in a more specific model assessing the effect of the interaction between gender and interparental conflict resolution on offspring's relationship efficacy beliefs. Specifically, as predicted, female offspring, rather than male offspring, were more likely to report increased relationship efficacy beliefs as a result of witnessing increased interparental conflict resolution.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The current study was the first to examine the role of coherence about parental relationships in the intergenerational transmission of relationship discord, and one of only a few studies to obtain multi-informant (mother and offspring) data on interparental conflict. The primary aim of this study was to locate and operationalize potential factors involved in offspring resilience to interparental conflict and divorce. Our results pointed to a positive role of offspring coherence about parental relationships when offspring report more interparental conflict resolution. However, our findings simultaneously suggested a much different effect of offspring's high coherence about parental relationships. At high levels of offspring coherence, increased interparental conflict (both mother and offspring reported) and decreased interparental conflict resolution (offspring reported) negatively influenced offspring's optimism about their own future marriage, which in turn was consistently associated with offspring's current relationship satisfaction. Further, while it was hypothesized that supportive parental relationships would protect offspring's cognitions about relationships from the influence of interparental conflict, higher offspring-reported maternal support combined with higher mother-reported interparental conflict was associated with increased acceptance of divorce in offspring (at least, in the current study). Thus, the current study's findings indicate differences in the pathways of influence of interparental conflict and resolution upon offspring relationship cognitions depending on the reporter of interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution (mother versus offspring). This study also highlights the complex role of offspring's coherence about parental relationships in the intergenerational transmission of relationship discord and perhaps,

builds upon previous research detailing how close relationships with parents are related to offspring's attitude formation and change (e.g., Hetherington, 2003b). Lastly, the current study highlights offspring's optimism about marriage as a consistently strong mediator linking these intergenerational pathways.

The Role of Offspring Coherence about Parental Relationships

Amato (2000)'s detailed list of potential moderators in the effects of parental divorce upon offspring named the "definition" and "meaning" of parental divorce, which is similar to our construct of coherence, as well as offspring's personal resources, as potential buffers for offspring. However, in our study, increased coherence regarding parental relationships did not have a buffering effect for offspring. Instead, increased coherence about parental relationships made offspring's optimism about their own future marriage more likely to be affected by interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution. For example, if less interparental conflict and/or more interparental conflict resolution occurred during a "highly coherent" offspring's adolescence, he or she was more likely to report increased optimism about his or her own future marriage, which was positively associated with the offspring's current relationship satisfaction. Alternatively, if more interparental conflict and/or less interparental conflict resolution occurred during a "highly coherent" offspring's adolescence, then that offspring was more likely to report decreased optimism about his or her future marriage and subsequently report decreased satisfaction in their current relationship. Analyses showed that for offspring with low coherence, there was no association between interparental conflict or interparental conflict resolution and their social cognitions about relationships.

Amato and Booth (2001) found that offspring's recollections of interparental discord mediated half of the effect of interparental conflict on offspring's own marital conflict. These findings, added to our findings that increased coherence about parental relationships makes offspring's optimism about marriage more vulnerable to the influence of interparental conflict, suggest that another offspring quality might also be at play. Davies and Cummings' (1994) theory of the development of offspring emotional insecurity after witnessing upsetting interparental conflict provides a frame through which we can understand this unexpected role of offspring's increased coherence regarding parental relationships. Davies and Cummings argue that offspring's attachment insecurity plays a role in offspring's mental organization, beliefs, and attitudes about themselves, and they state that offspring's attachment insecurity is heavily influenced by negative interparental interactions. The state of an offspring's attachment security can be very influential in offspring's assessment of personal life experiences, including relationships. Bowlby (1988) remarked that offspring with more insecure attachments to their parents were more likely to interpret upsetting events as personal failures, while offspring with secure attachments were more likely to perceive themselves and others positively.

Such intergenerationally-influenced cognitive biases might be either harmful or protective for offspring, depending on whether the offspring perceive their "cup" is half empty or half full. For example, my study found that for offspring with lower coherence regarding their parents' relationships, there was no positive or negative effect of interparental conflict or interparental conflict resolution upon offspring's optimism regarding marriage. Perhaps having lower coherence about parental relationships indicates less ruminative thought regarding relationships in general, making an offspring less likely to make positive or negative predictions

about his or her own future relationships as a result of interparental conflict or interparental conflict resolution. Alternatively, increased coherence might be an indicator that offspring are more aware of both positive and negative aspects of their parents' relationship. In this way, increased offspring coherence might correspond to increased rumination regarding his or her parents' relationship, meaning that in such conditions, offspring's social cognitions about relationships (such as their optimism about marriage) have more of a chance of being influenced by interparental conflict.

This line of thought leads to the question—do offspring have a higher likelihood of achieving high coherence regarding parental relationships because of higher emotional insecurity due to witnessing interparental conflict, or is high coherence more of an offspring “trait,” comparable to intelligence, for example, which then makes offspring more vulnerable to emotional insecurity in the face of stressful interpersonal experiences? To start, Steinberg, Davila, and Fincham (2006) found that early adolescent offspring's attachment insecurity mediated the effect of interparental conflict upon offspring's marital expectations. Further, Kelly and Emery (2003) found that offspring's specific painful memories regarding parental divorce actually did not correspond to their symptoms of anxiety and depression, but made offspring more likely to view life events through a negative filter. Kelly and Emery's findings suggest that stressful events in an offspring's family-of-origin can contribute to a cognitive framework that then colors their overall approach to life. These results, when paired with mine, suggest that perhaps some offspring, as a result of family-of-origin experiences, have a “reason” to think about parental relationships more than other offspring. One reason might include a highly conflictual parental marital history. Therefore, perhaps offspring with high coherence regarding

their parents' relationships are demonstrating more thought and effort in making sense of their parents' relationships, instigated by threatened emotional security.

Alternatively, as in my study, high coherence also indicated a link between decreased interparental conflict and offspring's increased optimism about marriage, suggesting that achievement of coherence might also be viewed as an offspring trait, quite like intelligence, that increases an offspring's drive to "make sense" of their life experiences. Hetherington, Stanley-Hagan, and Anderson (1989) found that offspring's individual characteristics, such as intelligence, independence, an internal locus of control, and self-esteem, are related to offspring's adaptability in the face of stressful experiences. My study suggests that a "characterological" quality of a drive to achieve coherence also might make offspring's relationship cognitions more affected by *both* positive and negative parental experiences.

Offspring coherence and interparental conflict resolution. Our prediction, based upon results from a pilot study, that offspring coherence regarding parental relationships would facilitate a positive relationship between witnessing interparental conflict resolution and offspring's optimism about marriage was confirmed in the current study. However, this moderated mediation effect was found only for offspring's, rather than mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution. As this effect was found with offspring's perceptions of interparental conflict resolution as a predictor, it indicates that it is important for offspring to personally process interparental conflict resolution for it to influence their social cognitions about relationships. These findings also correspond to previous research findings that witnessing interparental conflict resolution leads to the best outcomes in offspring (Dadds, et al., 1999). Offspring with the trait of high coherence regarding parental relationships might be more likely

to notice and make sense of witnessing the presence or absence of interparental conflict resolution. Additionally, characteristics of an offspring's familial environment and their parents' approach to handling conflict might lead to offspring's increased coherence. For example, offspring coherence might be facilitated by parents who model a beginning, middle and an end (namely, a resolution) to marital conflict, a suggestion supported by findings by Grych and Fincham (1993) that parental explanations that absolved their offspring from blame led to decreased offspring experiences of triangulation in relation to interparental conflict. However, the previously mentioned alternative—that coherence might simply be facilitated by witnessing more interparental conflict in general (having a reason to think about relationships more in depth)—might also be true, as interparental conflict resolution is more likely to occur along with the presence of interparental conflict

In sum, offspring's high coherence might make offspring more aware of interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution, or, as posited earlier, witnessing more interparental conflict resolution (and interparental conflict) might lead to more coherent offspring. In this way, high coherence regarding parental relationships can be positive and negative for offspring, theoretically depending on the *content* of their familial memories. Future studies should consider not only how well offspring can conceptualize their family of origin, but also the influence of the types of memories they recall. Coherence is merely the vehicle for the offspring's personal conclusions (or lack thereof) regarding the meaning of their family-of-origin experiences and their own feelings about marriage and commitment.

Mother versus Offspring Report of Interparental Conflict and Resolution

The current study's results supported our first hypothesis and replicated our pilot study's findings that offspring's optimism about marriage accounted for the association between interparental conflict resolution and offspring's current relationship satisfaction, even while controlling for learned relationship communication behaviors and other relationship cognitions. However, this mediation effect only occurred when mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution was a predictor in the mediation model, and was only present in association with offspring's perceptions of interparental conflict resolution in moderated mediation form, or in other words, only at high levels of coherence about parental relationships.

These findings suggest that offspring's optimism about marriage (and subsequently, their current relationship satisfaction) is only affected by their own perceptions of interparental conflict resolution when they have actively processed (achieved high coherence regarding) their parents' relationship. However, the fact that this simple mediation (without moderation by offspring's coherence regarding parental relationships) occurs only when mothers', rather than offspring's, report of interparental conflict resolution is included in the model hints at another pathway—namely, that the influence of mothers' perceptions of interparental conflict resolution upon offspring's optimism about marriage (and then offspring's current relationship satisfaction) might be indicative of a general attitude about marriage that is being passed from generation to generation. This attitude might be correlated with a mothers' tendency to report more positive conflict resolution strategies in her own relationship. For example, high levels of resolution might indicate to offspring that conflicts are manageable in marriage while little conflict resolution might indicate to offspring that marriage is difficult, tiring, and unrewarding. Past

research has found support for both a social learning perspective and a genetic factor in the passing of social attitudes from parent to offspring (Martin, et al., 1986). Further, Cunningham and Thornton (2006) found that parents' marital quality had moderate influence on offspring's level of support for the institution of divorce and their attitudes about premarital sex. Their findings showed the strongest influence of parental marital quality on offspring's relationship attitudes when parental marital quality was high, rather than low.

These differential pathways of influence lead to the consideration of an initial goal of the current study—to develop a more comprehensive measure of interparental conflict by collecting and combining data from two informants—young adults and their mother figures. Though offspring and mother report of interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution significantly correlated with each other (see Table 3), my latent variable that combined mother and offspring report of interparental conflict did not give an accurate portrayal of my data, suggesting that there were meaningful differences between mother and offspring report of interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution—differences supported in subsequent analyses examining mother and offspring report separately, described above. Several studies have used both parent and offspring report in assessing interparental conflict's effects upon offspring relationship functioning. Steinberg, Davila, and Fincham (2006) collected a sample of 8th grade females and their married parents. Their findings revealed no associations between parent report of interparental conflict and offspring outcome variables, including offspring's attachment security, marital expectations, and romantic experiences. Their conclusion was that parental perceptions of interparental conflict were not important for offspring's marital expectations. Additionally, Wierson, Forehand, and McCombs (1988) found that adolescents'

(aged 10-13) perceptions of interparental conflict carried unique variance in predicting offspring functioning, beyond the power of parental report of interparental conflict while noting that both adolescent and parent report of interparental conflict were related to deficits in adolescent social, behavioral, and cognitive functioning.

Differences between the current study and previous studies should be noted. Studies such as the aforementioned Steinberg, Davila, and Fincham (2006) and Wiersen, Forehand, and McCombs (1988) both examined early adolescents, who are less likely to be as aware and comprehending of their parents' conflict as the young adults that made up the current study's sample. Further, my adaptation of the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict (CPIC) scale for parent report had several more items than the adaptation of the CPIC used in Steinberg and colleagues (2006) study, perhaps providing a more nuanced comparison of the aspects of interparental conflict between informant. I believe that one way my study adds to the literature is in highlighting not only the differential pathways of intergenerational influences on relationships depending on the perspective of the informant, but also the role of the offspring's developmental stage in their perception of interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution. An offspring's developmental stage might influence their level of understanding and therefore their processing of their parents' relationship.

Maternal support, Interparental Conflict, and Offspring's Beliefs about Divorce

Post-hoc analyses showed that offspring were more likely to believe divorce is morally acceptable if they reported more supportive relationships with mothers, who also reported higher interparental conflict. This finding was in contrast to our original prediction, which firstly stated that supportive parental relationships would buffer offspring from the effects of interparental

conflict, and secondly, that the interaction of interparental conflict resolution and supportive parental relationships would lead to offspring's increased optimism about their own future marriage. Our results showed that the presence of maternal support did not buffer offspring from the effects of interparental conflict, but rather facilitated its effect upon offspring's beliefs about divorce. More intriguing was that this was only through mothers' report of interparental conflict, rather than offspring's own report. These findings suggest that offspring might be more aware of their mothers' experience of conflict in her marriage through their more supportive relationship with one another. This supportive mother-offspring relationship might also facilitate mutual disclosure between the mother and the offspring, prompting offspring to form their own conclusions about relationships and the ending of committed relationships. In this way, offspring are more likely to be aware of their mother's perceptions of conflict in her relationship through the offspring's closer relationship with their mother. Offspring might, as a result, feel more favorably toward divorce personally (even if their parents had not divorced) due to their desire for a better relationship between their parents and to reduce their exposure to interparental conflict and marital dissatisfaction. For example, one of the study participants stated during her structured interview while describing her parents' relationship (who later divorced), "I remember wishing that my parents would get a divorce, because I could tell they weren't happy with each other. I would leave notes around the house for them to find that would say things like, 'Get a divorce.'"

A reverse effect also seems to be true: offspring were more likely to believe divorce was unacceptable if they reported close relationships with mothers who reported high conflict resolution behaviors. This interaction effect might indicate the same process described in the

previous finding regarding the interaction between maternal support and mothers' report of interparental conflict, and also lend credence to the observation that interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution might act as two sides of the same coin, at least in the current study. More specifically, in many of our models, the same effects are found for both high interparental conflict and low interparental conflict resolution, and vice versa.

These interaction effects speak to the previously discussed indirect "transfer of attitudes" suggested by mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution upon offspring's optimism about marriage. For example, Larson and Gillman (1999) found that negative emotions are more likely to be transmitted from single mothers to their adolescent offspring when mothers are under stress. It seems reasonable, when included with the current findings, to suggest that such indirect effects might also impact offspring's attitudes about divorce quite like our previous suggestion that optimism about marriage might be indirectly passed from generation to generation through the use of conflict resolution. Parent-offspring transfer of attitudes about committed relationships is more likely to happen when there is high paternal warmth and when adolescents are involved in family decision-making (Brody, Moore, & Gleib, 1994); perhaps our results add that parent-offspring transfer of attitudes is also more likely when there is high maternal warmth—particularly in cases of parental divorce where many mothers end up as the primary caretaker. To this end, our findings correspond with those of Shulman and colleagues (1999) that maternal marital expectations (admittedly a bit different than our concept of optimism about marriage, which is more related to the offspring's beliefs about the success of a future marriage) and offspring's quality of maternal attachment best explained the variance in offspring's marital expectations. Further, in the case of mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution, mothers

who are adept at resolving conflicts in their marriages might also have more stringent beliefs about the morality of divorce. The second interaction effect seen here might be evidence of offspring who are more likely to endorse a similar stance to their mothers due in part to their closer relationship with their mothers.

Gender Differences in Offspring's Relationship Efficacy Beliefs

Our final finding was that female offspring were more likely to report increased relationship efficacy beliefs in association with witnessing interparental conflict resolution. These results were expected, given Whitton and colleagues' (2008b) findings that female offspring's relationship confidence was more associated than males' relationship confidence with parental divorce. Interestingly, Whitton and colleagues' study controlled for interparental conflict—emphasizing the influence of parental divorce, rather than conflict, on female offspring's relationship confidence. Our results show that whereas female offspring's confidence in their current relationship success might be more vulnerable to exposure to parental divorce than males' current relationship confidence (Whitton et al., 2008b), females are more likely to benefit from witnessing interparental conflict resolution than males.

Several previous studies support this gender effect regarding the influence of interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution upon offspring relationship cognitions and outcomes. Dadds and colleagues (1999) found that males experienced more negative outcomes related to parental use of a “discussing” style of interparental conflict resolution. More intriguingly, several studies support the conclusion that a female relationship partner's “blueprints” (i.e., her family-of-origin relationship models) are more important for the success of her current relationship than her male partner's “blueprints” and that females are more likely to

attend to conflictual material in relationships (Gottman, 1994; Levy, Wamboldt, & Fiese, 1997).

I believe that the current study's results are consistent with and add to the diverse body of literature detailing gender differences in the impact of interparental conflict upon offspring relationship functioning and outcomes in that it appears that female offspring's relationship confidence tends to be more influenced by witnessing interparental conflict resolution than male offspring's relationship confidence.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several hypotheses were not supported by the current study. No significant gender differences were found in the mediation model and no significant gender differences were found in the association between supportive parental relationships and offspring's optimism about marriage. However, the current findings should not be taken as unquestionable evidence that gender does not affect the larger constellation of intergenerational influences upon relationships, as my study sample size was not designed with enough power to detect small effects. Further, due to a methodological oversight, only 108 offspring (of 119) completed the maternal support measure and only 106 offspring (again, of 119) completed the paternal support measure. This limited my statistical power in exploring the influence of parental support upon offspring relationship cognitions and current relationship functioning. Lastly, divorce did not moderate the mediation model examining the effect of interparental conflict upon offspring relationship cognitions and their own current relationship satisfaction. This finding could be due to phenomena noted by Brennan and Shaver (1993), who found that parental divorce was not directly associated with offspring's relationship outcomes, emphasizing the diversity of intact and dissolved marriages—some intact marriages are highly conflictual, while some divorces

result in better outcomes for particular families. However, as approximately 40% of the offspring sample reported a parental divorce, small moderating effects due to parental divorce might have gone undetected in the current study.

Other significant limitations to my study relate to my choice of methodology, sample diversity, and sample inclusion criteria, which were mostly due to constraints in resources for completing this study. It is emphasized here that my study is cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal, so the conclusions made from the current results regarding intergenerational influences on relationships are tentative explanations based upon correlations, rather than causation. For example, my data shows that whereas offspring's optimism about marriage significantly predicts offspring's current relationship satisfaction, the reverse also could be true—offspring's current relationship satisfaction might predict offspring's optimism about marriage. I cannot determine definitively in the current study whether there are order effects—is offspring's current relationship satisfaction influencing offspring's cognitions about relationships just as offspring's perceptions of interparental conflict influence their relationship cognitions? Longitudinal evidence is needed to determine definitive causation within these associations. Additionally, the availability of resources, such as my funds for compensation, limited my ability to obtain data from as many sources as would be ideal. I was able to obtain both mother and offspring data—a feat many peer studies fail to do—but as a result, due to my limited resources, I forfeited the opportunity to obtain data for offspring's father figures and offspring's romantic partners, which would have provided a more nuanced and multi-perspective conceptualization of offspring's relationship functioning.

Further, though my sample included participants from many ethnic backgrounds, it is not thoroughly representative of the ethnic makeup of most cities in the United States, including the location of recruitment—Knoxville, Tennessee. Several efforts were made to increase diversity in my sample during recruitment, including targeted recruitment at healthcare facilities, churches, and city events heavily utilized or attended by individuals of diverse backgrounds. While we were frequently successful in gaining interest from and screening in offspring participants from these sites, we ran into difficulty when attempting to contact their mothers. Possible strategies to increase diversity in future sample collections might include increased compensation for study participation and increased flexibility regarding where and when data gathering may take place.

I also only admitted offspring participants who were currently involved in a committed romantic relationship. Ensign, Sherman, and Clark (1998) found that high levels of interparental conflict and the experience of parental divorce can lead to low levels of intimacy in romantic relationships in a college student population. It is possible that offspring that have such low levels of intimacy in their relationships were less likely to participate in our study. Further, because of my focus on offspring's current relationship functioning, I did not examine the characteristics of those offspring not currently in a romantic relationship. By only examining those offspring high-functioning enough to be more likely involved in a relationship, I am missing potential effects of interparental conflict and parental divorce that might make offspring less likely to be in a romantic relationship. By nature, my study might have attracted participants that were more relationship-oriented and therefore there is the potential for selection bias in my results. Further, my study inclusion criteria, which required offspring to be able to report on

interactions between both a mother and a father figure, might have also excluded young adults with different family constellations—for example, those without a father or a mother figure.

It should also be noted that this study was composed mainly of self-report data, rather than observational data, and therefore my conclusions regarding the influence of interparental conflict are reliant upon the perspectives of the mothers and offspring who participated in this study. However, this study bears the strengths of incorporating both coder-rated offspring interviews and a multi-informant design, strengths that are lacking in many peer studies examining intergenerational influences on relationships.

The results of this study are both hopeful and sobering. Specifically, my initial idea that achieving coherence about parental relationships would contribute positively to offspring outcomes in association with interparental conflict is supported through those individuals who developed increased optimism about their own future marriages (and subsequently, maintained higher relationship satisfaction) as a result of witnessing increased interparental conflict resolution. However, offspring with high coherence regarding their parents' relationships were also likely to be on the other end of the spectrum—to have experienced decreased optimism about their future marriage (and subsequently, be less satisfied in their current relationships) as a result of witnessing increased interparental conflict and decreased interparental conflict resolution. High coherence regarding parental relationships did not protect offspring from the effects of interparental conflict, but rather made them more vulnerable to its influence. Similarly, a more supportive maternal relationship in cases in which mothers also reported higher interparental conflict made offspring more likely to report more accepting beliefs about divorce. Taken together, my findings—those both expected and unexpected—suggest that the association

between interparental conflict, offspring's cognitions about relationships, and offspring's current relationship functioning depends upon many factors. These factors might include the type of informant of interparental conflict and the level of awareness and mental processing that informant—specifically when the informant is an offspring—has put into his or her understanding of parental interactions. The current study has highlighted several potential pathways within the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns that would benefit from further exploration.

Specifically, it would be worthwhile to take the next step and explore a chain-mediation model in which the role of offspring coherence about parental relationships is explored in the context of the intergenerational transmission of relationship discord. For example, it is possible that offspring coherence about parental relationships might be more of a mediator, rather than a moderator. The occurrence and type of interparental conflict might make it more likely that offspring will achieve coherence regarding their parents' relationship; this increased rumination might then lead to higher attachment insecurity, leading to less optimism about marriage and finally a less satisfying current relationship, possibly due to a lack of hope—considered further below. Alternatively, within the same model, an offspring might experience attachment insecurity as a result of witnessing interparental conflict, leading them to be more likely to ruminate about their parents' relationship, leading to a higher likelihood of achieving higher coherence regarding this parents' relationship. This might then lead, like the first model, to lower optimism about marriage and then to decreased satisfaction in the offspring's current relationship.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating findings from this study is the powerful role of offspring's optimism about marriage. Combined with the findings of the pilot study, I am left with evidence of a strong and consistent intergenerational link between interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution and offspring's current relationship functioning. What about an offspring's optimism about marriage makes it more influential in intergenerational pathways than the other potential mediators examined in this study, such as relationship confidence and efficacy, commitment beliefs, and relationship communication behaviors? Further, the current study's findings that offspring with high coherence are more vulnerable to the influence of interparental conflict are contrary to a finding in the pilot study that offspring with low coherence were more likely to be rated by coders as having lower "relationship expectations," or to be more fearful of intimate attachments, than offspring with high coherence in association with witnessing increased interparental conflict. One possibility for this difference is method variance between the studies. In the pilot study, an individual's relationship expectations were rated by a trained coder, rather than self-reported, and therefore the ratings might have been more influenced by the coders' impressions of the quality of the narrative and the types of events depicted within the narrative. On the other hand, the variable used in the current study, optimism about marriage, is self-reported by participants and might serve as a sort of barometer regarding the level of *hope* that one has for one's future relationships—a barometer that is simultaneously dependent upon one's family of origin "blueprint" *as well as* the current functioning of one's intimate relationship. A growing body of literature has begun exploring the meaning and correlates of hope, including its relation to both a sense of agency regarding a given goal and one's knowledge of pathways toward accomplishing a given goal (e.g., Snyder, et al., 1991). A

review of research focusing on the development and role of hope in people's lives highlights the influence of early life events in fostering or discouraging a sense of hope in individuals and hope's powerful role as a filter through which many life events, including relationships, are viewed (Snyder, 2000). It is possible that one's optimism about marriage (or, "hope" regarding the success about one's future marriage) is related to both a stable life-view, fostered through impressions taken from a family of origin, as well as the functioning of one's current relationship.

Other future directions include exploration of similar indirect effects—such as exploring further support for specific interparental and parent-child conditions that might facilitate the transfer of attitudes about marriage and divorce from parent to offspring. For example, as highlighted in this study, mother report of interparental conflict and resolution appeared to have indirect effects upon offspring's cognitions about relationships and their current relationship functioning. What about mother endorsement of interparental conflict resolution makes it more likely that offspring will report more positive attitudes about marriage, creating an indirect link between parent-reported interparental conflict resolution and offspring's current relationship satisfaction? Similarly, what about mothers' report of interparental conflict paired with a more supportive mother-offspring relationship makes it more likely that offspring will endorse more favorable attitudes about divorce? Future models might include both parent and offspring report of interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution in the same model to test how each predictor holds up against the other in the intergenerational transmission of relationship patterns.

Clinical implications. The current study's findings are two-sided in terms of how they inform clinical considerations when working with individuals, couples, and families in a

therapeutic setting. Firstly, as previously stated, I still hold that it is better for offspring to be able to construct a beginning, middle, and an end to their personal narrative of their parents' relationship, particularly when the family has endured a traumatic event such as a parental divorce or continues to endure more frequent trauma, such as consistent interparental conflict. However, I also found that in a way, "ignorance is bliss" in that there was no association between interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution and offspring's relationship cognitions when offspring coherence about parents' relationships was low. I have already described a number of potential reasons for this lack of association—a main one being a possible link between offspring attachment insecurity (perhaps triggered by stressful interparental and/or parent-child relationships) and offspring's higher coherence regarding their parents' relationship. These results beg the question whether it is better for some offspring to remain "in the dark" and thus theoretically unaffected by parental strife in terms of their own relationship outcomes, or if higher coherence about parents' relationships is simply the result of having a reason to consider those relationships more closely—such as after the occurrence of a trauma. In either case, care should be taken to consider how an individual's beliefs about him or herself are constructed and informed in relation to his or her parents' relationship and other significant relationship models, and how those beliefs are actively employed in the individual's relationship dynamics and relationship decisions.

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Appendix

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for all study variables

Variable	Mean	Range	Standard Deviation
Mothers' report of interparental conflict	29.89	18 – 54	10.10
Mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution	9.55	6 – 18	3.89
Offspring's report of interparental conflict	35.25	19 – 57	11.47
Offspring's report of interparental conflict resolution	11.04	6 – 18	3.92
Optimism about marriage	31.62	12 – 46	8.67
Relationship satisfaction	66.06	32 – 81	11.53
Relationship efficacy	37.67	11 – 49	8.44
Beliefs about divorce	24.47	12 – 36	5.25
Communication behaviors	11.79	-14 – 23	8.03
Paternal support	17.34	6 – 24	4.34
Maternal support	19.73	8 – 24	3.00
Coherence about parental relationships	14.15	7 – 18.67	1.85

Table 2

Fit indices for all estimated models

Model	Mother/Offspring Report	χ^2	DF	χ^2/DF	p	CFI	RMSEA	Figure
1	Latent CFA of interparental conflict	35.80	4	8.95	.00	.95	.26	
2	Latent CFA of interparental conflict	2.94	1	2.94	.09	1.00	.13	5
3	Offspring: resolution	1.06	1	1.06	.30	1.00	.02	
4	Mother: resolution	.71	1	.71	.40	1.00	.00	6
5, 6, 7	Offspring: conflict	.68	3	.23	.88	1.00	.00	7, 8
8, 9, 10	Mother: conflict	1.19	3	.40	.76	1.00	.00	9, 10
11, 12, 13	Offspring: resolution	1.56	3	.52	.67	1.00	.00	11, 12
14	Mother: resolution	1.23	3	.41	.75	1.00	.00	
15	Offspring: conflict	.86	3	.29	.84	1.00	.00	
16	Offspring: conflict	2.38	3	.79	.50	1.00	.00	
17, 18, 19	Mother: conflict	1.81	3	.60	.61	1.00	.00	13, 14
20	Mother: conflict	4.07	3	1.36	.25	.99	.05	
21	Offspring: resolution	1.22	3	.41	.75	1.00	.00	
22	Offspring: resolution	2.92	3	.97	.40	1.00	.03	
23, 24, 25	Mother: resolution	1.54	3	.51	.67	1.00	.00	15, 16
26	Mother: resolution	4.60	3	1.53	.20	.99	.07	

Table 3

Correlations between interparental conflict indicators for the interparental conflict measurement model

		Offspring Report			Mother Report		
		Intensity	Frequency	Resolution	Intensity	Frequency	Resolution
Offspring Report	Intensity						
	Frequency	.83**					
	Resolution	.76**	.80**				
Mother Report	Intensity	.70**	.60**	.56**			
	Frequency	.62**	.61**	.52**	.62**		
	Resolution	.50**	.52**	.61**	.71**	.70**	

Notes: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

	Interparental Conflict Resolution	Optimism about Marriage	Rel. Efficacy	Beliefs about Divorce	Comm. Behaviors	Rel. Satis.
Interparental Conflict Resolution						
Optimism about Marriage	-.13					
Rel. Efficacy	-.14	.29**				
Beliefs about Divorce	-.10	.29**	-.10			
Comm. Behaviors	-.04	.30**	.65**	-.04		
Rel. Satisfaction	-.15	.49**	.55**	.02	.65**	

Notes: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

	Maternal Support	Optimism about Marriage	Rel. Efficacy	Beliefs about Divorce	Comm. Behaviors	Rel. Satis.
Maternal Support						
Optimism about Marriage	.16					
Rel. Efficacy	.20*	.29**				
Beliefs about Divorce	.00	.29**	-.10			
Comm. Behaviors	.08	.30**	.65**	-.04		
Rel. Satisfaction	.14	.49**	.55**	.02	.65**	

Notes: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

Table 11

Correlations between offspring's report of interparental conflict, interparental conflict resolution, maternal support, paternal support, offspring's coherence about parental relationships and mother's report of interparental conflict and interparental conflict resolution

		Offspring Report				Mother Report		
		Conflict	Resol.	Maternal Support	Paternal Support	Coherence	Conflict	Resol.
Offspring Report	Conflict							
	Resol.	.91**						
	Maternal Support	-.04	-.02					
	Paternal Support	-.34**	-.37**	.12				
	Coherence	-.31**	-.25**	-.03	.12			
Mother Report	Conflict	.69**	.63**	.00	-.30**	-.15		
	Resol.	.58**	.61**	.05	-.30**	-.13	.90**	

Notes: * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$

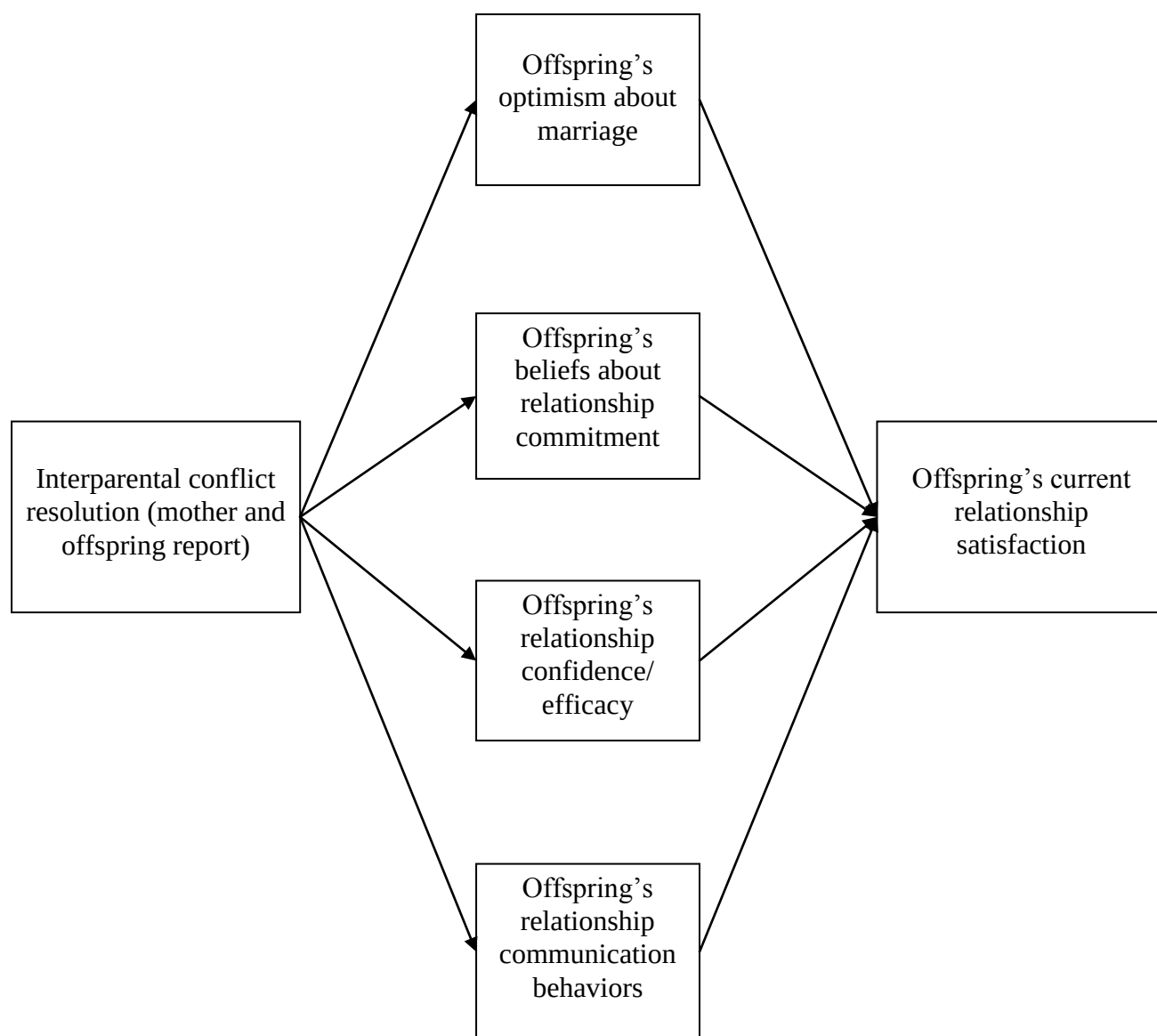


Figure 1

Illustration of hypothesis 1

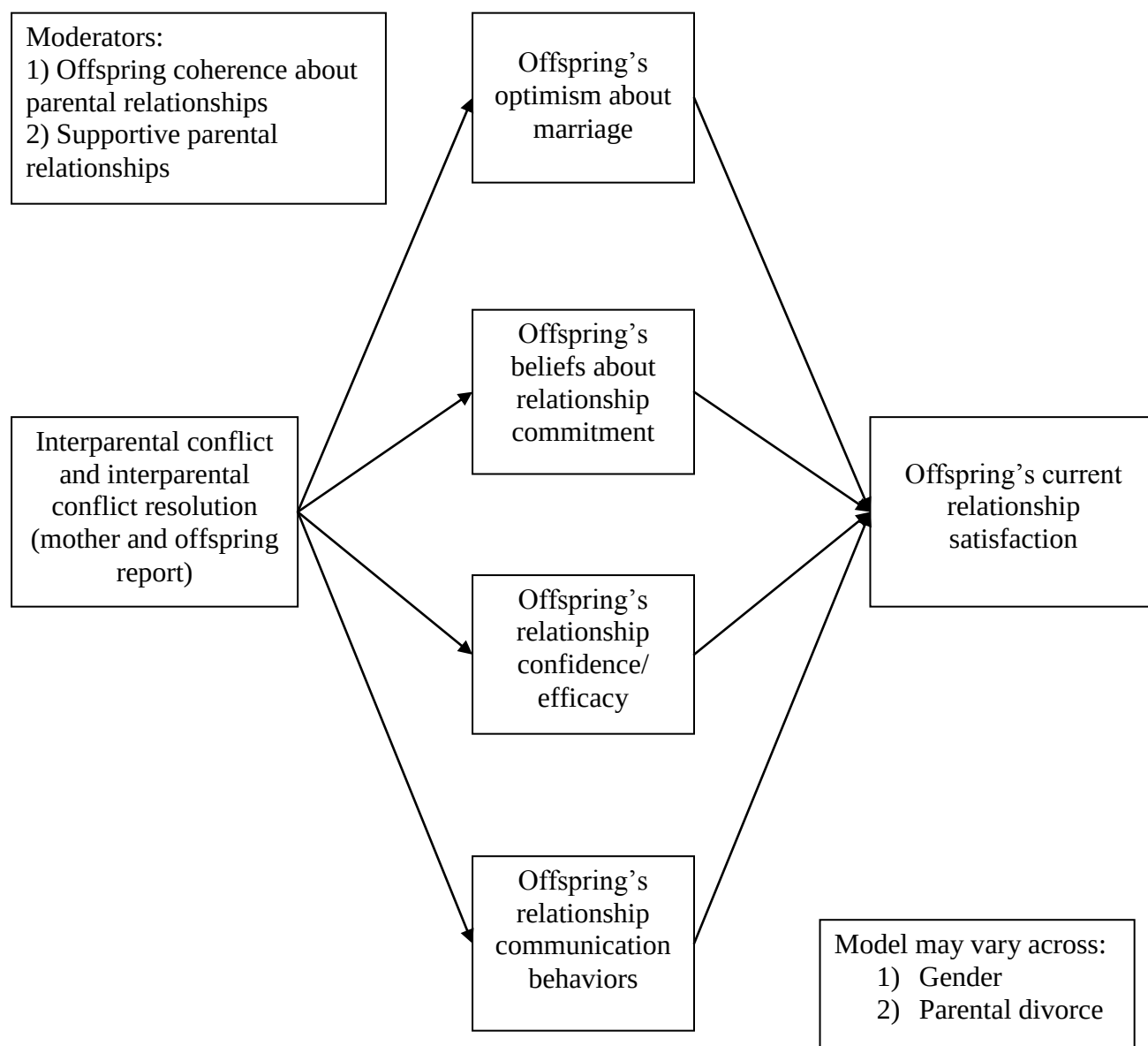


Figure 2

Illustration of hypotheses 2, 3, and 4a

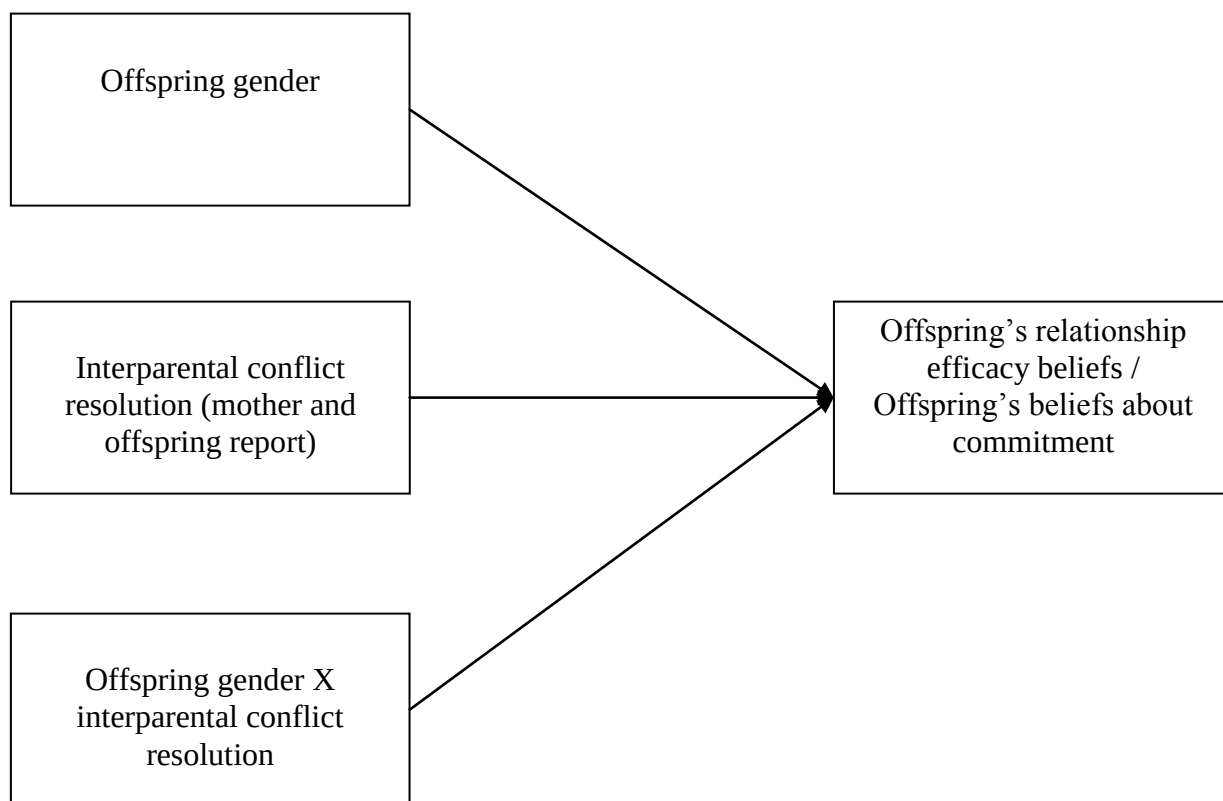


Figure 3

Illustration of hypothesis 4b

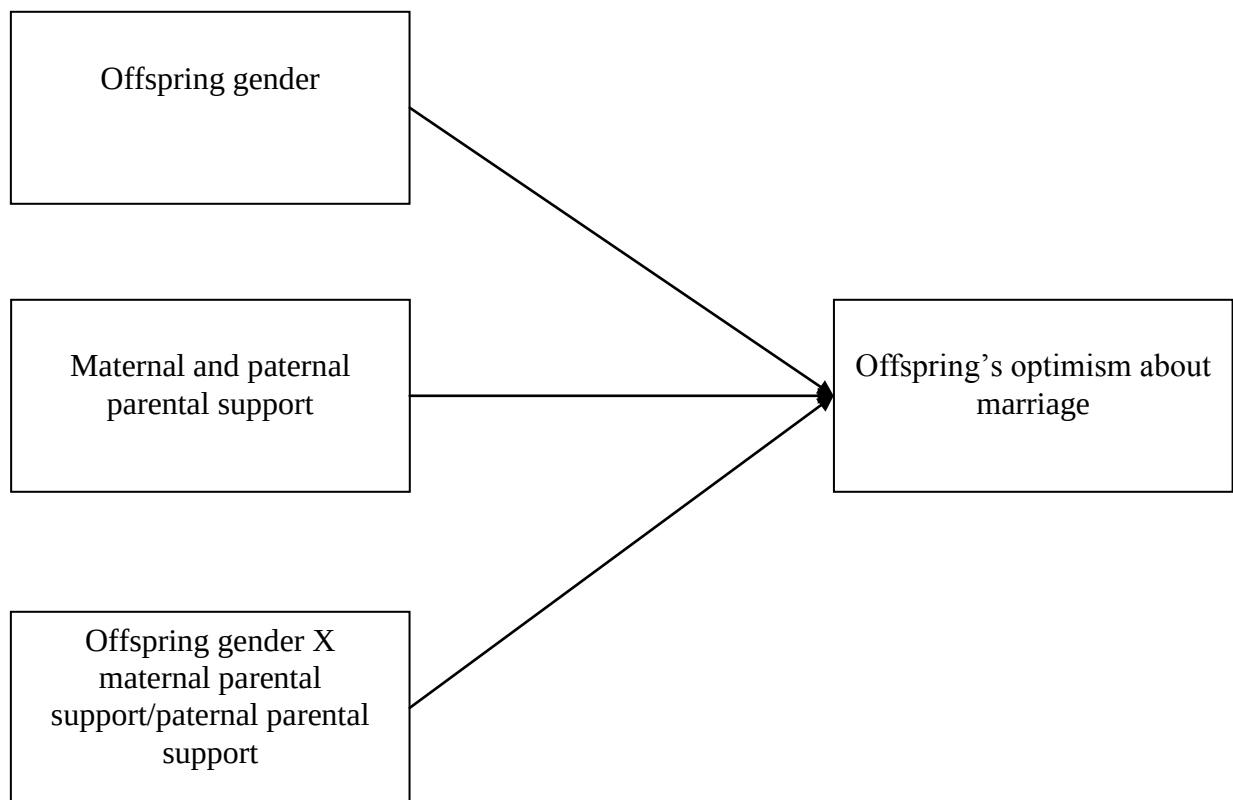


Figure 4

Illustration of hypothesis 4c

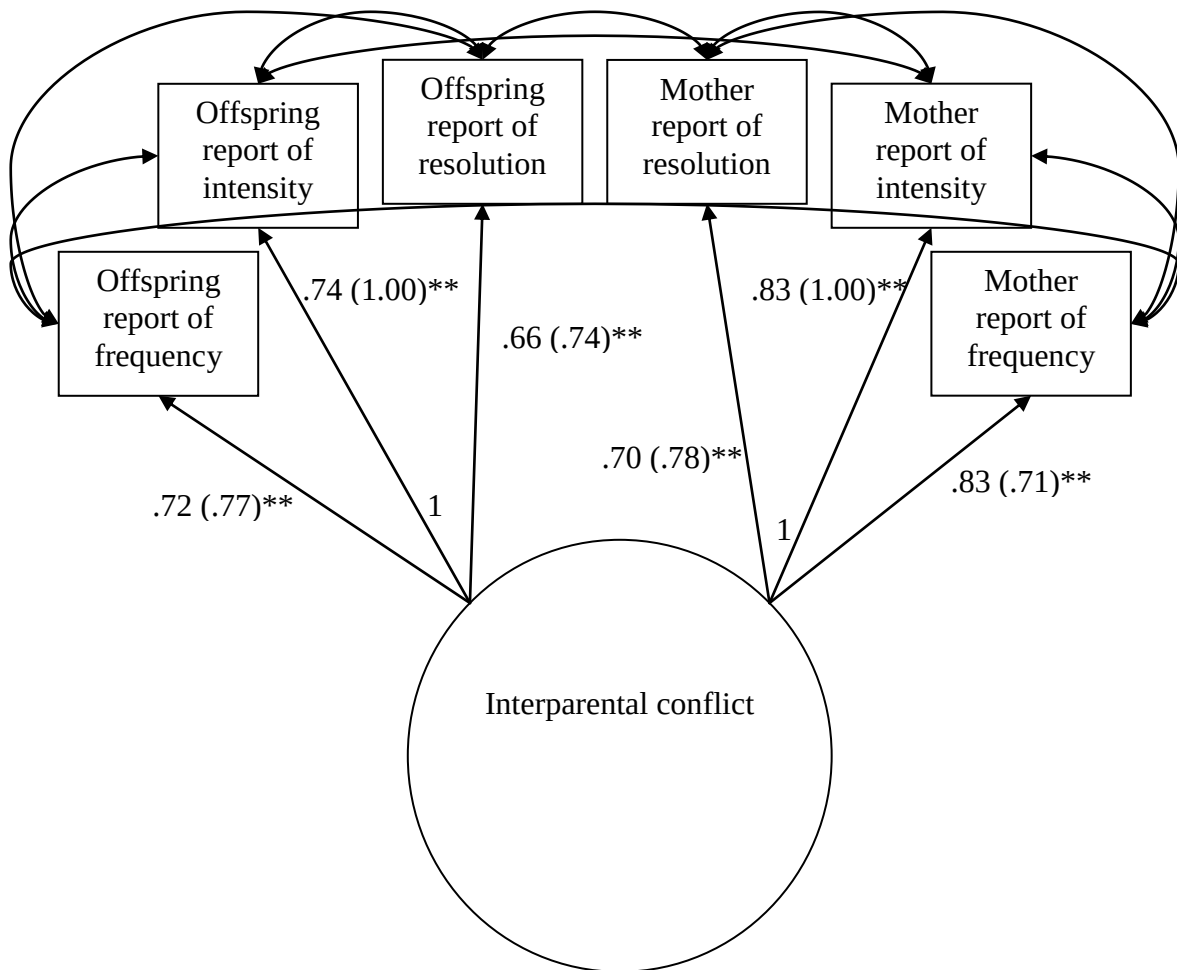


Figure 5

*CFA model of interparental conflict; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; standardized (unstandardized); residual covariances not included for clarity purposes*

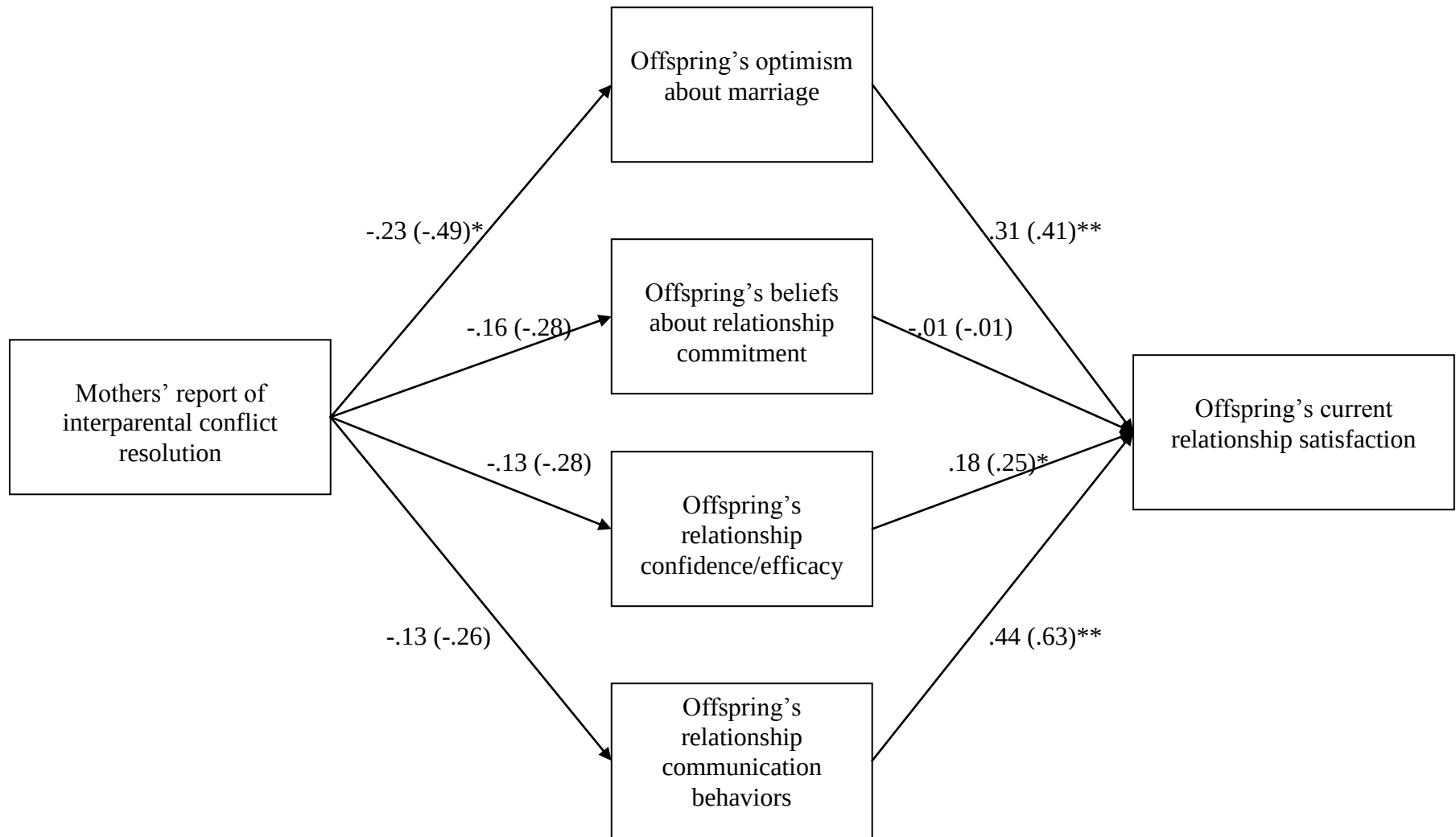


Figure 6

Mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution mediation model; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; standardized (unstandardized); residual covariances not included for clarity purposes

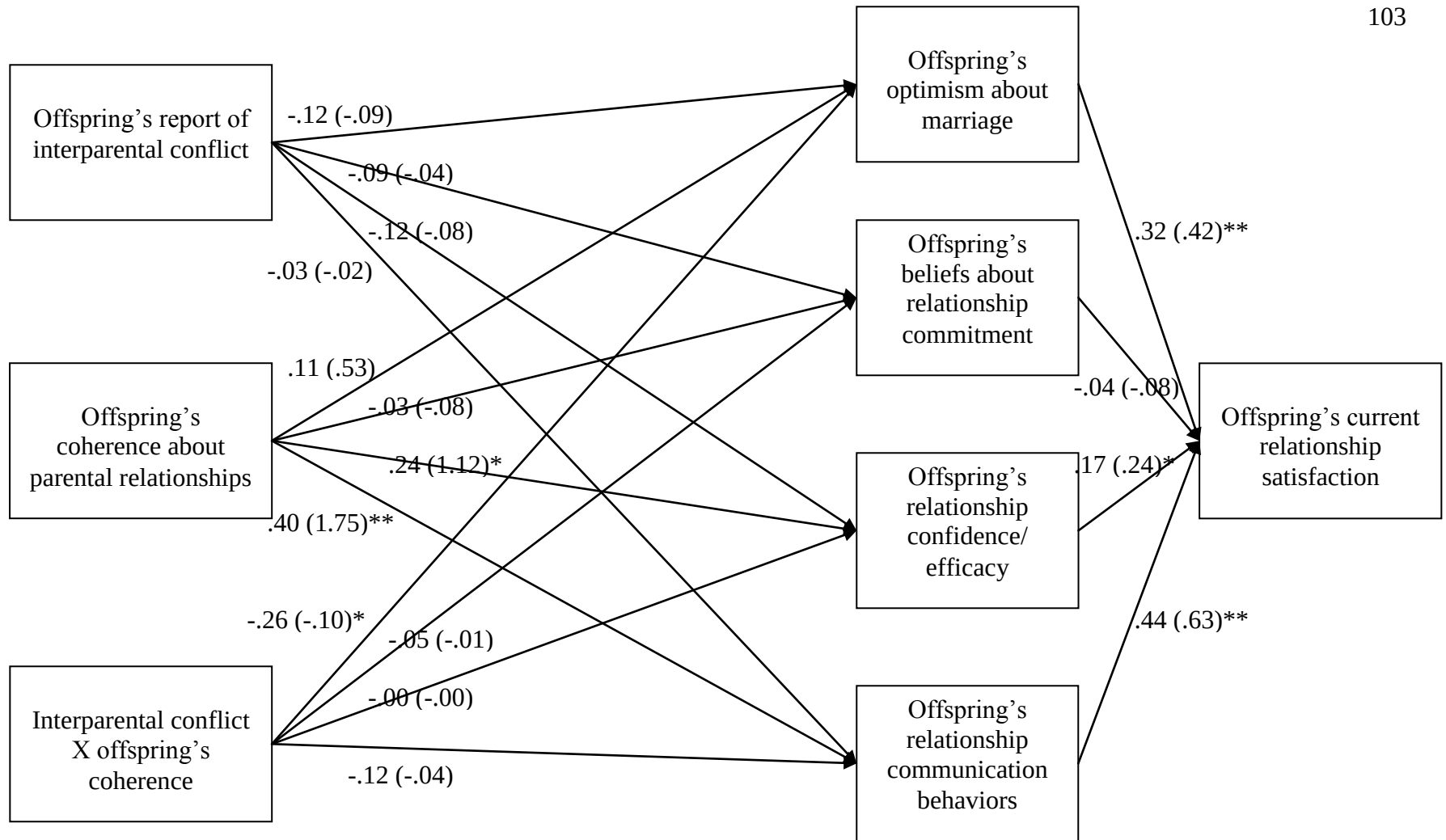


Figure 7

Interaction effect: *offspring's report of interparental conflict x offspring's coherence about parental relationships*; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; standardized (unstandardized); residual covariances not included for clarity purposes

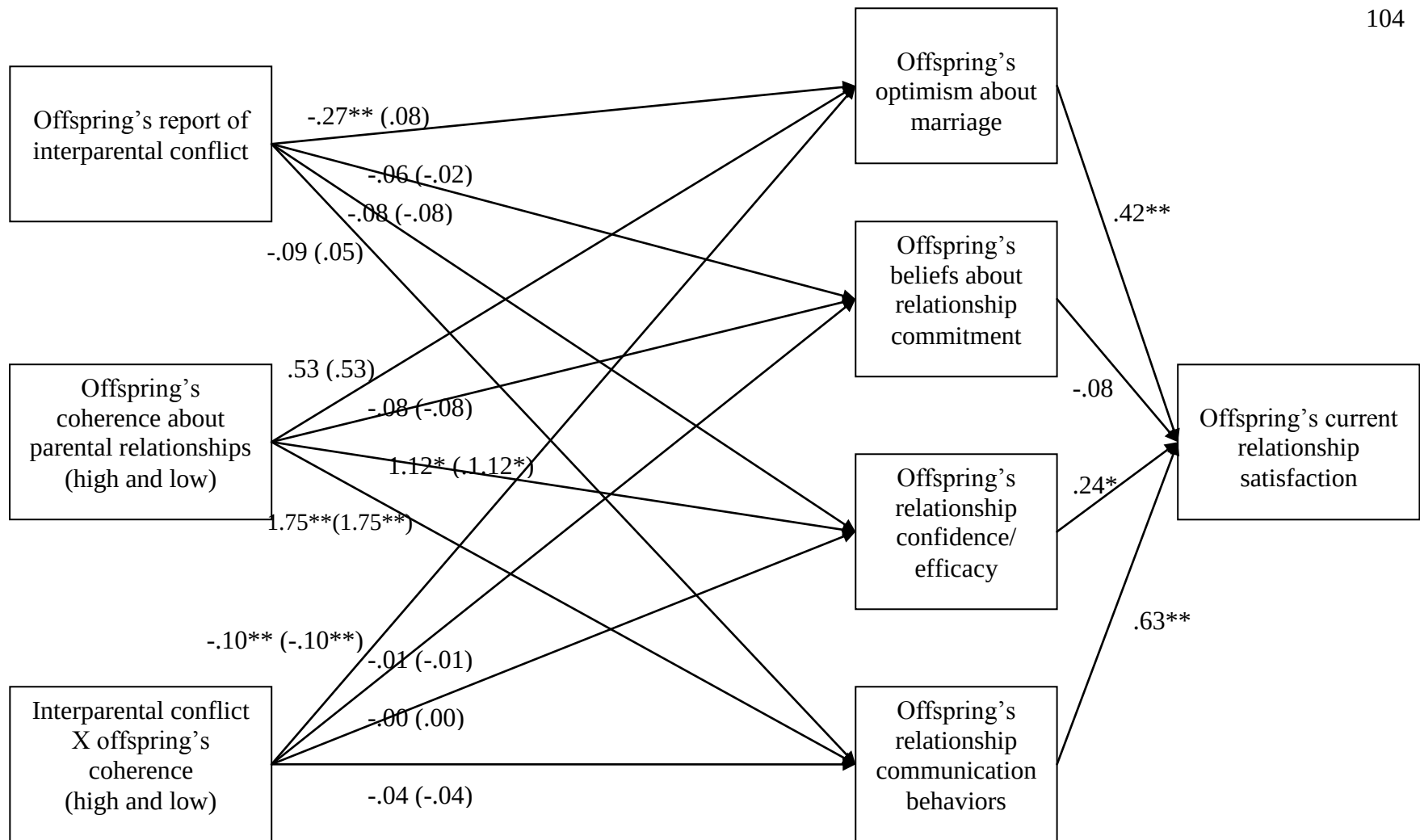


Figure 8

*Interaction effect: offspring's report of interparental conflict x offspring's coherence about parental relationships: High and low coherence; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; high coherence (low coherence)—unstandardized coefficients; residual covariances not included for clarity purposes*

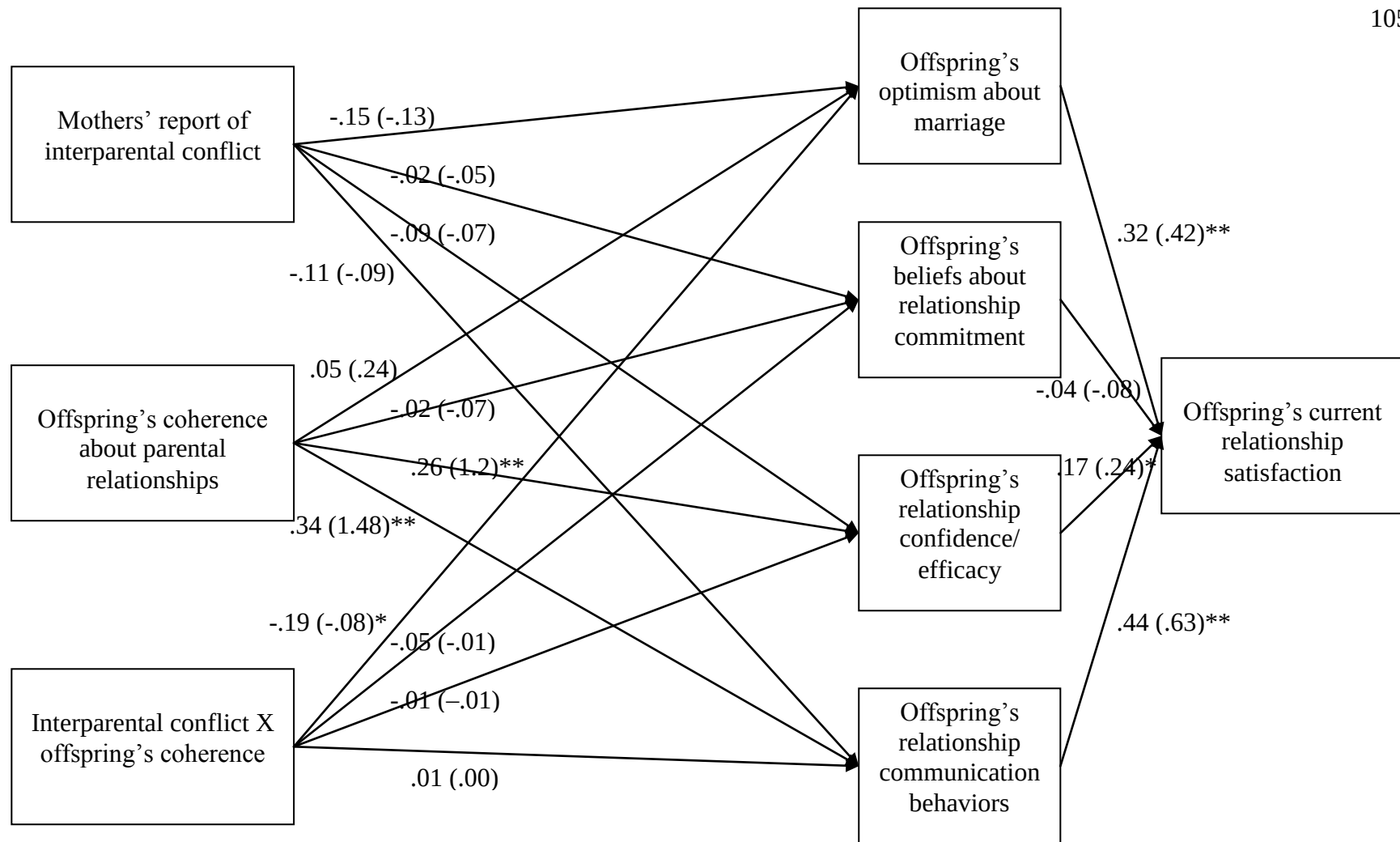


Figure 9

*Interaction effect: mothers' report of interparental conflict x offspring's coherence about parental relationships; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; standardized (unstandardized); residual covariances not included for clarity purposes*

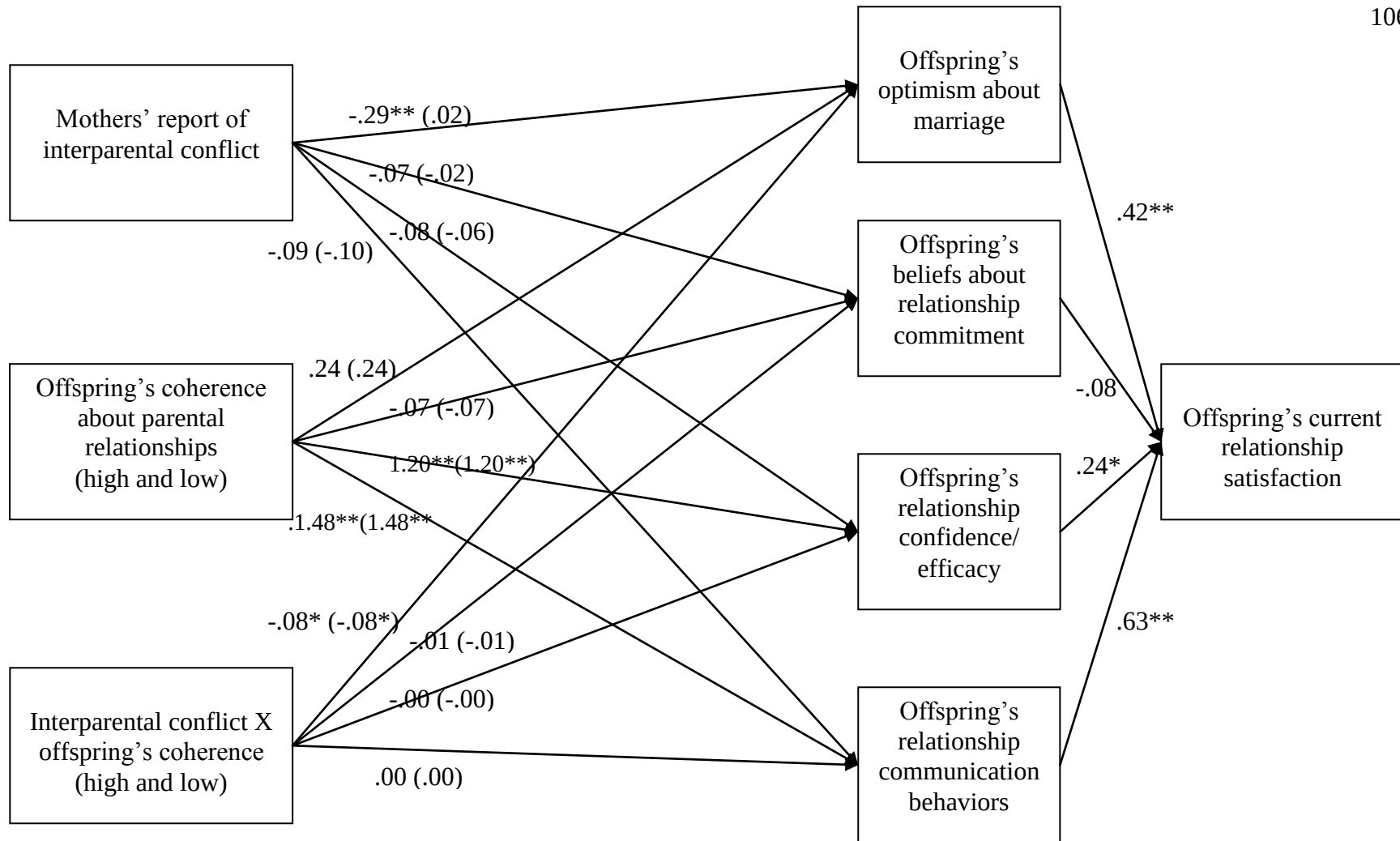


Figure 10

*Interaction effect: mothers' report of interparental conflict x offspring's coherence about parental relationships: High and low coherence; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; high coherence (low coherence)—unstandardized coefficients; residual covariances not included for clarity purposes*

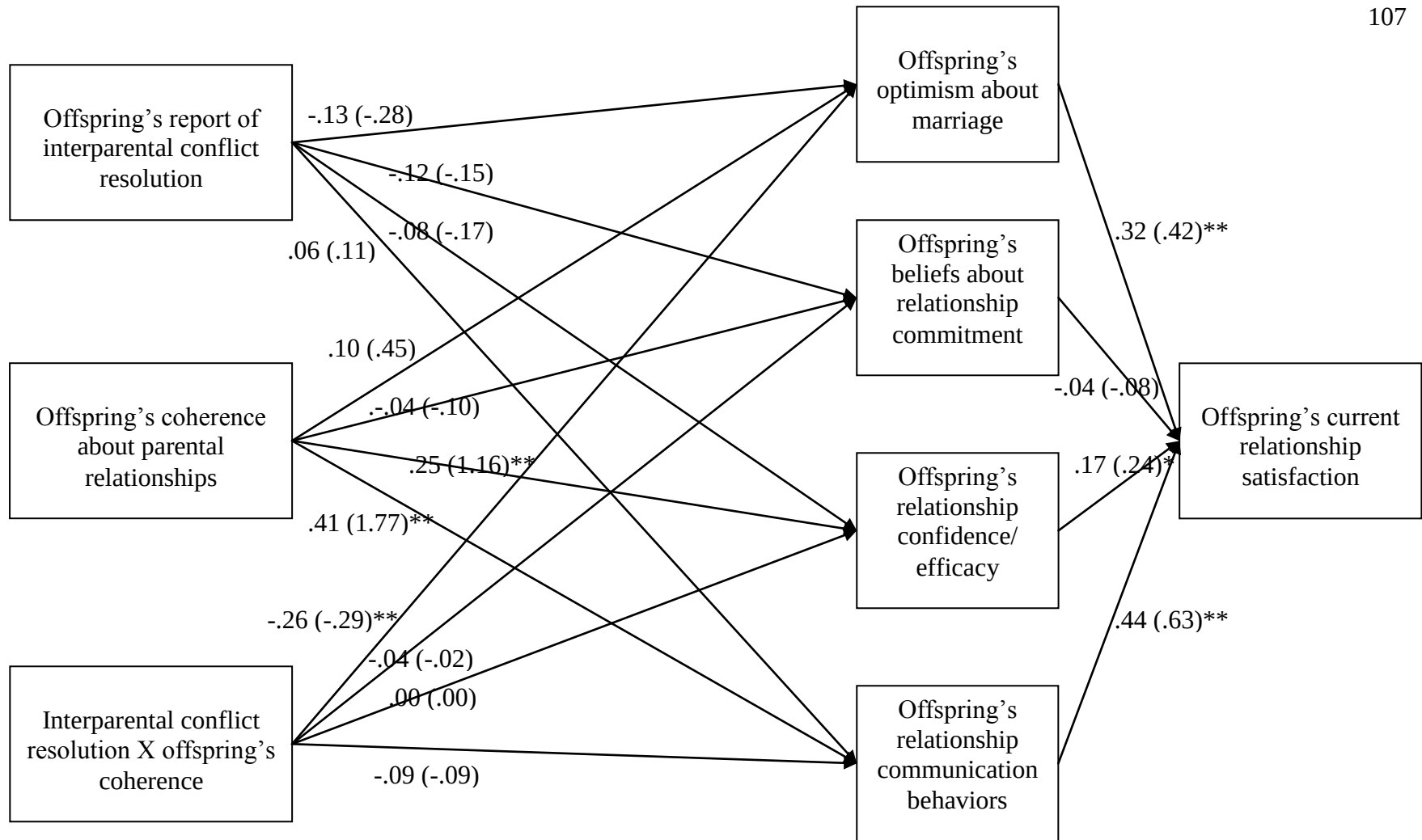


Figure 11

*Interaction effect: Offspring's report of interparental conflict resolution x offspring's coherence about parental relationships; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; standardized (unstandardized); residual covariances not included for clarity purposes*

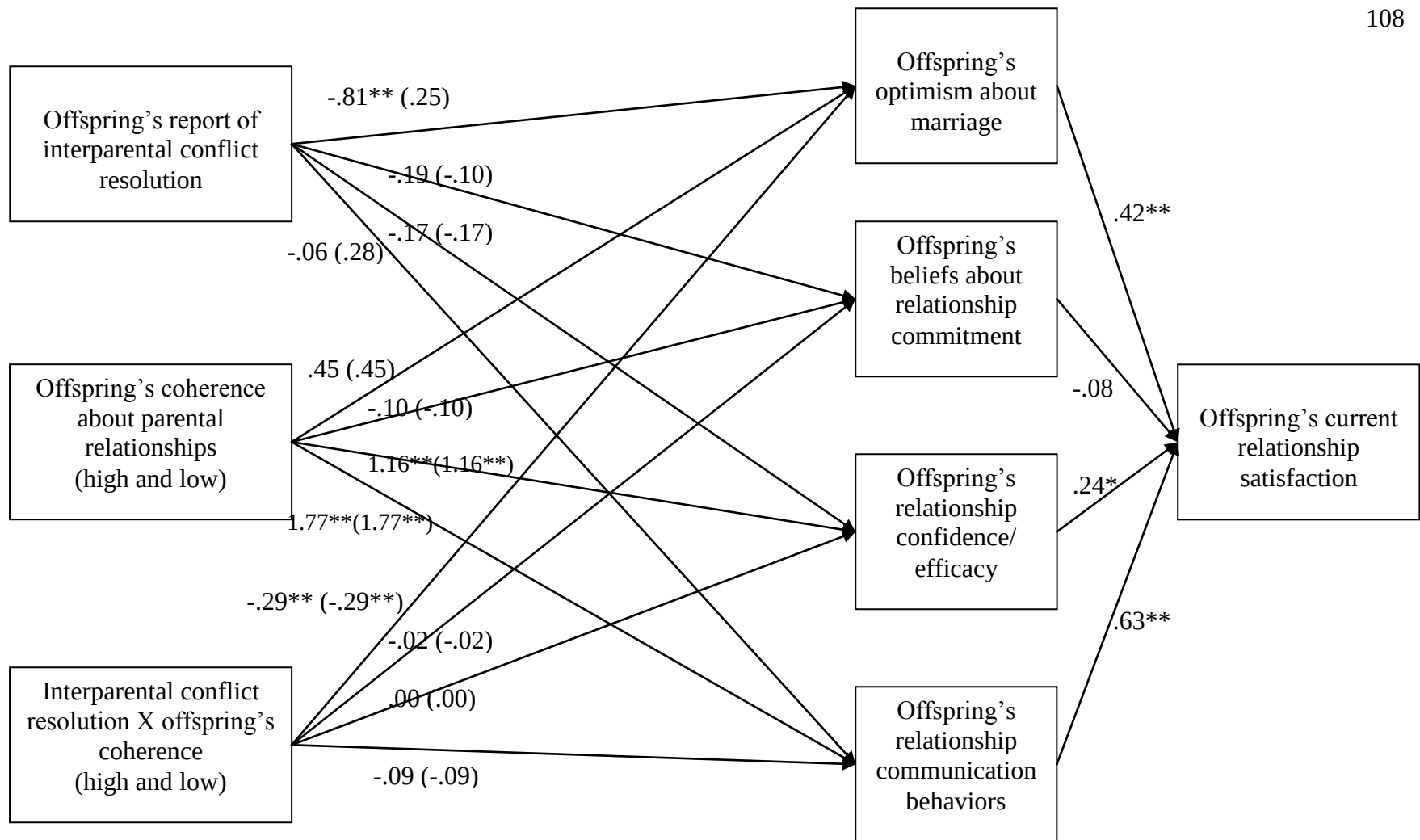


Figure 12

*Interaction effect: Offspring's report of interparental conflict resolution x offspring's coherence about parental relationships: High and low coherence; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; high coherence (low coherence)—unstandardized coefficients; residual covariances not included for clarity purposes*

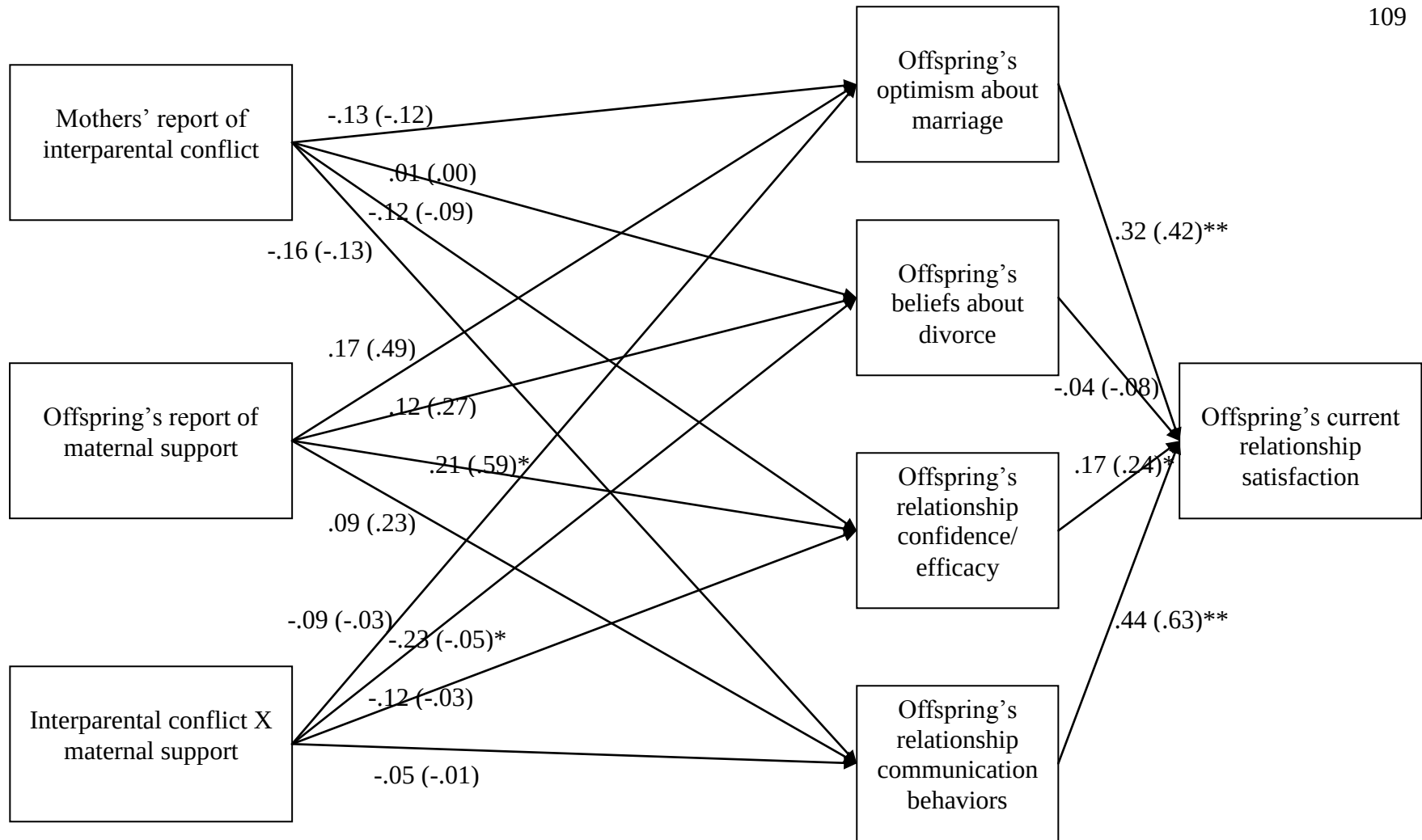


Figure 13

*Interaction effect: mothers' report of interparental conflict x offspring's report of maternal support; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; standardized (unstandardized); residual covariances not included for clarity purposes*

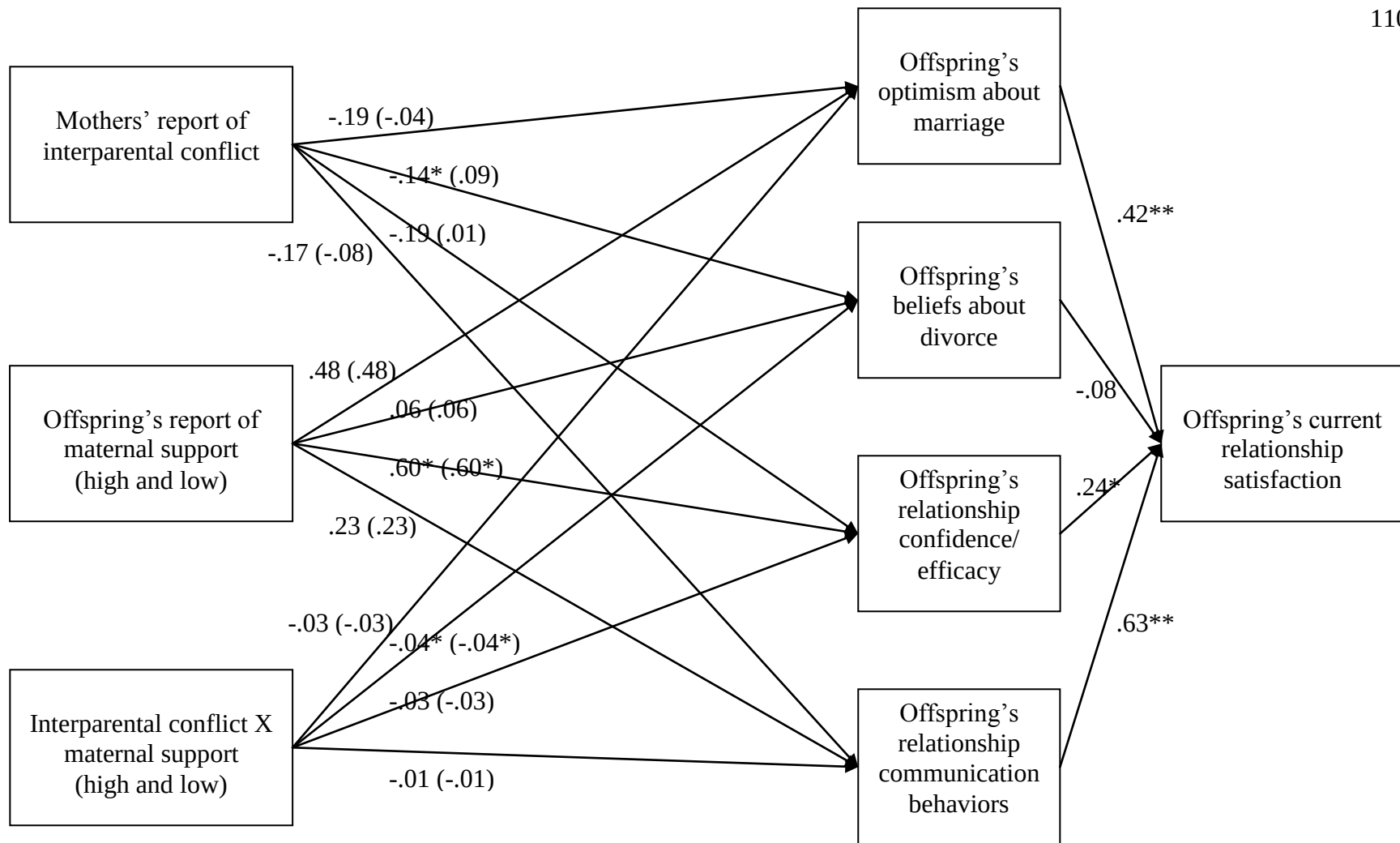


Figure 14

*Interaction effect: mothers' report of interparental conflict x offspring's report of maternal support: High and low maternal support; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; high maternal support (low maternal support)—unstandardized coefficients; residual covariances not included for clarity purposes*

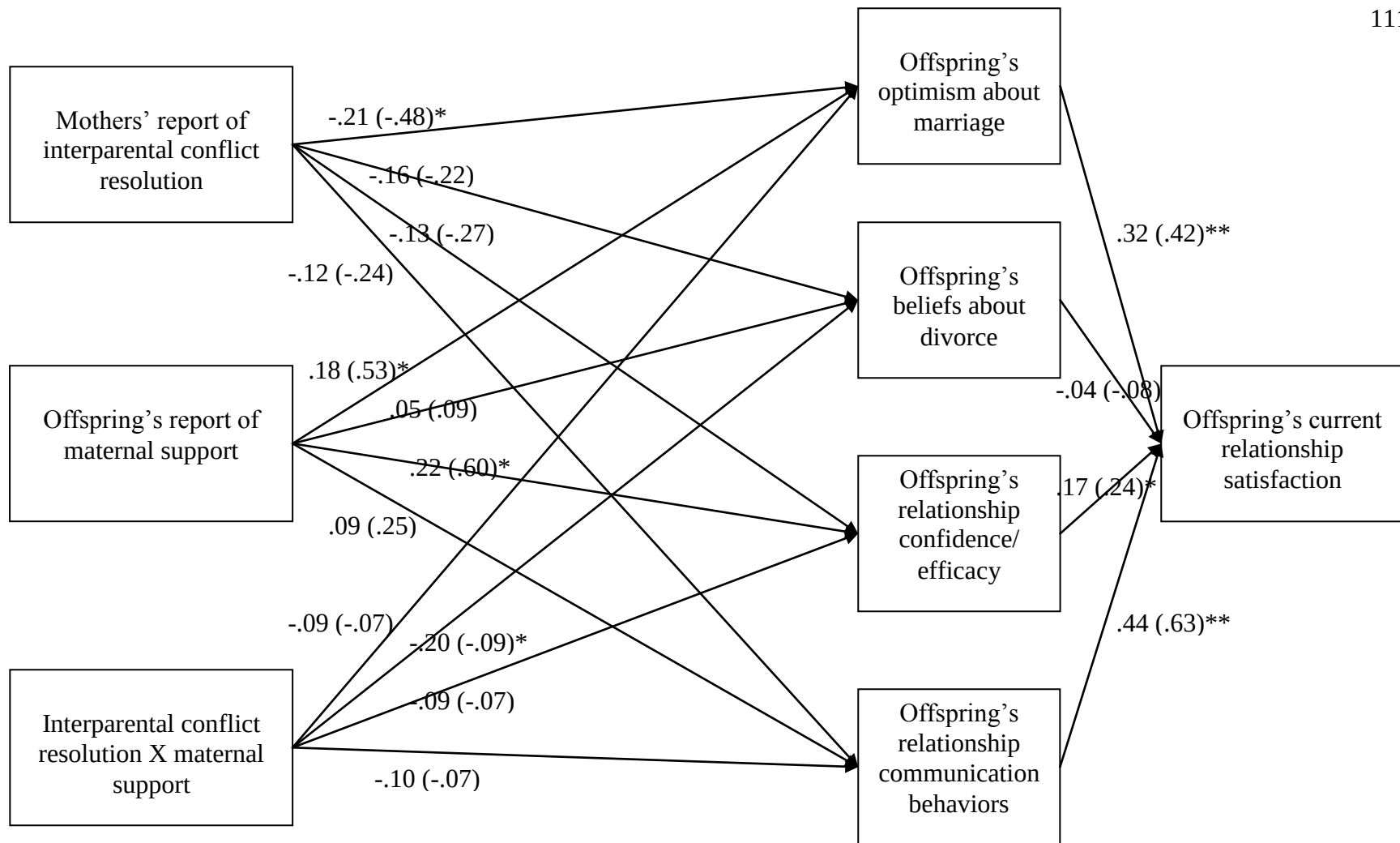


Figure 15

*Interaction effect: mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution x offspring's report of maternal support; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; standardized (unstandardized); residual covariances not included for clarity purposes*

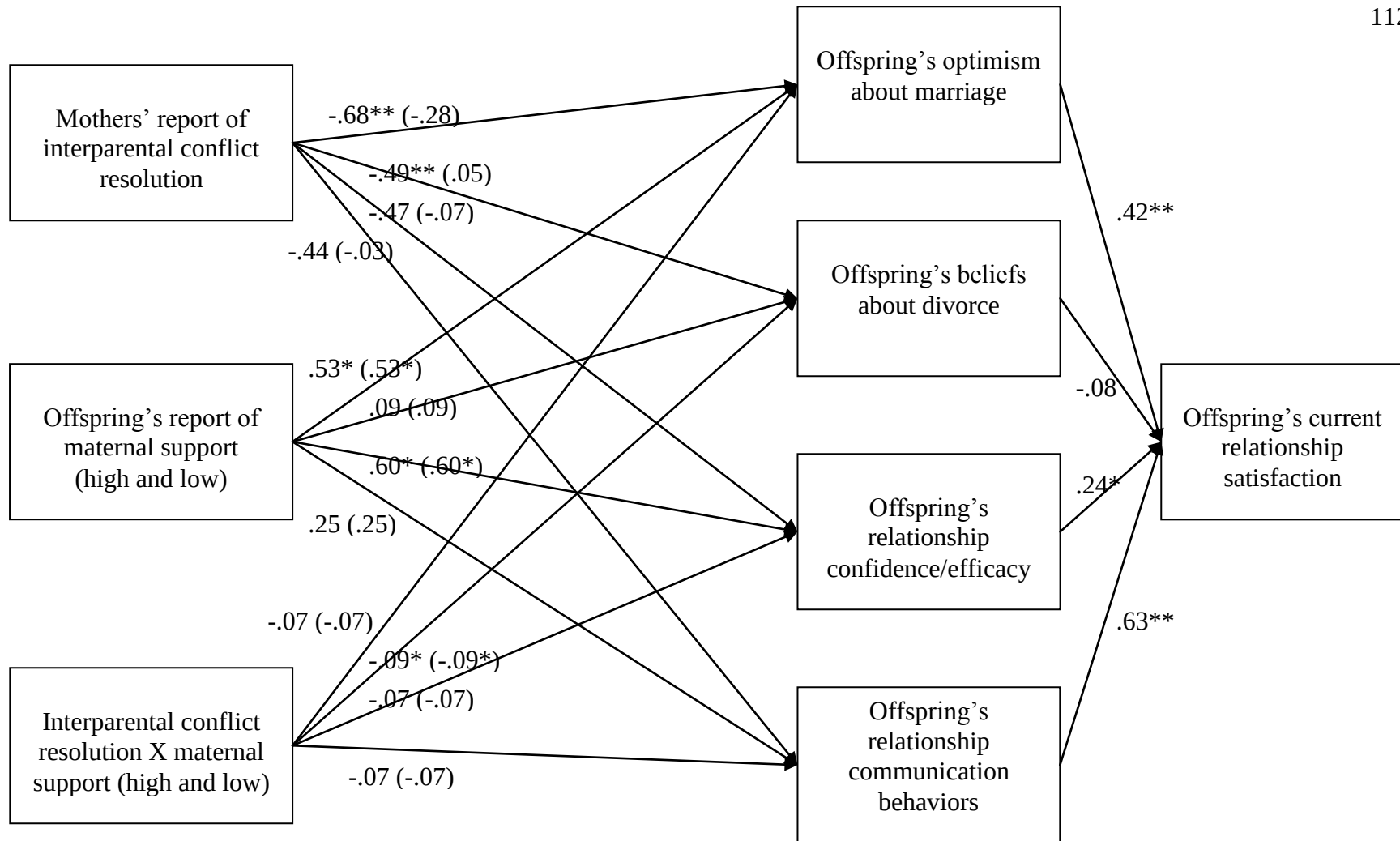


Figure 16

*Interaction effect: mothers' report of interparental conflict resolution x offspring's report of maternal support: High and low maternal support; notes: ** = $p < .01$, * = $p < .05$; high maternal support (low maternal support)—unstandardized coefficients; residual covariances not included for clarity purposes*

Biographical Data (Mothers)

Before you begin the questionnaires, please tell us a little about yourself. This information, and all information that you give us, will be kept strictly confidential.

What is your age? _____

How many years of education have you had? _____

What is your gender? 1. Female 2. Male

What is your racial group? 1. Asian 2. African-American 3. Hispanic 4. Native American
5. Caucasian 6. Other _____

How many children do you have? _____

Would you describe yourself as...
Heterosexual Bisexual Homosexual

Are you employed 1. Full Time or 2. Part Time 3. Other _____

What is your occupation? _____

What was your household's yearly income while your children were living at home?
1. Less than \$10,000 2. \$10,000 - \$24,999 3. \$25,000 - \$49,999
4. \$50,000 - \$74,999 5. \$75,000 - \$99,999 6. \$100,000 - \$249,999
7. Over \$250,000

What is your religious denomination? 1. Baptist 2. Catholic 3. Episcopalian
4. Fundamentalist 5. Jewish 6. Lutheran 7. Methodist 8. Presbyterian
9. Other Protestant _____ 10. Other religion _____ 11. None

How often do you participate in religious services?
1. Frequently 2. Occasionally 3. Seldom 4. Never

How much do you consider yourself to be a religious or spiritual person?
1. Not at all 2. A little 3. Moderately so 4. Very much so

Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship? 1. Yes 2. No

If you are currently in a romantic relationship,

How long have you been dating/married to your partner? _____

Do you and your partner live together? 1. Yes 2. No

Are you and your partner seriously considering marriage? 1. Yes 2. No 3. N/A

Are you and your partner engaged to be married? 1. Yes 2. No 3. N/A

Are you and your partner married? 1. Yes 2. No 3. N/A

What is your current relationship status with your children's biological father/father figure?

1. Married 2. Divorced 3. Separated 4. Widowed

If you answered either Separated or Divorced for the preceding question, please continue. If not, continue on to the next page.

If you have been divorced from your children's biological father/father figure, how long have you been divorced? _____ years

How old were you when the divorce/separation occurred? _____ years old

How much have you dated since the divorce/separation? (circle one)

1	2	3	4
Not At All	Some	Often	Very Often

How much has your children's biological father/father figure dated since the divorce/separation? (circle one)

1	2	3	4
Not At All	Some	Often	Very Often

Have you lived with anyone without marriage after the divorce/separation?

____ Yes ____ No

If so, how many times? ____

Has your children's biological father/father figure lived with anyone without marriage after the divorce/separation?

____ Yes ____ No

If so, how many times? ____

Have you remarried? ____ Yes ____ No If so, when? ____ year(s) ago

Has your children's biological father/father figure remarried? ____ Yes ____ No If so, when? ____ year(s) ago

With whom did your children primarily live with after the divorce? _____

What were the custody/visitation arrangements? Please describe briefly.

Biographical Data (Offspring)

Before you begin the questionnaires, please tell us a little about yourself. This information, and all information that you give us, will be kept strictly confidential.

(Please circle the appropriate answer or fill in the blank.)

What is your age? _____

How many years of education have you had? _____

What is your gender? 1. Female 2. Male

What is your racial group? 1. Asian 2. African-American 3. Hispanic 4. Native American
6. Caucasian 6. Other _____

Would you describe yourself as...
Heterosexual Bisexual Homosexual

How many children do you have? _____

How long have you been dating your partner? _____

Do you and your partner live together? 1. Yes 2. No

Are you and your partner seriously considering marriage? 1. Yes 2. No 3. N/A

Are you and your partner engaged to be married? 1. Yes 2. No 3. N/A

How many times have you been in serious romantic relationships (before this one)? _____

Are you employed? 1. Full Time 2. Part Time 3. Other _____

What is your occupation? _____

What was your household's yearly income while you were living at home with your parents?

1. Less than \$10,000 2. \$10,000 - \$24,999 3. \$25,000 - \$49,999
4. \$50,000 - \$74,999 5. \$75,000 - \$99,999 6. \$100,000 - \$249,999
7. Over \$250,000

What is your household's yearly income currently?

1. Less than \$10,000 2. \$10,000 - \$24,999 3. \$25,000 - \$49,999
4. \$50,000 - \$74,999 5. \$75,000 - \$99,999 6. \$100,000 - \$249,999
7. Over \$250,000

What is your religious denomination? 1. Baptist 2. Catholic 3. Episcopalian
 4. Fundamentalist 5. Jewish 6. Lutheran 7. Methodist 8. Presbyterian
 9. Other Protestant _____ 10. Other religion _____ 11. None

How often do you participate in religious services?
 1. Frequently 2. Occasionally 3. Seldom 4. Never

How much do you consider yourself to be a religious or spiritual person?
 1. Not at all 2. A little 3. Moderately so 4. Very much so

Are your biological parents (circle): 1. Still Married 2. Never married and apart
 3. Never married and living together 4. Separated
 5. Divorced 6. Father Deceased 7. Mother Deceased
 8. Both Deceased

Whom do you consider to be your primary parental figures? 1. Your biological parents
 2. Your biological mother and stepfather 3. Your biological father and stepmother
 4. Your adopted parents 5. Your foster parents 6. Your grandparents
 7. I was raised in a single parent home.

**If you answered either Separated or Divorced for the preceding question, please continue.
 If not, continue on to the next page.**

If your parents are divorced, how long have they been divorced? _____ years

How old were you when the divorce/separation occurred? _____ years old

How much has your mother dated since the divorce/separation? (circle one)

1	2	3	4
Not At All	Some	Often	Very Often

How much has your father dated since the divorce/separation? (circle one)

1	2	3	4
Not At All	Some	Often	Very Often

Did your mother live with anyone without marriage after the divorce/separation? ____ Yes
 ____ No

If so, how many times? ____

Did your father live with anyone without marriage after the divorce/separation? ____ Yes
 ____ No

If so, how many times? ____

Has your mother remarried? ____ Yes ____ No If so, when? ____ year(s) ago

Has your father remarried? ____ Yes ____ No If so, when? ____ year(s) ago

Whom did you primarily live with after the divorce? _____

What were the custody/visitation arrangements? Please describe briefly.

Your Current Romantic Relationship...

a. What is your partner's first name? _____

b. What category best describes your current romantic relationship?

- ☐ Married ☐ Engaged ☐ Cohabiting ☐ Exclusive ☐ Casual Dating
☐ Friends with benefits

c. How long have you been in this relationship? ____ years, ____ months, and ____ days.
(If married, this should be the length of your marriage.)

Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-16)
(Funk & Rogge, 2007)

1. Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Extremely Unhappy	Fairly Unhappy	A Little Unhappy	Happy	Very Happy	Extremely Happy	Perfect

2. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?

5	4	3	2	1	0
All the time	Most of time	More often than not	Occasionally	Rarely	Never

3. Our relationship is strong.

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all True	A little true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Almost completely True	Completely true

4. My relationship with my partner makes me happy.

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all True	A little true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Almost completely True	Completely true

5. I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner.

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all True	A little true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Almost completely True	Completely true

6. I really feel like part of a team with my partner.

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all True	A little true	Somewhat true	Mostly true	Almost completely True	Completely true

7. How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely

8. How well does your partner meet your needs?

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely

9. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely

10. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?

0	1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Almost Completely	Completely

For each of the following items, select the answer that best describes how you feel about your relationship. Base your responses on your first impressions and immediate feelings about the item.

11.	INTERESTING	5	4	3	2	1	0	BORING
12.	BAD	0	1	2	3	4	5	GOOD
13.	FULL	5	4	3	2	1	0	EMPTY
14.	STURDY	5	4	3	2	1	0	FRAGILE
15.	DISCOURAGING	0	1	2	3	4	5	HOPEFUL
16.	ENJOYABLE	5	4	3	2	1	0	MISERABLE

to discuss the matter further.

Woman nags and demands while Man withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses to discuss the matter further.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Very **Very**
Unlikely **Likely**

6. Criticize/Defend.

Man criticizes while Woman defends herself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman criticizes while Man defends himself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

7. Pressure/Resist.

Man pressures Woman to take some action or stop some action, while Woman resists.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman pressures Man to take some action or stop some action, while Man resists.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

8. Emotional/Logical.

Man expresses feelings while Woman offers reasons and solutions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman expresses feelings while Man offers reasons and solutions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

9. Threat/Back down.

Man threatens negative consequences and Woman gives in or backs down.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman threatens negative consequences and Man gives in or backs down.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

10. Verbal Aggression.

Man calls Woman names, swears at her, or attacks her character.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman calls Man names, swears at him, or attack his character.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

11. Physical Aggression.

Man pushes, shoves, slaps, hits, or kicks Woman.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman pushes, shoves, slaps, hits,
or kicks Man.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

C. AFTER A DISCUSSION OF A RELATIONSHIP PROBLEM,

1. Mutual Understanding. Both feel each
other has understood his/her position.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

**Very
Unlikely**

**Very
Likely**

2. Mutual Withdrawal. Both withdraw from
each other after the discussion.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

3. Mutual Resolution. Both feel that the
problem has been solved.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4. Mutual Withholding. Neither partner is
giving to the other after the discussion.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

5. Mutual Reconciliation. After the
discussion, both try to be especially
nice to each other.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

6. Guilt/Hurt.

Man feels guilty for what he said
or did while Woman feels hurt.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman feels guilty for what she said
or did while Man feels hurt.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

7. Reconcile/Withdraw.

Man tries to be especially nice, acts
as if things are back to normal,
while Woman acts distant.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman tries to be especially nice, acts
as if things are back to normal,
while Man acts distant.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

8. Pressure/Resist.

Man pressures Woman to apologize or
promise to do better, while Woman resists.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman pressures Man to apologize or
promise to do better, while Man resists

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

9. Support Seeking.

Man seeks support from others
(parent, friend, children).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Woman seeks support from others
(parent, friend, children).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Attitudes toward Marriage Scale
(Boyer-Pennington, Pennington, & Spink, 2001)

1. If you marry, to what extent will you miss the life you have had as a single person?

Not At All					Very Much
0	1	2	3	4	5

2. In your opinion, to what extent will it trouble you to give up your personal freedom when you marry?

Not At All					Very Much
0	1	2	3	4	5

3. In your opinion, will adjustment to married life be difficult for you?

Not At All					Very Much
0	1	2	3	4	5

4. Do you ever have doubts as to whether you will enjoy living exclusively in marriage with one person after marriage?

Never					Frequently
0	1	2	3	4	5

5. In your opinion, to what extent will the responsibilities of married life be enjoyable to you?

Not At All					Very Much
0	1	2	3	4	5

6. How happy do you think you will be if you marry?

Not At All					Very Much
0	1	2	3	4	5

7. Do you think you will find (or have found) a person who is a suitable marriage partner for you? Yes No

8. Do you ever have doubts about your chance of having a successful marriage?

Never					Frequently
0	1	2	3	4	5

9. Do you think it would be advisable for you always to remain single? Yes No

10. Do you worry ever that the person you marry wouldn't fulfill his/her responsibilities in the marriage?

Never					Frequently
0	1	2	3	4	5

11. A bad marriage is better than no marriage at all. Yes No

Relationship Confidence Scale
(Stanley, Hoyer, & Trathen, 1994)

Please answer each question below by indicating how strongly you agree or disagree with the idea expressed related to your marriage or dating relationship. You can circle any number from 1 to 7 to indicate various levels of agreement or disagreement with the idea expressed. Please answer regarding your relationship with your current partner.

Strongly Disagree				Neither Agree nor Disagree				Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7		

1. I believe we can handle whatever conflicts arise in the future.
2. I don't have much confidence in the future of our relationship.
3. I'm not at all sure that we can make this relationship work for the long haul.
4. I feel good about our prospects to make this relationship work for a lifetime.
5. We may not have what it takes to keep this relationship going.
6. We can handle just about anything that comes our way.
7. I am not sure that we can avoid divorce or breaking up in the future.
8. I am very confident when I think of our future together.
9. We have the skills a couple needs to make a marriage last.
10. Our risk for divorce or breakup is probably greater than average.

Commitment Index
(Stanley & Markman, 1992)

Please circle the number that best indicates how strongly you agree or disagree to the statements listed below. Please answer regarding your current relationship.

Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. Except when a spouse dies, marriage should be a once-in-a-lifetime commitment.
2. People should feel free to end a marriage as long as the children are not going to be hurt.
3. Divorce is wrong.
4. If a couple works hard at making their marriage work but find themselves incompatible, divorce is the best thing they can do.
5. It is all right for a couple to get a divorce if their marriage is not working out.
6. A marriage is a sacred bond between two people which should not be broken.
7. I don't make commitments unless I believe I will keep them.
8. I do not feel compelled to keep all of the commitments that I make.
9. I have trouble making commitments because I do not want to close off alternatives.
10. I try hard to follow through on all of my commitments.
11. Fairly often I make commitments to people or things that I do not follow through on.
12. Following through on commitments is an essential part of who I am.

Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale
(Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992)

In every family there are times when the parents don't get along. When their parents argue or disagree, kids can feel a lot of different ways. We would like to know what kinds of feelings *you* have when *your* parents (primary parental figures) have arguments or disagreements. Circle the answer for each sentence that best describes your parents.

T = True

ST = Sort of True

F = False

1.	I never see my parents arguing or disagreeing.	T	ST	F
2.	When my parents have an argument they usually work it out.	T	ST	F
3.	My parents often get into arguments about things I do at school.	T	ST	F
4.	My parents get really mad when they argue.	T	ST	F
5.	When my parents argue I can do something to make myself feel better.	T	ST	F
6.	I get scared when my parents argue.	T	ST	F
7.	I feel caught in the middle when my parents argue.	T	ST	F
8.	I'm not to blame when my parents have arguments.	T	ST	F
9.	They may not think I know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot.	T	ST	F
10.	Even after my parents stop arguing they stay mad at each other.	T	ST	F
11.	My parents have arguments because they are not happy together.	T	ST	F
12.	When my parents have a disagreement they discuss it quietly.	T	ST	F
13.	I don't know what to do when my parents have arguments.	T	ST	F
14.	My parents are often mean to each other even when I'm around.	T	ST	F
15.	When my parents argue I worry about what will happen to me.	T	ST	F
16.	It's usually my fault when my parents argue.	T	ST	F
17.	I often see my parents arguing.	T	ST	F
18.	When my parents disagree about something, they usually come up with a solution.	T	ST	F
19.	My parents' arguments are usually about something I did.	T	ST	F
20.	The reasons my parents argue never change.	T	ST	F
21.	When my parents have an argument they say mean things to each other.	T	ST	F
22.	When my parents argue or disagree I can usually make things better.	T	ST	F
23.	When my parents argue I'm afraid that something bad will happen.	T	ST	F

24.	My mom wants me to be on her side when she and my dad argue.	T	ST	F
25.	Even if they don't say it, I know I'm to blame when my parents argue.	T	ST	F
26.	My parents hardly ever argue.	T	ST	F
27.	When my parents argue they usually make up right away.	T	ST	F
28.	My parents usually argue or disagree because of things that I do.	T	ST	F
29.	My parents argue because they don't really love each other.	T	ST	F
30.	When my parents have an argument they yell a lot.	T	ST	F
31.	When my parents argue there's nothing I can do to stop them.	T	ST	F
32.	When my parents argue I worry that one of them will get hurt.	T	ST	F
33.	I feel like I have to take sides when my parents have a disagreement.	T	ST	F
34.	My parents often nag and complain about each other around the house.	T	ST	F
35.	My parents hardly ever yell when they have a disagreement.	T	ST	F
36.	My parents often get into arguments when I do something wrong.	T	ST	F
37.	My parents have broken or thrown things during an argument.	T	ST	F
38.	After my parents stop arguing, they are friendly toward each other.	T	ST	F
39.	When my parents argue I'm afraid that they will yell at me too.	T	ST	F
40.	My parents blame me when they have arguments.	T	ST	F
41.	My dad wants me to be on his side when he and my mom argue.	T	ST	F
42.	My parents have pushed or shoved each other during an argument.	T	ST	F
43.	When my parents argue or disagree there's nothing I can do to make myself feel better.	T	ST	F
44.	When my parents argue I worry that they might get divorced.	T	ST	F
45.	My parents still act mean after they have had an argument.	T	ST	F
46.	My parents have arguments because they don't know how to get along.	T	ST	F
47.	Usually it's not my fault when my parents have arguments.	T	ST	F
48.	When my parents argue they don't listen to anything I say.	T	ST	F

Parental Perceptions of Interparental Conflict Scale
(adapted from the Children's Perceptions of Interparental Conflict scale; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992)

Directions: We are interested in how you and your participating child's father figure typically dealt with problems in your relationship during your participating child's adolescence. Please rate each item as True, Sort of True, or False.

Father figure indicated by offspring (name): _____

1.	My partner and I hardly ever argued or disagreed.	T	ST	F
2.	When my partner and I argued or disagreed, we usually worked it out.	T	ST	F
3.	My partner and/or I tended to get really angry when we disagreed.	T	ST	F
4.	We argued or disagreed a lot.	T	ST	F
5.	Even after my partner and I stopped arguing, we stayed angry at each other.	T	ST	F
6.	When we had a disagreement we usually discussed it quietly.	T	ST	F
7.	We were often mean to each other even when our children were around.	T	ST	F
8.	Our children often saw my partner and I argue or disagree.	T	ST	F
9.	When my partner and I disagreed about something, we usually came up with a solution.	T	ST	F
10.	When my partner and I argued or disagreed we said hurtful things to each other.	T	ST	F
11.	When my partner and I argued, we usually made up right away.	T	ST	F
12.	When my partner and I had an argument, we often raised our voices.	T	ST	F
13.	My partner and/or I often nagged and complained about each other around the house.	T	ST	F
14.	My partner and I hardly ever raised our voices when we had a disagreement.	T	ST	F
15.	My partner and/or I have broken or thrown things during an argument.	T	ST	F
16.	After my partner and I stopped arguing, we were usually friendly toward each other.	T	ST	F
17.	My partner and/or I have pushed or shoved each other during an argument.	T	ST	F
18.	My partner and I were still mean to each other after we had an argument.	T	ST	F

Relationship With Your Father (or Stepfather)

Directions: Please use the numbers below to answer the following questions about your relationship with your father or stepfather, whoever you lived with most of the time.

Not At All	A Little	Quite A Bit	Very Much
1	2	3	4

1. To what extent could you turn to your (step)father for advice about problems?
2. How often do you need to work hard to avoid conflict with your (step)father?
3. To what extent could you count on your (step)father for help with a problem?
4. How upset does did your (step)father sometimes make you feel?
5. To what extent can you count on your (step)father to give you honest feedback, even if you might not want to hear it?
6. How much does your (step)father make you feel guilty?
7. How much do you have to “give in” in this relationship?
8. To what extent can you count on your (step)father to help you if a family member very close to you died?
9. How much does your (step)father want you to change?
10. How positive a role does your (step)father play in your life?
11. How significant is this relationship in your life?
12. How close will your relationship be with your (step)father in 10 years?
13. How much would you miss your (step)father if the two of you could not see or talk with each other for a month?
14. How critical of you is your (step)father?
15. If you wanted to go out and do something this evening, how confident are you that your (step)father would be willing to do something with you?
16. How responsible do you feel for your (step)father’s well-being?
17. How much do you depend on your (step)father?
18. To what extent can you count on your (step)father to change?
19. How much would you like your (step)father to change?
20. How angry does your (step)father make you feel?
21. How much do you argue with your (step)father?
22. To what extent can you really count on your (step)father to distract you from your worries when you feel under stress?
23. How often does your (step)father make you feel angry?
24. How often does your (step)father try to control or influence your life?
25. How much more do you give than you get from this relationship?

Relationship With Your Mother (or Stepmother)

Directions: Please use the numbers below to answer the following questions about your relationship with your father or stepfather, whoever you lived with most of the time.

Not		Quite	Very
At All	A Little	A Bit	Much
1	2	3	4

1. To what extent could you turn to your (step)mother for advice about problems?
2. How often do you need to work hard to avoid conflict with your (step)mother?
3. To what extent could you count on your (step)mother for help with a problem?
4. How upset does your (step)mother sometimes make you feel?
5. To what extent can you count on your (step)mother to give you honest feedback, even if you might not want to hear it?
6. How much does your (step)mother make you feel guilty?
7. How much do you have to “give in” in this relationship?
8. To what extent can you count on your (step)mother to help you if a family member very close to you died?
9. How much does your (step)mother want you to change?
10. How positive a role does your (step)mother play in your life?
11. How significant is this relationship in your life?
12. How close will your relationship be with your (step)mother in 10 years?
13. How much would you miss your (step)mother if the two of you could not see or talk with each other for a month?
14. How critical of you is your (step)mother?
15. If you wanted to go out and do something this evening, how confident are you that your (step)mother would be willing to do something with you?
16. How responsible do you feel for your (step)mother’s well-being?
17. How much do you depend on your (step)mother?
18. To what extent can you count on your (step)mother to change?
19. How much would you like your (step)mother to change?
20. How angry does your (step)mother make you feel?
21. How much do you argue with your (step)mother?
22. To what extent can you really count on your (step)mother to distract you from your worries when you feel under stress?
23. How often does your (step)mother make you feel angry?
24. How often does your (step)mother try to control or influence your life?
25. How much more do you give than you get from this relationship

Structured Interview Questions

1. Please describe your parents' relationship with each other.
 - Give an example of an interaction that "sums up" your parents' relationship for you.
 - Why do you think your parents' relationship is the way that it is?
 - What was your mother's role in the relationship?
 - What was your father's role in the relationship?
 - What was your role in the family?
 - How did your parents show each other love?
 - How did your parents show each other support?
 - What did your parents' disagreements look like?
 - What did making-up look like with your parents?
 - How did your parents' relationship make you feel about getting married?
2. Please describe if and how your parents' relationship with each other has affected your current and/or past romantic relationships?
 - What did you learn about relationships from watching your parents interact?
 - (If their parents are divorced) How did you learn that your parents were going to get divorced?
 - (If they have a step-family) Did you learn anything different watching your step-parents?

Narrative Coding Form

ID: _____ Date: _____ Coder: _____

Section Codes (1-5)

		Parent's Relationship
Narrative Coherence	Internal Consistency	
	Organization	
	Flexibility	
Narrative Beliefs	Relationship Expectations	

Global Codes

View of parent's relationship (circle one): positive ambivalent negative

Short replies/little elaboration/requires multiple prompts from interviewer: Yes No

Vita

Jennifer Willett Howell was born in Raleigh, North Carolina on August 24, 1983. She was raised in Raleigh and graduated from William G. Enloe Gifted and Talented High School in 2002. The same year, Jennifer enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she obtained Bachelor of Arts degrees in psychology and English and graduated with honors in 2006. Jennifer went on to work as the study coordinator for the CanThrive Couples Research Study at Duke University recruitment location in Durham, North Carolina, where she managed recruitment and study activities for a multi-million dollar NIH-funded study helping couples cope with breast cancer from May of 2006 until July of 2007. Jennifer obtained her Master's degree in Psychology in August of 2009 at the University of Tennessee, and is currently pursuing her doctorate degree in Clinical Psychology at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. She will be completing her predoctoral internship in Clinical Psychology at the Lexington, Kentucky Veteran's Affairs Medical Center beginning in July of 2011.