

Examining Parental Denigration in Family Systems and its Association with Parent-Child
Closeness, Interparental Conflict, and Psychological Well-Being

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Dedication and Acknowledgements

This dissertation is dedicated to the millions of families who experience difficult transitions, such as separation, divorce, and litigation, and continue to keep their children's best interests at the forefront. I hope this work contributes to that process, even in the slightest.

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Abstract

Over the past 30 years, numerous researchers have documented that when conflict between parents is frequent, intense, and lasting, children in both married and divorced families are at an increased risk for emotional and behavioral difficulties. In contrast to the extensive research on interparental conflict and interpartner violence, very little empirical research has focused on extreme parental behaviors where parents continuously demean each other in front of their children and attempt to interfere with the child's relationship with the other parent. The only reference to these behaviors in the literature are reports of what has been termed Parental Alienation (PA), the frequently discussed idea that some parents have deliberately alienated their children from the other parent, who has done nothing to merit a child's rejection. Despite its impact and widespread use, PA and the behaviors it purportedly involves remain virtually without empirical support. In general, very little empirical literature exists on extreme forms of parental negativity, such as directly denigrating co-parents in front of children.

The primary aim of the current study is to gain a comprehensive understanding of extreme forms of parental negativity, termed parental denigration, and establish the reliability of denigration as a construct. I will examine data from multiple sources, such as young adults, sibling pairs, high-conflict parents, and parent-child dyads in order to (1) document the existence of parental denigration and provide data on its frequency across marital status, (2) establish the reliability and validity of a new measure, the Parental Denigration Scale, (3) link reports of denigration to reports of psychological outcomes, parental conflict, and parent-child relationship quality in young adulthood, and (4) compare PA vs. conflict perspectives on denigration by examining instances of one-sided denigration.

Results from my analysis of a sample of nearly 1,000 young adults from both married and

divorced/never married families suggest that parental denigration occurs across marital status (though denigration frequency is higher in divorced families overall), denigration can be measured reliably, there is a high level of agreement between reporters within the same family about measurement, denigration is consistently associated with poorer parent child relationships and poorer child adjustment, and in the few instances of unilateral denigration, children feel less close with the denigrator parent, not the denigrated parent. “Parental Alienation” may occur in rare cases, but the overall pattern of the present results is inconsistent with alienation claims and suggests that denigration is a form of interparental conflict. Legal and mental health professionals should exercise caution in upholding claims of parental alienation in the courtroom, given the dearth of empirical evidence for its existence and the contrary findings regarding its proposed outcomes from this study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Interparental Conflict

Conflict and Children's Adjustment. Trends in marriage, divorce, and nonmarital childbearing have dramatically changed in the United States over the past 15 years. Although the rate of divorce in the United States has decreased over the past several decades, nearly half of first marriages are still estimated to end in divorce, and cohabitations are even more likely to end in separation (Cherlin, 2009). Since married and cohabiting parents tend to part ways early in their relationships (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002), children are more likely than ever to experience parental separation and separate parenting. Approximately 10 to 15% of families are estimated to remain highly conflicted long after a formal divorce (Buchanan & Heiges, 2001), but high levels of conflict, while rarer in frequency, exist in married families as well (Emery, 1982; Cummings & Davies, 2011). Intense conflict between parents is relevant to the millions of children who experience or have experienced the breakup of romantic relationships between their unmarried but long-term, cohabiting parents, children whose parting parents have not lived together but have maintained a serious, ongoing romantic relationship, and children whose parents are still in a romantic relationship but engage in frequent conflict.

Research has consistently shown that interparental conflict before, during, and after parental divorce is a robust predictor of children's psychological functioning (Amato & Keith, 1991; Cumming & Davies, 2011; Emery, 1982). The magnitude of the detrimental association between interparental conflict and child adjustment (Buehler et al., 1997) is almost twice that of the reported effects of divorce on children (Amato & Keith, 1991), indicating that interparental conflict is actually more harmful than divorce itself. Overt or covert conflict between parents is associated with externalizing problems, including delinquency, antisocial behavior, and conduct

problems (Dadds, Atkinson, Turner, Blums, & Lendich, 1999; Emery & O'Leary, 1984; Harden et al., 2007), as well as hyperactive/inattentive behaviors (Peterson & Zill, 1986). Interparental conflict is also related to internalizing problems, such as depression (Dadds et al., 1999; Johnston, Gonzales, & Campbell, 1987), anxiety, emotional insecurity (Cummings & Davies, 2011), and more subtle internal symptoms of distress, including painful feelings of loss and blame (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000).

Conflict itself has both direct effects and indirect effects through its disruption of parenting and subsequent harming of parent-child relationships (Cummings & Davies, 2011). Conflict can even affect parent-child relationships differently for children within the same family. Previous studies examining sibling experiences of parental conflict (Skopp et al., 2005; Richmond & Stocker, 2003) have found that siblings differ in their experiences of conflict due to differences in personality, emotional and cognitive processing, mood, and age. High conflict parents are also more likely to confide in and lean on older siblings and engage in role reversal (Peris, Goeke-Morey, Cummings, & Emery, 2008). Engaging in parentification with older siblings and disclosing inappropriate, relationship-specific information may increase the likelihood that parent-child relationships with older siblings are more negatively impacted than the relationships with younger siblings in high conflict families.

Conversely, in families with twins, conflict may harm the parent-child relationship more similarly, since monozygotic (and same sex dizygotic) twins are the same age and gender, and they share more similar experiences within the family than siblings of differing ages. Parents are also more likely to treat twins more similarly than siblings, increasing the likelihood that twins experience more similar parental behaviors than siblings of different ages. Two previous studies have used reports from the children of discordant twin pairs to estimate the genetic and

environmental influences on marital conflict (Harden, Turkheimer, Emery, D’Onofrio, Slutske, Heath, & Martin, 2007; Jenkins, Simpson, Dunn, Rosbash, & O’Connor, 2005). However, there is no current literature on the ways in which conflict impacts the parent-child relationship for twins, and no study has examined the similarity of reports from twins on their parents’ conflict. In sum, there are a variety of negative outcomes associated with experiencing interparental conflict in childhood, and conflict can affect the parent-child relationship differently for siblings within the same family.

Acrimony

In general, behaviorally manifested post-divorce conflict tends to decline over time as individuals transition from their spousal roles to their new roles as co-parents (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990; McIntosh, Long, & Wells, 2009). However, approximately 10 to 15% of divorced families are estimated to remain highly conflicted (Buchanan & Heiges, 2001), and children in these families are at a considerably higher risk for experiencing the damaging effects of long-term conflict than children from families with low levels of post-divorce conflict.

Acrimony, or psychologically-maintained hostility, often remains high for long periods of time, especially for mothers whose former spouses have found another intimate partner (McIntosh et al., 2009) or for mothers and fathers whose co-parents are largely unavailable for parenting (Shim & Emery, 2010).

High levels of acrimony between former spouses remain perceptible to children and thus harmful to their psychological adjustment, even if the children no longer actively witness their parents fighting in their presence (McIntosh et al., 2009). Interparental conflict may play out in front of the children (e.g., during exchanges between parents’ houses), when the children are alone with one parent (e.g., a deliberate attempt to undermine the other parent’s discipline or

love), or in prolonged and repeated legal battles. Importantly, post-divorce conflict tends to center around child-related issues (as opposed to the parents' relationship), as former spouses are left with only a parental role and must engage with one another as co-parents rather than husband/wife (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). Unfortunately, parents underestimate the degree to which their children (as young as 6) perceive and internalize parental conflict (Ablow, Measelle, Cowan, & Cowan, 2009) and underreport the frequency with which they engage in interparental aggression in front of their children (O'Brien, John, Margolin, & Erel, 1994; Jaffe, Wolfe, & Wilson, 1990). Parents' underestimates of the frequency and impact of their conflict behaviors is clinically relevant and should be emphasized to professionals working with divorcing or separating families.

Strategies for Emotional Regulation. Witnessing direct conflict is frightening for children (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981; Cummings, 1987), and when children experience negative affect, they develop coping strategies to regulate their emotions (Emery, 1989). The types of strategies children usually develop are either emotion-focused or problem-focused in nature (e.g. intervening in a fight vs. throwing a tantrum). Problem-focused and emotional responses to parental conflict have been observed in laboratory simulations (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985; Cummings, Davies & Simpson, 1994), documented in recordings of family arguments around the dinner table (Vuchinich, Emery, & Cassidy, 1988), and described in reports by battered women about their children's reactions to marital violence (Barnett et al., 1980; Christopoulos et al., 1987). Some strategies children develop in response to conflict may include performing certain behaviors, such as protecting or caring for one parent, painting one parent as "the bad guy," or attempting to draw parents' attention away from conflict and onto them (e.g. tantrums, achievements).

Since distress is aversive, responses that reduce negative affect are likely to be negatively reinforced. Thus, if a child responds to a parental fight by talking about the details of a project or a fight with another student, and this maneuver successfully distracts the parents from their argument, the distraction has served to remove the unpleasant stimulus of parental conflict. According to a family systems perspective, children's reaction to conflict can be modeled as a 3-step process, where (1) conflict is distressing for the child, (2) the child reacts in an effort to alleviate the distress, and (3) whichever actions reduce the conflict are likely to be maintained, as they reduce distress within the child and serve a function within the family as a whole (Emery, 1989). Thus, the child's response is maintained to help regulate distress in the future and improve family functioning by extinguishing conflict.

Diminished Parenting Quality. Interparental conflict commonly leads to inconsistent discipline, which may take the form of deliberate efforts to undermine the children's relationship with the other parent. The sources of parents' intense and destructive disputes include not only the overt causes of conflict in divorce (e.g., an affair, money issues), but also more subtle emotional issues such as anger in reaction to emotional pain (McDonald & Leary, 2005; Panksepp, 2005), grief, or efforts to engage the former partner. Children witnessing this may play a particularly active role in mediating, protecting one parent or "taking sides," or they may retreat from their family and disengage from both parents (Buchanan et al., 1991).

Interparental conflict and parents' own emotional and practical concerns with divorce typically create additional stress for children. Research shows that both divorced mothers and fathers are less warm, less strict, harsher, and more inconsistent in disciplining their adolescents (Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1997; Hetherington & Kelly, 2002; Zill et al., 1983). Role reversal or "parentification" is another parenting problem found more commonly in divorced

families (Peris, Goeke-Morey, Cummings, & Emery, 2008), as teenagers (or older siblings) may become a parent's caretaker, confidant, or "best friend." Parenting quality typically improves over time but still may not return to former levels (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002). The improvement is critical to children's well-being, because having at least one authoritative parent, together with diminished or contained conflict, is the best predictor of children's positive psychological adjustment in divorce (Emery, 1999).

Harmful Types of Conflict. Of the numerous forms of interparental conflict, overtly expressed conflict (e.g. yelling, threatening, bad-mouthing) and covertly expressed conflict (e.g. triangulating children into marital discord) are especially deleterious to various child functioning variables and child outcomes (Buehler et al., 1997; Cummings & Davies, 2011; Grych & Fincham, 1992). Perhaps the most harmful maneuver is when parents bring their children into the middle of their conflicts. Buchanan and colleagues (Buchanan et al., 1991; Buchanan & Waizenhofer, 2001) have shown that when parents bad-mouth each other in front of their children, use them to carry messages, gain information about their former partner, or pressure them to side with one parent, children are likely to either align with one parent or disengage from both parents. The pressure of being caught in the middle of parental conflict adversely affects both children's psychological well-being and parent-child relationships.

Origins of Parental Alienation Syndrome/Parental Alienation

The most extreme form of involving children in conflict are reports of what has been termed Parental Alienation Syndrome (PAS), coined by forensic psychiatrist, Richard Gardner, in 1985. Gardner described PAS as a "...disorder that arises primarily in the context of child-custody disputes. Its primary manifestation is the child's campaign of denigration against a parent, a campaign that has no justification. It results from a combination of a programming

(brainwashing) parent's indoctrinations and the child's own contributions to the vilification of the targeted parent." Thus, Gardner asserted that PAS involves both an outcome (alienation) and a cause -- the intentionally hostile and undermining words and actions of one parent against his or her co-parent (Gardner, 1985, 1992).

Current Conceptualizations. The conceptualization of PAS and the overall construct of Parental Alienation (PA) have been reformulated over the past 30 years by researchers who take a more empirical approach and by those whose views are still closely aligned with Gardner's original formulation. Some commentators still hold the opinion that the rejected parent is a loving caregiver who has done nothing wrong (Darnall, 1998; Gardner, 2002), while others believe that the rejected parent has contributed to the problem via poor parenting (Kelly & Johnston, 2001). Currently, most researchers agree that there are, in fact, cases in which a child rejects one parent. However, in these cases, multiple factors contribute to rejection, such as behaviors carried out by *both* parents, various types of abuse, parental mental illness, substance use, and factors associated with the child, such as age and temperament.

There has been considerable discussion about the PA/PAS construct, since it has had a major impact on courtroom proceedings and, often, on parent-child relationships. Allegations of PAS have become a common legal strategy in an untold number of custody cases when children resist contact with a parent or when attorneys attempt to ignore and rationalize abuse perpetrated by a rejected parent (Johnston, 2003). When a PAS "diagnosis" is upheld in the courtroom, it can lead to coercive and punitive outcomes, such as "parentectomies" where primary custody is granted to the rejected parent, and attempts to "deprogram" allegedly alienated children by sending them to an intensive camp with the rejected parent. These intrusive interventions may

sever important attachment relationships with the “non-victimized” parent, disrupt the child’s social relationships, elicit extreme behavioral responses, and cause trauma (Johnston, 2005).

The alienation construct has also greatly influenced decisions made by custody evaluators. A 2007 survey of 104 custody evaluators revealed that almost all participants were familiar with PAS and endorsed the importance of assessing for alienation in custody decisions (Baker, 2007). Furthermore, three-fourths of evaluators believed that a parent could turn a child against the other parent. In a 2010 survey of 119 professionals associated with the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, 95% of participants were familiar with the concept of PA and 72% believed that determining whether PA has occurred is of utmost importance (Cox, 2010). The emphasis placed on PA by legal and mental health professionals is concerning, given that PA is barely mentioned in the empirical literature.

Empirical Issues with the PA Construct. Interest in extreme parental behaviors has been noted both by practitioners and researchers alike (Emery, 2005; Dallam, 1999; Bruch, 2002; Fidler & Bala, 2010; Johnston et al., 2005). At a basic conceptual level, it is not clear whether the behaviors termed “alienation” are, in fact, a part of a campaign to brainwash children against a parent or, more simply, a form of extreme parental conflict. In order to steer clear of the implications associated with the term “alienation” and differentiate my purposes from those identified with PA proponents, I will use the term “parental denigration” to refer to negative parental behaviors that demean the other parent, triangulate children, and aim to interfere with the child’s relationship with the other parent. This allows the focus of the construct to behavioral rather than outcome-focused. Thus, parental denigration refers to specific behaviors carried out by parents, not the outcome of disrupted parent-child relationships.

From a clinical and legal standpoint, it is important to distinguish whether parental denigration is reciprocal and distances children from both parents, as is typical of parental conflict (Cummings & Davies, 2011; Emery, Cummings, & Fincham, 1992), or whether denigration is one-sided and distances children from the parent who is denigrated, which is asserted by proponents of parental alienation. If denigration is more similar to interparental conflict, children who experience parental denigration should feel distanced from, or less close with *both* parents. Alternatively, if denigration is more similar to alienation, children who experience parental denigration should feel very close to *one* parent and distant from the other. While every instance of parental denigration may not follow the same parent-child relationship pattern, it is important to see whether data support one perspective or the other. Additionally, it would be important to subsequently assess whether there are exceptions to the rule and under what circumstances.

Though it is clear that some parents engage in extreme negativity toward one another, very little empirical research has focused on extreme parental behaviors where parents continuously demean each other in front of their children and attempt to interfere with the child's relationship with the other parent. Most published reports that investigate these behaviors are studies that seek to examine, test, or substantiate PAS. Unfortunately, there are no psychometrically sound instruments that measure alienation, so these studies used methods that lack reliability and validity. Such methods include unstructured clinical interviews (Clawar & Rivlin, 1991), semi-structured interviews (Baker, 2006), case studies (Gardner, 1987), and symptom checklists (Gardner, 2002). Some of these reports have documented the existence of parental denigration behaviors, however, no study or report to date has obtained reports from multiple informants or linked denigration to psychological problems among children.

Limitations of these methods and the dearth of empirical support for alienation have been repeatedly noted by both psychological and legal experts (Dallam, 1999; Bruch, 2002; Emery, 2005; Johnston et al., 2005; Fidler & Bala, 2010; Hoult, 2006). In fact, a recent, comprehensive review of 39 published and unpublished studies of PA rated *none* as being of high quality, only 18% of moderate quality, 43% of low quality, and 39% of very low quality (Saini, Johnston, Fidler, & Bala, 2013). The next section provides a comprehensive review of the studies rated as being of moderate quality by Saini et al. (2013).

Empirically-Oriented Studies Examining PA

In their review, Saini et al. (2013) underscore the overall lack of empirical quality of studies that examine alienation and note the reliance on clinical observations and expert opinions to support the construct. They systematically reviewed the current literature on alienation and rated each study based on methodological quality. Studies were only included for review if they clearly stated a research design, reported a sample size, explained how data were gathered and analyzed, and clearly stated findings. Therefore, their review excluded the numerous opinion articles on the alienation construct and included the 29 studies and 10 doctoral dissertations that met the stated criteria. The authors systematically rated the strengths, limitations, and methodological quality of each study using 8 basic research criteria and scored each study on whether or not it met each criterion. Each study's score determined its level of quality; studies with scores of 2 or less were rated very low quality, studies with scores of 3-4 were rated low quality, studies with scores of 5-6 were rated moderate quality, and studies with scores of 7-8 were rated high quality. Of the 39 studies, no study was rated high quality, and only 7 studies were rated moderate quality.

Across the 7 studies rated moderate quality, there is general agreement that alienation can occur across gender and across marital status, though it occurs more frequently in divorced or disrupted families, suggesting that conflict is a formative factor. These studies also implicate both parents as contributing to the problem and suggest that children may be differently affected by reciprocal denigration based on various factors. Five studies explored the alienation construct by studying children from high conflict families in the community. The first study (Stoner-Moskowitz, 1998) compared the self-concept of 141 children in intact families, divorced families, high-conflict families, and PAS identified families. Results from multiple informants and numerous standardized measures indicated that children from intact families had significantly higher self-concepts than children in all other groups; however, there were no significant differences between children in divorced, high-conflict, and PAS identified families.

The other four studies in this group were carried out by Janet Johnston and colleagues (Johnston, 2003; Johnston, Walters, & Olesen, 2005a,b,c) Across studies, a very small number of children (6%) were extremely rejecting of one parent, and in almost all of these cases, the rejected parent exhibited parenting deficits, abusive behavior, or undesirable personality characteristics. Findings suggested that both the aligned and the rejected parent contributed to the problem, as did the child's individual vulnerabilities. The authors also found that children who rejected a parent demonstrated more behavioral problems, internalizing symptoms, and different coping styles than children who did not reject a parent.

The sixth study (Gordon, Stoffey, & Bottinelli, 2008) examined the relationship between performing alienating behaviors and the presence of primitive defenses, using the L (Lie), F (Unusual Psychopathology), and K (Correction for Defensiveness) validity scales of the MMPI-2. The authors examined 158 MMPI-2 profiles of parents who were ordered by the court to be

evaluated for child custody, where 76 families had been deemed PAS cases and the remaining 82 were control cases that did not involve PAS. In order to examine the underlying PAS hypotheses, the authors compared the combination $L + K - F$ and the Goldberg Index $(L + Pa + Sc) - (Hy + Pt)$ in parents identified as alienators, those identified as target parents, and mothers and fathers in the control group. Results indicated that mothers and fathers identified as alienators had scores in the clinically significant range, and control mothers and fathers had scores in the normal range, suggesting that alienating parents demonstrated more primitive defenses than control parents.

In the final study, Laughrea (2002) developed a measure called the Alienated Family Relationship Scale (AFRS) to identify alienated dynamics within a family from the perspective of young adults. The AFRS contains 42 items that examine interparental conflict, alienating attitude of the father toward the mother and of the mother toward the father, and alienated attitude of the young adult toward both. She sampled 417 Canadian undergraduates from intact families and 76 undergraduates from divorced families and found that the AFRS demonstrated good construct and convergent validity and good reliability. Participants from divorced families perceived more conflicts and alienating attitudes between their parents and perceived them as less capable of resolving their conflicts compared to participants from intact families. This is consistent with previous studies where parents from divorced families display more bad-mouthing and conflict behaviors than parents from married families and highlights the importance of further investigation of these “alienating attitudes” and associated behaviors.

A study similar to Laughrea (2002), but rated as low quality by Saini et al. (2013), was Moné and Biringen’s (2006) study, which investigated how memories of alienation when participants were children impacted the parent-child relationship both during childhood and in

young adulthood. They created a measure, the Relationship Distancing Questionnaire, to collect data on undergraduates' childhood memories of parents' attempts to alienate the other parent. Undergraduates from both married and divorced families reported experiencing parental behaviors associated with the alienation construct, and higher levels of reported alienation behaviors were correlated with poorer relationships with "alienating" parent and feeling reciprocally rejected by the "alienated" parent. Interparental conflict was a better predictor of feelings of alienation than marital status, suggesting that what the authors termed parental alienation may actually be a form of conflict.

The Indisputable Phenomenon: Extreme Parental Negativity

Given the limited research to date, as well as its questionable quality (Saini et al., 2013), researchers should be cautious about drawing conclusions about the consequences of what might appear to be one parent's attempts to alienate his/her child(ren) from the other parent. Researchers and clinicians should be even more cautious about making inferences of causality when a child openly rejects a relationship with one of his or her parents. Though the strong assertions about the nature, goals, and outcome of PAS as a syndrome have been incisively challenged and redefined as *the alienated child* (Kelly & Johnston, 2001), which does not assume causality and posits that the estranged parent also contributes to the rejection as a result of poor parenting or even abuse, it is clear that some parents do engage in extreme negativity toward one another.

These behaviors are difficult to study because parents are likely to underreport their own denigration behaviors and over report the other's parent's frequency of denigration (O'Brien et al., 1994), reports from young children are unreliable, and parents engaged in high conflict disputes often have children who vary widely in age. Empirical examination of these behaviors is sorely

needed, as it will elucidate whether these behaviors are related to conflict and reciprocally distance children from parents or are a form of parental alienation, where children feel more distanced from the denigrated parent. Since these behaviors have not been studied previously, determining frequency, gender differences, and reliability of reporting these behaviors will be critical. Additionally, examination of these behaviors will shed light on the PA construct and inform judges and clinicians on whether there is empirical data to support the claims that underlie PA. In the next section, initial investigation of the construct of parental denigration is presented.

Previous Investigation of Parental Denigration

Building off the work of Laughrea (2002) and Moné and Biringen (2006), a logical starting point for research on this topic was to investigate the frequency of extreme parental actions as reported retrospectively by a nonclinical sample of young adults (Rowen & Emery, in press). In comparison to younger children who are still living at home, young adults have a greater capacity to report more reliably and accurately, as well as greater objectivity in rating negative parental behaviors, due to their age and independent living circumstances. Assessment of this sample also allowed for the empirical study of correlates that are possible consequences of parental alienation, particularly for parent-child relationships. Again, in order to make the purposes and the implications of this research clear, the use of the term “alienation,” which implies an outcome, was avoided, and instead the term “parental denigration,” which focuses on the parents’ behavior itself, was used.

Rowen & Emery (in press) examined denigrating actions and statements carried out by one parent aimed at his or her co-parent using a new measure designed specifically for the purpose of assessing parental denigration (the Parental denigration Scale). The authors did not

focus on aspects of the parent-child relationship thought to underlie alienation, the presumed effects of alienation, or respondents' recollections of their own alienation-related thoughts and behaviors toward their parents (which was the focus of the Relationship Distancing Questionnaire by Moné and Biringen, 2006). Furthermore, denigration behaviors that were examined were taken from Baker and Darnell's 2006 compilation of alienating strategies to ensure that both the wide range of behaviors possibly carried out by parents and also the most extreme parental behaviors were investigated.

We explored the nature and frequency of parental denigration using the Parental Denigration Scale, assessed whether extreme parental denigration was unilateral or reciprocal, and investigating the ways in which experiencing parental denigration is related to closeness in parent-child relationships. We were particularly interested in whether children feel closer to the denigrating parent (as the alienation construct seems to imply), whether children feel closer to the denigrated parent, or whether children feel close to neither parent, especially if denigration is reciprocal (Buchanan et al., 1991; Buchanan & Waizenhofer, 2001). Specifically, we investigated: (1) how often parents make negative, denigrating comments about the other parent, (2) the specific types of negative comments and behaviors carried out by parents, (3) whether our new instrument, the Parental Denigration Scale, could be used to measure denigration reliably, (4) how the types and frequencies of these behaviors differ across marital status, and (5) how denigration was related to reported closeness in parent-child relationships.

We found that a one-factor solution fit best for the 22 items on the Parental Denigration Scale, where item loadings were greater than .45, and the proportion of variance explained was 40%. Denigration was reported in both married and divorced families, and participants who reported more frequent parental denigration also reported feeling *less* close with parents, having

poorer quality of communication with parents, and increased feelings of isolation. We also found a very small number of cases (4% of all participants) where denigration was reportedly carried out by only one parent with no reciprocation by the other parent. All of these instances except one occurred in divorced families, so we chose to omit the married family from the analysis for consistency. These parents had a total denigration score (the summation of all negatively worded PDS items) above 88, indicating that parents performed each behavior frequently or most of the time. Even in these families, however, children reported feeling closer with the parent who was denigrated, not to the parent carrying out the denigration. Thus, we found an absence of parental rejection in the presence of unilateral and reciprocal denigration, which is contrary to claims consistent with parental alienation. While these findings are the first step in examining the construct of parental denigration, data from multiple sources and aspects of psychological well-being and family dynamics are needed to gain a richer understanding of these behaviors.

Summary and Hypotheses

The current study will examine the frequency and nature of extreme parental behaviors, termed parental denigration, to understand whether denigration is a form of extreme conflict or parental alienation and examine its associations with parent-child relationship quality and psychological outcomes. This is a complex task, given the issues associated with reliably and accurately assessing parental denigration behaviors. First, other than the measure created by Rowen & Emery (in press), there is no empirically validated measure in the literature that objectively measures these behaviors; most assessment tools are behavior checklists or question sets that assume causality or are geared toward a specific outcome. Second, obtaining valid reports of denigration behaviors is difficult, since parents are likely to disagree, blame each other, and underreport behaviors. Furthermore, reports from younger children can be unreliable

or be influenced by feeling caught in the middle between parents.

Young adult children appear to be the best informants, since they are older, have had time to gain perspective and reflect on their parents' relationship, and usually feel less caught in the middle than younger children. Young adult children also still visit parents relatively frequently, so they are not too far removed from family dynamics. However, young adult children are only one source of information. In order to validate their reports, sibling reports are needed. Furthermore, it will be important to examine the similarities and differences between children's reports and parents' reports. Thus, in addition to collecting data from young adults in a university setting and in the community, reports from sibling pairs and child-parent dyads will be collected as well. The Parental Denigration Scale developed by Rowen and Emery (in press) demonstrated good internal consistency and reliability, so while further research is needed to validate this measure, it is the most advanced instrument in the literature that measures denigration behaviors. Therefore, acquiring young adult reports of denigration behaviors using an empirically tested tool and comparing those reports to those of siblings and parents will provide useful data on the reliability and validity of this measure of denigration behaviors.

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of parental denigration, the current study aims to (1) document the existence of parental denigration and provide data on its frequency in different samples, (2) attempt to test the reliability and perhaps validity of the Parental Denigration Scale by obtaining reports from multiple informants in the same family and obtaining retest data from at least 300 participants, (3) link reports of denigration to reports of psychological outcomes, parental conflict, and parent-child relationship quality in young adulthood (4) compare PAS vs. conflict perspectives on denigration by examining instances of one-sided denigration.

Four studies are proposed to provide information on the overriding goals of this research, mentioned above. Study 1 will focus on collecting data from a large sample of young adults from a public university and from the community to provide validity information on the denigration construct and provide a more diverse replication sample for results found by Rowen & Emery (in press). Additionally, in Study 1, participants will be asked to complete the Parental Denigration Scale at a one-month follow-up date to examine the test-retest reliability of the Parental Denigration Scale. Study 2 will focus on collecting data from twin and non-twin sibling pairs to assess whether siblings experience denigration similarly, or whether age and personality differences contribute to different experiences. Study 3 will focus on collecting data from separating and litigating parents, married parents of college students, and divorced parents of college students to obtain parental reports of self (how often they engage in denigration) and co-parent denigration (how often co-parents engage in denigration) frequency, across marital status.

Finally, in Study 4, data from parent-child dyads will be collected to examine the similarity of parent and child reports of denigration frequency and investigate how often they differ in their reports, the magnitude of the differences, and which specific behaviors they differ on most. Collecting data from multiple informants will not only allow for a rich dataset, but it will also provide a solution to the methodological limitation of inflated correlations due to a single informant, as I will be able to correlate siblings' reports of denigration and parenting instead of relying on the same reporter for all outcomes. This data will also contribute to the very limited literature on parental denigration and provide a unique family systems perspective.

It is hypothesized that the university sample and community sample of young adults will report experiencing parental denigration in both divorced and married families and that increased levels of denigration will be associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms, more

frequent interparental conflict, and poorer parent-child relationship quality. Additionally, it is hypothesized that the Parental Denigration Scale will demonstrate good test-retest reliability ($\alpha > .80$) (Study 1). It is also hypothesized that within families, older siblings will report more parental denigration than younger siblings, but sibling reports will be more similar within families than across families. Further, reports of parental denigration will be highly correlated among identical twins and will be more closely related than non-twin sibling reports (Study 2). It also hypothesized that reports of self and co-parent denigration frequency will be more similar in married families than divorced and separating/litigating families and that overall denigration frequency will be lower in married families than divorced and separating/litigating families. Finally, it is predicted that parents will underreport denigration behaviors compared to children, and that child reports of denigration behaviors will be more highly correlated with child adjustment than parental reports (Study 4).

In sum, the proposed research will explore extreme parental behaviors and investigate the ways in which they are associated with young adults' psychological well-being and parent-child relationship quality. This will be the first empirical study to use multiple informants, including siblings, high-conflict parents, and parents-child dyads, to explore the impact of parental denigration on the individual and within the family system. The proposed research has the potential to provide an empirical basis for reliability and validity of the Parental Denigration Scale, the frequency and nature of parental denigration, and elucidate whether denigration is associated with distancing children from both parents or solely the denigrated parent. This information is relevant to the literature on conflict and custody decision-making and may provide legal professionals and clinicians with important empirical background for making custody decisions and conducting family therapy when denigration behaviors are reported.

Chapter 2: Method

Participants

Community-based sample. Participants were individuals recruited through Mechanical Turk ($N = 350$), which is an interface where investigators can post “tasks” or studies that “workers” or participants complete for a small payment. Participants underwent a pre-screening to ensure that they were between the ages of 18-30 and fluent English speakers.

Undergraduates and their siblings. Participants were college students ($N=203$) recruited through the UVa participant pool and the Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC) psychology department and their siblings ($N = 203$). Approximately half of these student-sibling pairs were targeted to be from married families, and approximately half of these pairs were targeted to be from divorced and never married families. Students were invited to participate based on their report about their sibling’s presumed willingness to participate in a research study. All students and siblings were between the ages of 18-30.

Twins. Monozygotic and dizygotic twin pairs ($N = 121$ pairs; 103 monozygotic, 18 dizygotic) were recruited at an annual twins gathering. Twins were between the ages of 18-35 (M age = 24.85). Seventy-one twin pairs were from divorced or never married families, providing a nice contrast to undergraduates, where participants from married families are much more abundant than participants from divorced families.

Undergraduates and their parents. Participants were college students ($N=185$) recruited through the UVa participant pool and the PVCC psychology department and their parents ($N = 185$). Approximately half of these student-parent pairs were targeted to be from married families, and approximately half of these pairs were targeted to be from divorced and never married families. Students were invited to participate based on their report about their

parents' marital status and their parents' presumed willingness to participate in research. All students were between the ages of 18-30.

Currently Litigating Parents. Participants ($N=111$) were recruited from the Mediation Center of Charlottesville (MCC). All participants were parents from counties within Central Virginia who were going through a romantic relationship separation, a marital separation, or a divorce, and were court-mandated to participate in mediation or enroll in conflict resolution at the MCC. Participants were between the ages of 18 –66 and lived in counties within Central Virginia. Approximately 70% were Caucasian, and the majority of parents received a high school level education. Parents participated in the study in exchange for a payment of \$10

Design and Procedure

Community-based sample. Participants completed the study via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which is a site that allows investigators to post Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs), in exchange for 50 cents. MTurk allows investigators to require certain qualifications before a participant engages in a task and to set up a test in order to verify the qualifications. In order to control for age, an age requirement of 18-30 was set as a qualification and an additional age-related question was placed in the screening information to verify participants' birthdates. Investigators are also able to check participants' quality of response reputation. Only participants with an approval rating of 95% and above were accepted, in order to protect against individuals who provide random answers to questions or rush through the study. Once participants agreed to participate in the study and met the pre-screening qualifications, they were directed to a Survey Monkey link where they provided informed consent and completed the measures listed in the materials section. The study took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Once participants completed the study, they were directed to a debriefing form, where they indicated that they read

and understood the information (via a checkbox). Upon receiving that confirmation, they were paid 50 cents from our Amazon account. Data was stored in a password protected Survey Monkey account and was only available for download by authorized users.

University Students and Siblings. Participants were recruited through the university participant pool, using a pre-screen question that asked them whether their sibling would be willing to participate in a study. Only participants who respond “yes” or “maybe” to this pre-screen question were invited to participate via email. In the email, participants confirmed that their sibling was also interested in participating, and siblings’ email addresses and/or phone numbers were obtained to establish contact. Researchers emailed or called siblings to ask if they were willing to participate. If siblings were willing to participate, the university student and sibling provided informed consent, and they were sent the study via a Survey Monkey link. The study took approximately 40 minutes to complete. After completing the study, participants were led to a debriefing form and were unable to exit until they indicated that they read the form.

Approximately 30 days after completion of the study, university student participants were asked to retake the Parental Denigration Scale in order to obtain retest data, which took approximately 5 minutes. Once students completed the entire study, they were awarded credit. Data was de-identified and kept in a password protected folder.

Twins. In the summer of 2012, our lab conducted research at the annual Twins Days Festival in Twinsburg, Ohio, which thousands of twins attend. At the festival, the researcher recruited monozygotic and dizygotic twin pairs between the ages of 18-35. Twins who were willing to participate read and signed an informed consent agreement and were seated at a private table inside of the research booth. Participants filled out demographic information, answered questions about frequency of contact with parent, rated relationship with parents, and

completed the Parental Denigration Scale. The study took approximately 10 minutes to complete. Once they completed the measures, they were given a debriefing form and asked if they had any questions. After they read the debriefing form, they were entered to win a \$50 gift certificate. Participant data was assigned a number, and no identifying information was recorded to protect participant confidentiality.

MCC Parents. MCC parents were recruited through the Medication Center of Charlottesville (MCC) by mediators, parent educators, and volunteers at the MCC. Participants were asked to arrive 10-15 minutes early for their respective intervention (co-parenting education or mediation) in order to complete the first portion of the study. Upon arrival, each co-parent was asked to complete a compilation of measures, which included measures of parental denigration and acrimony. Pre-class questionnaires were given to the MCC administrator and kept in a locked cabinet. One month after completing the respective intervention, the MCC administrator mailed participants the same compilation of measures. In an attached letter, which reminded the participants of their original consent, participants were asked to send the questionnaire back to the University of Virginia lab via an enclosed stamped and addressed envelope. Once the completed post-class questionnaire was received by the researcher, participants were sent a small thank you note along with a \$10 payment.

University Students and Parents. Participants were recruited through the university participant pool, using a pre-screen question that asked whether both of their parents would be willing to participate in a study. Only participants who responded “yes” or “maybe” to this pre-screen question were invited to participate via email. In the email participants confirmed that their parents were interested in participating, and parents’ email addresses and/or phone numbers were requested to establish contact. Researchers emailed or called parents to ask whether they

were willing to participate. Once parents and students both indicated their interest in participating, each participant was sent a link to the study, which contained an informed consent form and the measures listed in the materials section below. Family members were asked not to share their responses with each other until all participants completed the study. The study took approximately 40 minutes to complete. Once participants completed the measures, they were led to a debriefing form and were unable to exit until they indicated that they read the form.

Approximately 30 days after completion of the study, student participants were asked to retake the Parental Denigration Scale in order to obtain retest data, which took approximately 5 minutes. After students completed the entire study, they were awarded credit. All data was de-identified and kept in a password-protected folder or in a locked data room.

Materials

The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987) assesses the affective and cognitive dimensions of relationships with parents and peers. For the purposes of this study, participants only completed the mother section and the father section of the IPPA to assess relationship quality. The mother and father sections each consist of 25 items and use a 5-point Likert scale response format (1 = *almost never or never true* to 5 = *almost always or always true*). Higher total IPPA scores indicate a greater attachment relationship to the attachment figure (mother or father).

The Parenting Styles Index (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994) contains items on parenting practices that correspond to three dimensions of authoritative parenting: acceptance/involvement, behavioral supervision and strictness, and psychological autonomy-granting. The two scales used for this study were the *acceptance/involvement* scale (9 items), which measures the extent to

which an adolescent perceives his or her parents as loving, responsive, and involved, and the *psychological autonomy-granting* scale (9 items), which measures the extent to which parents use noncoercive, democratic discipline practices and encourage the adolescent to express individuality. All participants will complete the 18 questions for both their mother and father; all responses are on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). Participants are asked to respond with a 9 if the question is not applicable.

The Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (*CESD*; Radloff, 1977) measures current depressive symptomology in the general population. It is not used for diagnosis in clinical populations, so it is an ideal measure for this study. The *CESD* contains 20 items, and all responses are on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *rarely or none of the time* to 4 = *most or all of the time*).

The Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (*CPIC*; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) is a 13-item measure that assesses children's perceptions and interpretations of conflict, such as conflict properties, threat, and self-blame. Response choices are on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

The Satisfaction With Life Scale (*SWLS*; Diener, 1985) is a short, 5-item instrument designed to measure global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life. Responses are on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

The Networks of Relationships Inventory (*NRI*; Furman & Burhmester, 1985) assesses characteristics of relationships with family members and friends using 5, 3-item subscales. Only inventories applicable to mothers and fathers were used in this study to examine the nature of participants' relationships with parents. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *little or none* to 5 = *the most*).

The State Trait Anxiety Inventory (*STAI*; Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg, & Jacobs, 1983) measures trait and state anxiety in the general population. It contains 20 items that measure trait anxiety and 20 items that measure state anxiety. The 20-item Trait Anxiety measure was used for the purposes of this study. Responses are rated on a 4-point scale (1 = *almost never* to 4 = *almost always*), where higher scores indicate greater anxiety.

The Painful Feelings About Divorce Scale (*PFAD*; Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000) is a 39-item measure that assesses painful feelings associated with divorce, such as parental blame, loss, self-blame, and seeing the world through the lens of divorce. Responses are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*).

The Acrimony Scale (*AS*; Shaw & Emery, 1987) is a 25-item measure of co-parenting conflict between separated or divorced parents that yields a single acrimony score (the mean of all items), with higher scores indicating greater conflict and more co-parenting difficulties. Responses are scored on a 4-point Likert scale rating the degree to which each statement characterizes the relationship (1 = *almost never* to 4 = *almost always*). Items are worded in a counterbalanced format to control for response bias.

The Negative Parental Characteristics Checklist was designed to measure how often individuals report experiencing overtly negative, neglectful, or abusive actions by their parents growing up. These are parental actions and characteristics that have been associated with parental rejection (Johnston & Kelly, 2005), such as physical abuse, substance abuse, and mental health issues. This measure contains 22 items, and responses are on a 5-point Likert-type frequency scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, 5 = *most of the time*).

The Parental Denigration Scale (*PDS*; Rowen & Emery, in press) was designed to measure how often individuals witnessed their parents engaging in various demeaning behaviors aimed at

the other parent, during the years participants lived in the same house as their parents. Items were generated by reviewing the published literature on “parental alienation strategies.” Many of the items are based off of Baker and Darnell’s (2006) compilation of “strategies employed by alienating parents.” The revised measure contains 22 of the original 44 items, 8 of which are reversed in the direction of positive parental interactions. Responses are on a 5-point Likert-type frequency scale (1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 4 = *often*, 5 = *most of the time*).

Note about measures. Measures were adjusted for parents so that they reported on their own experiences of participating in parental denigration, conflict, and parenting behaviors.

Statistical Power

One of the primary hypotheses of this study is that there will be more reported parental denigration in divorced families than married families. An a priori power analysis was conducted to determine the minimum number of participants needed to detect a moderate effect ($d = 0.35$ to 0.50) of denigration with at least 80% power, using a two-sample t-test to test mean differences between married and divorced families, with an alpha of .05. The recommended sample size for this assessment ranges from 33-75 pairs. Therefore, a minimum of 100 student-sibling pairs ($N = 50$ married, $N = 50$ divorced) and 100 student-parent pairs ($N = 50$ married, $N = 50$ divorced) were targeted for data collection. A total of 157 student-sibling pairs ($N = 104$ married, $N = 53$ divorced) and 265 student-parent pairs ($N = 188$ married, $N = 77$ divorced) provided data appropriate for analyses, which allowed for 80% power, at minimum.

The second main set of hypotheses of this study is that there will be various differences and similarities between reports of denigration, parental conflict, and psychological outcomes between children, siblings, and parents in the same family. Another a priori analysis was conducted to see how many students, siblings, and parents were needed to detect a moderate

correlation ($r = 0.3$ to 0.4) between family members' denigration scores, using an alpha of $.05$. The recommended sample size for this assessment ranges from 46-84 pairs. The 157 student-sibling pairs and 265 student-parent pairs that had complete enough data to use for analyses met the criteria needed for 80% power for the correlation analysis.

Data collection efforts matched or exceeded all target goals, and total analyzable data will allow for sufficient power for all desired analyses. Data that will be used for analysis has been collected from 348 university students ($N = 231$ married, $N = 117$ divorced), 272 community participants ($N = 178$ married, $N = 94$ divorced), 111 high-conflict parents ($N = 111$ divorced), 109 twin pairs ($N = 71$ married, $N = 38$ divorced), 157 non-twin sibling pairs ($N = 104$ married, $N = 53$ divorced), 265 parent-child dyads ($N = 188$ married, $N = 77$ divorced), and 105 co-parent pairs ($N = 63$ married, $N = 42$ divorced).

Preliminary Analyses

All measures were scored following scoring procedures described in the original publications or manuals. Participants with insufficient or incomplete data ($N = 343$), individuals who did not meet the age requirement ($N = 198$), individuals who had a parent who passed away in childhood ($N = 47$), and individuals who finished the survey in fewer than 12 minutes ($N = 264$) were excluded from analysis. Data was plotted, and descriptive analyses were conducted to identify any potential problems (e.g., non-normative distributions, outliers) and to verify that statistical assumptions have been met. In our previous study (Rowen & Emery, in press), we found no significant differences in mean scores or demographic characteristics between individuals with divorced parents and parents who were never married and do not live together. A series of t-tests were conducted to ensure that participants with divorced and never married parents did not differ significantly with regard to demographic characteristics or any of the

measured variables, such as reported parental denigration, parent-child relationship quality, and psychological health outcomes. As with our previous study, I found no significant or substantial differences between these two groups. Thus, I will combine these individuals and place them in one group (“divorced”) to compare their outcomes with those of individuals with married parents, for all subsequent analyses.

Chapter 3: Results

The overall goals for analyses are to (1) examine the nature and frequency of denigration behaviors, (2) assess the reliability and validity of the Parental Denigration Scale, and (3) examine the relationship between experiencing denigration in childhood and various outcomes in young adulthood. Given that these overall aims seek to establish denigration as a construct and examine correlations with later outcomes, my planned analyses will be relatively straightforward. Once this research is expanded upon in the future, I will employ more complex and advanced statistical modeling techniques.

Analyses will be conducted to study parental denigration across four samples: adult children, sibling pairs, parents, and parent-child dyads. In Study 1, child reports are examined to assess the prevalence and characteristics of parental denigration. An exploratory factor analysis will be performed to understand the factor structure of denigration in this sample of university and community participants and compare this factor structure to the factor structure previously found in data from university students (Rowen & Emery, in press). Frequency of denigration will be assessed to see how often denigration occurs across marital status, whether mothers or fathers are reported to denigrate more frequently, and what types of denigration behaviors occur with the most frequency. The relationship between reported denigration frequency and both

parent-child relationship quality and psychological well-being will be examined to assess the relationship between experiencing denigration in childhood and outcomes in young adulthood. Instances of unilateral denigration will also be identified, and the hypothesis associated with parental alienation, that children will feel closer to denigrating parent, will be tested. Finally, test-retest reliability will be calculated to provide psychometric support for the Parental denigration Scale.

Study 2 aims to (a) examine the similarities and differences between sibling reports of parental denigration and (b) assess the relationship between sibling reports of parental denigration and their reports of outcomes, such as parent-child relationship quality and psychological well-being. This will be achieved by first comparing reports of parental denigration between monozygotic twins, dizygotic twins, and non-twin siblings to assess the consistency in sibling reports and provide validity support for the Parental denigration Scale. Next, denigration reports will be examined by age, and the hypothesis that older sibling will report more denigration than younger siblings will be tested. Then, I will assess whether more discrepant reports of parental denigration between siblings is associated with more discrepant reports of parent-child relationship quality and more discrepant reports of psychological well-being. Finally, In order to utilize a multi-informant approach and avoid inflating correlations by relying on a single informant, one sibling's reports of relationship quality and psychological well-being will be correlated with the other sibling's reports of negative denigration.

In Study 3, parental reports of the frequency with which they denigrate their co-parent and the frequency with which their co-parent denigrates them will be examined across married parents, divorced parents, and separating/litigating parents. Sample means for both self-reported and reported co-parent denigration frequency will be compared to assess how often parents

across marital status report the occurrence of denigration behaviors. Within samples, reported self and co-parent denigration will be compared to assess the discrepancy between the frequency with which parents report they engage in denigration behaviors and how often they report their co-parent engages in denigration behaviors. In divorced samples, co-parent denigration reports will be correlated with acrimony to test the hypothesis that reported co-parent denigration frequency and interparental acrimony will be highly correlated. Finally, denigration reports within pairs of co-parents will be examined to assess the consistency between co-parents' reports of denigration

Finally, Study 4 aims to examine reports of denigration between young adult children and parents, across marital status. First, child reports of parental denigration behaviors will be compared with parents' reports of their own denigration behaviors to test the hypothesis that parents will underreport the frequency with which they engage in denigration behaviors. Next, child reports of parental denigration behaviors will be compared with parental reports of their co-parents' denigration behaviors to assess the consistency between parents and children about the other parent. Finally, child self-reports of relationship quality with parents and psychological well-being will be compared with parental reports of relationship quality and their assessment of children's psychological well-being to assess the consistency in reports and to, again, have multiple informants for the same outcome variable.

The results are presented under four major headings. First, I examine the prevalence and characteristics of parental denigration in a sample of university students and community participants (Study 1). Second, I examine the relationship between sibling reports of parental denigration and associated psychological outcomes (Study 2). Third, I explore the association between co-parent reports of parental denigration and whether reports differ across marital status

(Study 3). Finally, I explore the relationship between parent and child reports of parental denigration and psychological outcomes (Study 4).

Study 1: Prevalence and Characteristics of Parental Denigration in Three Samples of Child Reporters.

EFA. The first aim of this study was to examine the factor structure of parental denigration in a larger sample with community-based participants. Using data from the 994 total adult child reporters from the UVa, MTurk, and Twins samples, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with GeoMin rotation was performed in Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 2012). The factor structure was examined for mothers and fathers separately in order to identify any significant differences between parents. First, the factor structure was examined in mothers, and the Eigenvalues suggested a sharp drop after the second factor. Thus, a two-factor solution, which separated positive items and negative items, appeared to fit best. This two-factor solution became the working model going forward.

The exploratory two-factor solution was used to fit a confirmatory two-factor model, in which positive and negative denigration items loaded on two separate factors. These two factors were correlated $r = -.70$, fit with a CFI of .995 and an RMSEA of .085. Given the good fit of this model, a model that included both mothers and fathers was constructed. First, this model was fit in which mother and father factor loadings were free to differ. This model was compared to a model that constrained mother and father loadings to be equal. While model comparison suggested that there were some significant differences between mothers and fathers, the correlation between mother and father loadings was $r = .78$, and there did not appear to be any important theoretical differences between mother and father loadings. Given the high correlation between factor loadings and the absence of theoretically significant differences, measurement parameters were constrained to be equal in all subsequent models (see Table 1 for factor

loadings). This model was chosen in order to test the differences between mother and father positive and negative items in married and divorced families.

Psychometrically, the positive and negative factors (Factor 2 and Factor 1, respectively) for mothers and fathers did not significantly differ. Additionally, means for mother and father positive behaviors did not significantly differ. However, mean differences for mother and father negative behaviors significantly differed ($p < .001$), where negative behaviors were .30 of a standard deviation higher for mothers than fathers. Thus, while factor structure was consistent for mothers and fathers, negative behavior frequency significantly differed between mothers and fathers.

Finally, mother and father loadings were examined by marital status. The variance for married parents was fixed at 1, and the corresponding means for married parents were fixed to 0 in order to create a reference group against which to compare divorced parents. Comparison by marital status revealed that divorced families were significantly less positive and significantly more negative than married families ($p < .001$). Means for divorced parents were a standard deviation lower than means for married parents on Factor 2 (Estimate = -1.1, $p < .001$, mothers; Estimate = -1.1, $p < .001$, fathers) and approximately a standard deviation higher than married parents on Factor 1 (Estimate = .97, $p < .001$, mothers; Estimate = .81, $p < .001$, fathers). Further, the correlation between the two factors was lower in divorced families ($r(313) = -.47$, $p < .001$, mothers; $r(313) = -.41$, $p < .001$, fathers) than married families ($r(667) = -.74$, $p < .001$, mothers; $r(667) = -.68$, $p < .001$, fathers).

The two-factor solution fit well for both mothers and fathers and in married and divorced families. Coefficient alpha was computed to determine the internal consistency of the two

factors. For mothers, the alpha coefficient for negative items (Factor 1) was .94 and was .90 for positive items (Factor 2). For fathers, the alpha coefficient for negative items (Factor 1) was .95 and was .88 for positive items (Factor 2).

Table 1

PDS Factor Loadings for Exploratory Factor Analysis with GeoMin Rotation

Factor 1: Negative	Loading	Factor 2: Positive	Loading
Item 1: <i>Said bad things</i>	.85	Item 4: <i>Spoke Respectfully</i>	.68
Item 2: <i>Made me feel guilty for enjoying time</i>	.87	Item 10: <i>Encouraged me to have a strong relationship</i>	.88
Item 3: <i>Created conflict</i>	.91	Item 11: <i>Excited when I spoke positively about parent</i>	.89
Item 5: <i>Put down values</i>	.84	Item 14: <i>I felt free to give/receive love to parent</i>	.81
Item 6: <i>Asked me to choose</i>	.91	Item 17: <i>Spoke positively about other parent</i>	.90
Item 7: <i>Said other parent was mentally unstable</i>	.85	Item 18: <i>Wanted me to feel close to both parents</i>	.91
Item 8: <i>Spend less time with other parent</i>	.95	Item 21: <i>Positive about presents given</i>	.81
Item 9: <i>Other parent not important</i>	.93		
Item 12: <i>Negative Feelings</i>	.90		
Item 13: <i>Tested me</i>	.83		
Item 15: <i>Talked down to other parent</i>	.84		
Item 16: <i>Quizzed me</i>	.85		
Item 19: <i>Talked about flaws</i>	.79		
Item 20: <i>Other parent is a bad person</i>	.93		
Item 22: <i>Undermined other parent's authority</i>	.73		

Note: Factor loadings were constrained to be equal for mothers and fathers. Items correspond to numbered items on the Parental Denigration Scale.

The correlation between the two factors was -.47 for divorced mothers, -.41 for divorced fathers, -.74 for married mothers, and -.68 for divorced fathers.

Married $N = 668$, Divorced $N = 326$. Child reporters from UVa, MTurk, and Twins samples.

In creating the PDS, positively worded items were placed throughout the measure to counterbalance negatively worded items and try to capture denigration through both negatively and positively worded items. It was hypothesized that reverse scoring the positive items would provide information about denigration behaviors, but instead, they provided information about the absence of positive behaviors, not the presence of negative ones. Statistical analysis has revealed that the absence of positive behaviors is not the same as the presence of negative ones, given that all positive items loaded onto a completely different factor. Further, the goal of this study is to examine specific, negative behaviors the ways in which the presence of denigration behaviors impact parent-child relationships and psychological well-being. Therefore, given that the behaviors I aim to measure in are encompassed within Factor 1, and Factor 2 does not provide information on denigration behaviors, I will primarily use Factor 1 in analyses. All mention of “denigration behaviors” will refer to the negative items that comprise Factor 1.

Test-retest Reliability. In order to establish test-retest reliability for the Parental Denigration Scale (PDS), participants ($N = 334$) were given the measure at two time points, 30 days apart. Pearson’s product moment correlations were calculated between parental denigration scores at time 1 and time 2. Scores were highly stable over the four week interval. Pearson correlation coefficients ranged from .80 to .83 for Factor 1 and ranged from .86 to .89 for Factor 2 scores (see Table 2). This provides good support for the psychometric reliability of the PDS.

Table 2.

Test-retest Reliability for Denigration Factors

Score	Test-retest Reliability
Factor 2: Mothers	.89
Factor 2: Fathers	.86
Factor 1: Mothers	.83
Factor 1: Fathers	.80

Note: Reliability calculated between negative and positive item scores for mothers and fathers at time 1 and time 2 (30 day time interval).

$N = 334$ (UVa participants who took the measure at time 1 and time 2).

Denigration Frequency. A total mother denigration score and a total father denigration score were calculated by summing the 15 items that comprised Factor 1. Child informants across all samples reported experiencing parental denigration infrequently, on average, in both divorced and married families, though there was a higher reported frequency in divorced families. Mean child-reported denigration score was 22.31 ($SD = 9.53$) for married mothers and 20.90 ($SD = 8.19$) for married fathers. For divorced mothers, mean child-reported denigration score was 33.01 ($SD = 14.12$) and was 29.20 ($SD = 13.92$) for divorced fathers (See Table 3).

Table 3.

Comparisons of Denigration Frequency across Parent and Marital Status

	Parent		Significance	
	Mothers	Fathers		
Status	Married	$M = 22.32, SD = 9.53$	$M = 20.90, SD = 8.19$	$t = 5.18, p < .001$
	Divorced	$M = 33.01, SD = 14.12$	$M = 29.20, SD = 13.92$	$t = 5.86, p < .001$
	Significance	$t = 14.12, p < .001$	$t = 11.82, p < .001$	

Note: Means and standard deviations are for total denigration scores. Scores range from 15-75. The Significance column corresponds to differences between married parents and divorced parents, and the Significance row corresponds to differences between mothers across marital status and fathers across marital status.

Married $N = 668$, Divorced $N = 326$. Child reporters from UVa, MTurk, and Twins samples.

Individual item examination revealed a consistent pattern of more frequent denigration in divorced families than married families. For example, participants responded *usually* or *always* to “*This parent said bad things about my other parent in front of me*” for 13% of married mothers and 8% of married fathers, but this was true for 40% of divorced mothers and 24% of divorced fathers. Additionally, participants responded *usually* or *always* to “*I feel like this parent tried to create conflict between me and my other parent*” for 3% of married mothers and 2% of married fathers, but for 15% of divorced mothers and 13% of divorced fathers. Table 4 provides a comprehensive list of all denigration items and their endorsement frequencies, broken down by parent and marital status.

Table 4.

Percentages of Endorsements for Denigration Items

Item	Married		Divorced	
	Mom	Dad	Mom	Dad
1. This parent said bad things about my other parent in front of me.	1 3 5 68 20 13	1 3 5 77 15 08	1 3 5 31 29 40	1 3 5 52 24 24
2. This parent made me feel guilty if I enjoyed time with my other parent.	1 3 5 92 05 03	1 3 5 94 04 02	1 3 5 65 16 19	1 3 5 77 14 09
3. I feel like this parent tried to create conflict between me and my other parent.	1 3 5 92 05 03	1 3 5 94 04 02	1 3 5 71 14 15	1 3 5 71 16 13
5. This parent put down my other parent's values.	1 3 5 84 10 06	1 3 5 84 09 07	1 3 5 55 23 22	1 3 5 60 21 19
6. This parent asked me to choose between him/her and my other parent.	1 3 5 95 03 02	1 3 5 93 07 0	1 3 5 79 09 12	1 3 5 82 10 08
7. This parent told me that my other parent was mentally unstable.	1 3 5 94 02 04	1 3 5 93 05 02	1 3 5 75 08 17	1 3 5 72 13 15
8. This parent encouraged me to spend less time with my other parent.	1 3 5 95 02 03	1 3 5 97 02 01	1 3 5 80 08 12	1 3 5 86 06 08
9. This parent made comments to indicate that my relationship with my other parent was not important.	1 3 5 96 02 02	1 3 5 98 01 01	1 3 5 85 06 09	1 3 5 87 06 07
12. This parent used a tone of voice that made me think s/he had negative feelings about my other parent.	1 3 5 77 15 07	1 3 5 82 13 05	1 3 5 34 29 37	1 3 5 52 24 24
13. I feel like this parent tested me to make sure I was on his/her side.	1 3 5 91 06 03	1 3 5 94 04 02	1 3 5 66 18 16	1 3 5 76 13 11

15. When my parents were in the same room, this parent talked down to my other parent in front of me.	1 3 5 81 13 06	1 3 5 79 13 08	1 3 5 76 11 13	1 3 5 69 15 16
16. This parent quizzed me after I spent time alone with my other parent.	1 3 5 93 04 03	1 3 5 96 03 01	1 3 5 69 13 18	1 3 5 83 10 07
19. This parent talked to me about my other parent's flaws.	1 3 5 60 23 17	1 3 5 71 20 09	1 3 5 30 27 43	1 3 5 47 26 27
20. This parent told me that my other parent is a bad person.	1 3 5 93 03 04	1 3 5 95 02 03	1 3 5 67 13 20	1 3 5 80 07 13
22. This parent undermined my other parent's authority.	1 3 5 83 10 07	1 3 5 81 13 06	1 3 5 64 18 18	1 3 5 63 18 19

Note: Numbers presented are frequencies displayed as percentages. Responses were collapsed into three groups: "Never" and "Rarely" responses were collapsed into one group, "Sometimes" remained a group, and "Often" and "Always" responses were collapsed into one group. Since frequencies were quite low overall, it seemed more parsimonious to examine the frequencies in three categories instead of five, without compromising the integrity of the results.

1 = *never/rarely*, 3 = *sometimes*, 5 = *often/always*.

Married $N = 668$, Divorced $N = 326$. Child reporters from UVa, MTurk, and Twins samples.

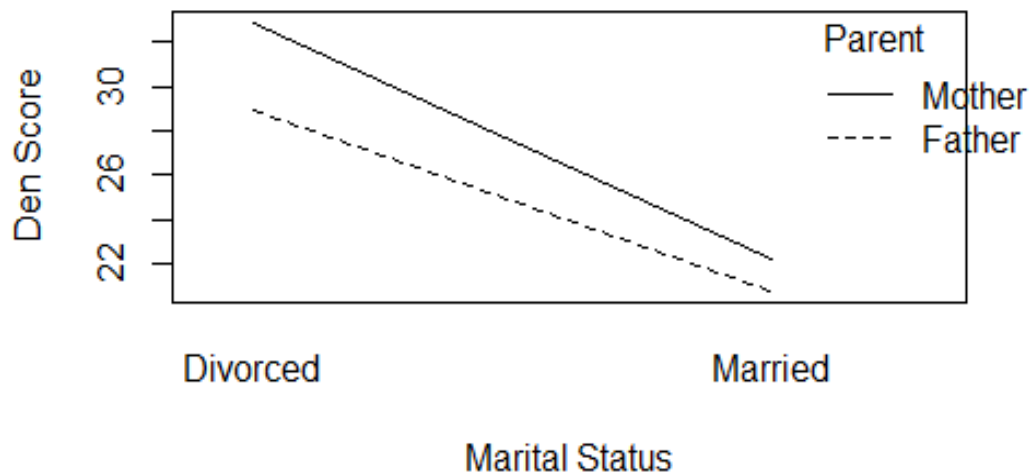
Total Denigration by Parent and Marital Status. In order to examine whether there were significant differences in denigration behaviors between mothers and fathers, paired t-tests were conducted to compare child reports of parental denigration behaviors in divorced and married families. In both married and divorced families, young adult children reported that, on average, mothers denigrated more frequently than fathers ($t(667) = 5.90, p < .001$, married; $t(325) = 5.25, p < .001$, divorced). Independent-sample t-tests were conducted to examine differences between mothers across marital status and fathers across marital status. Mothers and fathers in divorced families were reported to denigrate significantly more often than mothers and fathers in married families ($t(992) = 14.12, p < .001$, mothers; $t(992) = 11.82, p < .001$, fathers).

A linear mixed effects model with a random intercept for each individual family was fit to examine the effects of marital status and parent on denigration score. First, a model that included the main effect of parent and the main effect of marital status was fit and revealed a

significant main effect for marital status ($b = 8.93$, $CI\ 95 = 7.51$ to 10.34) and a significant main effect for parent ($b = -2.23$, $CI\ 95 = -2.82$ to -1.64). Next, a model that included both main effects and the interaction between the two main effect was fit and revealed a significant interaction between marital status and parent ($b = -2.45$, $CI\ 95 = -3.70$ to -1.20) (See Figure 1). An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to compare the two models, and the model that included the interaction fit significantly better ($\chi^2 = 14.82$, $p < .001$).

Figure 1.

Interaction between Parent and Marital Status for Predicting Denigration Score



Note. Married $N = 668$, Divorced $N = 326$. Child reporters from UVa, MTurk, and Twins samples.

Tests for demographic variables, such as participant ethnicity, gender, and mother and father education level showed no significant relationship with denigration scores, which is consistent with previous findings (Rowen & Emery, in press).

Association between Denigration and Relationship Quality. Correlational analyses were

conducted to examine the association between child reports of parental denigration behaviors and relationship quality variables. More frequent reported denigration was associated with poorer parent-child relationship quality across parents and marital status, such as decreased closeness, involvement, and less attachment (see Table 5). More frequent denigration was also associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms, less satisfaction with life, and more frequent interparental conflict (see Table 6 for correlations). Interestingly, while child reports indicated that parental denigration frequency is associated with poorer parent-child relationships with both parents overall, parent-child relationship quality is especially poor for the parent who is engaging in the denigration behaviors, not the parent who is being denigrated. For example, child-reported mother denigration scores were weakly, negatively correlated with attachment to fathers ($r = -.10, p > .05$), but were significantly, negative correlated with attachment to mothers ($r = -.49, p < .01$). See Tables 5 and 6 for a comprehensive list of correlations.

Table 5.

Comprehensive Correlations Table: Relationship Outcomes and Denigration Scores by Marital Status

	DenM ¹	IPPAM ²	InvM ³	NRIM ⁴	DenF ¹	IPPAF ²	NRIF ³	InvF ⁴
DenM ¹	1							
IPPAM ²	-.47*** -.49***	1						
InvM ³	-.39*** -.45***	.76*** .77***	1					
NRIM ⁴	-.37*** -.38***	.85*** .88***	.73*** .77***	1				
DenF ¹	.73*** .49***	-.34*** -.17*	-.32*** -.14*	-.26*** -.11	1			
IPPAF ²	-.30*** -.10	.64*** .07	.50*** .01	.55*** -.01	-.46*** -.42***	1		
NRIF ³	-.24*** -.01	.55*** .06	.46*** -.01	.63*** .03	-.35*** -.26***	.84*** .85***	1	
InvF ⁴	-.23*** -.03	.50*** .01	.56*** -.03	.44*** -.04	-.38*** -.23***	.76*** .75***	.74*** .76***	1

Note: The number on the first row is the correlation for participants from married families. The number on the second row is the correlation for participants from divorced families.

¹DenM and DenF are the total denigration scores for mothers and fathers

²IPPAM and IPPAF are the scores on the IPPA measure for both mothers and fathers.

³InvM and InvF are the Involvement subscales of the Parenting measure for mothers and fathers.

⁴NRIM and NRIF are the summed NRI (closeness) scores for mothers and fathers.

Married $N = 668$, Divorced $N = 326$. Child reporters from UVa, MTurk, and Twins samples.

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Table 6.

Correlations Table: Psychological-wellbeing Outcomes and Denigration Scores by Marital Status

Outcome	Mother Denigration	Father Denigration
CESD ¹	.29*** .26***	.30*** .31***
STAI ²	.09 .03	.08 .04
SWL ³	-.28*** -.27***	-.27*** -.31***
Conflict ⁴	.65*** .50***	.61*** .65***

Note: The number on the first row is the correlation for participants from married families. The number on the second row is the correlation for participants from divorced families.

¹CESD corresponds to CESD (depression) total score.

²STAI corresponds to STAI (anxiety) total score

³SWL corresponds to SWL (satisfaction with life) total score.

⁴Conflict corresponds to Conflict (child-reported interparental conflict) total score.

Married $N = 668$, Divorced $N = 326$. Child reporters from UVa, MTurk, and Twins samples.

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Association between Denigration and Painful Feelings about Divorce. In order to examine the relationship between parental denigration frequency and painful feelings about divorce (Laumann-Billings & Emery, 2000), correlational analyses were performed on children's mother and father total denigration scores and scores on the Painful Feelings about Divorce (PFAD) subscales. Mother denigration total scores were positively correlated with the Maternal Blame ($r(169) = .35, p < .001$), Loss and Abandonment ($r(169) = .28, p < .001$), and seeing life through the Filter of Divorce ($r(169) = .25, p < .001$) subscales. Father denigration total scores were positively correlated with the Paternal Blame ($r(169) = .37, p < .001$), Loss and Abandonment ($r(169) = .31, p < .001$), and seeing life through the Filter of Divorce ($r(169) = .28, p < .001$) subscales.

Additionally, child reported attachment with mothers was negatively correlated with the Maternal Blame ($r(169) = -.52, p < .001$) and the Loss and Abandonment ($r(169) = -.26, p < .01$) subscales, and child reported attachment with fathers was negatively correlated with the Paternal Blame ($r(169) = -.57, p < .001$) and the Loss and Abandonment ($r(169) = -.44, p < .001$) subscales. Interestingly, child reports of maternal denigration appear to be significantly associated with Maternal Blame, and reports of father denigration appear to be significantly associated with Paternal Blame, suggesting more blame is placed on the denigrator parent. See Table 7 for comprehensive correlations between parental denigration, attachment, and PFAD subscales.

Table 7.

Comprehensive Correlations between Pain Subscales, Denigration, and Attachment

	DenM ¹	DenF ¹	PBlame ²	Loss ³	Filter ⁴	MBlame ⁵	SBlame ⁶	Accept ⁷	IPPAM ⁸	IPPAF ⁸
DenM ¹	1									
DenF ¹		1								
PBlame ²	.11	.37***	1							
Loss ³	.28***	.31***	.52***	1						
Filter ⁴	.25***	.28***	.43***	.57***	1					
MBlame ⁵	.35***	.08	-.12	.19**	.31***	1				
SBlame ⁶	-.02	.11	.23**	.29***	.45***	.30***	1			
Accept ⁷	.07	.11	.09	-.06	-.09	.05	-.03	1		
IPPAM ⁸	-.49***	-.17*	.16*	-.26**	-.12	-.52***	-.12	.02	1	
IPPAF ⁸	-.10	-.42***	-.57***	-.44***	-.17*	.22**	-.12	-.05	.07	1

Note. Scores presented are for the 171 individuals from divorced families from the UVA sample who took the Painful Feelings About Divorce (PFAD) measure.

¹DenM and DenF are the total denigration scores for mothers and fathers

²PBlame are total scores on the Paternal Blame scale of the PFAD.

³Loss are total scores on the Loss and Abandonment scale of the PFAD.

⁴Filter are total scores on the Filter of Divorce scale of the PFAD.

⁵MBlame are total scores on the Maternal Blame scale of the PFAD

⁶SBlame are total scores on the Self Blame scale of the PFAD.

⁷Accept are total scores on the Divorce Acceptance Scale of the PFAD.

⁸IPPAM and IPPAF are the scores on the IPPA measure for both mothers and fathers.

p < .05*, p < .01**, p < .001***

Unilateral Denigration. In an effort to identify instances of unilateral denigration that would be consistent with the parental alienation hypothesis, an exploratory analysis was performed on individual families. Ten instances of unilateral denigration were identified out of the 994 child reports (1% of the sample), where one parent was reported to denigrate frequently (a total score above 60), while the other parent was reported to rarely denigrate (a total score below 30). Nine of the ten parents who were identified as unilateral “denigrators” were mothers. Of the ten families, five had divorced parents and five had married parents, and five were from the UVa sample, while the other half were from the MTurk sample. Eight of the ten children were White, female, and reported very high conflict scores, ranging from 50-65 (maximum conflict score is 65). Highest achieved parental education ranged from high school diploma to graduate degree.

In order to assess attachment, closeness, and involvement with parents, the IPPA, NRI, and Involvement scores for these 10 families were examined. For all of these measures, higher scores indicate closer, warmer, more involved parent-child relationships. In 9 of the 10 unilateral denigration cases, children reported feeling more securely attached to (IPPA score ranges: 84-108, denigrated parent; 34-77, denigrator parent) and closer with (NRI score ranges: 36-63, denigrated parent; 17-51, denigrator parent) the denigrated parent than the denigrator parent. This was also true for reported parental involvement; 9 out of 10 participants reported that the denigrated parent was more involved (scores ranged from 16-34) in their childhood than the denigrator parent (scores ranged from 9-30). In the remaining case of unilateral denigration, the

participant reported feeling securely attached to both parents (IPPA scores for denigrator and denigrated parent = 97, 98, respectively), closer with the denigrator parent (NRI scores for denigrator and denigrated parent = 69, 55, respectively), and that both parents were similarly involved (Involvement scores for denigrator and denigrated parent = 30, 25, respectively). Thus, none of the 994 participants in this sample reported feeling alienated from or rejecting of the denigrated parent, which is contrary to the hypothesis posited by parental alienation proponents. See Table 8 for a comprehensive list of scores.

Table 8.

Instances of one-sided Denigration

ID	MarStat	NRIM ¹	NRIF ¹	InvM ²	InvF ²	IPPAM ³	IPPAF ³	Conflict ⁴	DenM ⁵	DenF ⁵
6	2	18	36	7	20	44	84	64	74	22
78	1	39	48	21	33	77	94	61	70	32
2283	2	23	52	14	16	44	88	62	67	27
101	1	43	51	25	28	66	91	56	65	29
2168	1	24	49	13	32	32	96	59	64	19
292	2	69	55	30	25	97	98	40	63	28
201	1	33	63	23	34	55	96	64	63	39
2173	1	17	57	12	25	34	101	57	62	39
125	2	51	60	29	32	74	108	35	60	25
2107	2	59	17	32	9	87	34	65	31	60

Note: For Marstat, 1 = married, 2 = divorced.

¹NRIM and NRIF are the NRI total score (closeness) scores for mothers and fathers.

²InvM and InvF are the Involvement subscales of the Parenting measure for mothers and fathers.

³IPPAM and IPPAF are the IPPA total scores (attachment) for both mothers and fathers.

⁴Conflict is total conflict scores.

⁵DenM and DenF are the total denigration scores for mothers and fathers.

Total N = 994 child reporters. The N reported here are the 10 participants who reported unilateral denigration.

Predicting Relationship Quality. A linear mixed effects analysis of the relationship between attachment and denigration was performed using R (R Core Team, 2013) and *lme4* (Bates, Maechler & Bolker, 2012). Given the differences in denigration frequency by marital status and the previously documented negative effects of conflict on relationship quality, I sought

to construct a model that incorporated these factors. Denigration for mothers, denigration for fathers, gender, conflict, and marital status were entered as fixed effects into the model. As a random effect, to account for the nested nature of siblings from the same family, a function was added to the model which assigned a different intercept to each subject. Two separate models were constructed: one for attachment to mothers (Model 1) and one for attachment to fathers (Model 2).

For Model 1, mother denigration, ($b = -.67$, $CI\ 95 = -.86$ to $-.49$), father denigration ($b = .28$, $CI\ 95 = .07$ to $.48$), gender ($b = 4.50$, $CI\ 95 = 1.84$ to 7.15), and conflict ($b = -.31$, $CI\ 95 = -.46$ to $-.16$), were significant predictors of attachment. Interestingly, whereas denigration by mothers was a *negative* predictor of attachment to mothers, denigration by fathers was a *positive* predictor. This indicates that higher mother denigration frequency is associated with *less* attachment to mothers, and higher father denigration is associated with *more* attachment to mothers. In other words, denigration on the part of fathers leads children to feel closer to mothers – the denigrated parent. Additionally, marital status was not a significant predictor, suggesting that denigration and conflict are better indicators of attachment to mothers.

For Model 2, father denigration ($b = -.86$, $CI\ 95 = -1.10$ to $-.62$), marital status ($b = -6.97$, $CI\ 95 = -10.18$ to -3.76), and conflict ($b = -.24$, $CI\ 95 = -.42$ to $-.06$) were significant predictors of attachment to fathers. In contrast to Model 1, denigration on the part of mothers was not a significant predictor of father attachment, suggesting that mother denigration does not directly influence children's attachment to fathers. While gender was a significant predictor of mother attachment, it was not a significant predictor of father attachment. Additionally, marital status was a significant, negative predictor of father attachment but not mother attachment, so it appears that children feel less attached to divorced fathers. These models suggest that attachment

to fathers and mothers are influenced differently by gender, marital status, and denigration behavior on the part of the other parent.

Study 2: Relationship Between Sibling Reports of Parental Denigration.

Sibling Reports of Parental Denigration. Correlational analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between monozygotic twin, dizygotic twin, and UVa sibling reports of denigration. Overall, sibling reports of denigration had a strong, positive relationship across parents, $r(266) = .74, p < .001$, mothers; $r(266) = .73, p < .001$, fathers. Sibling reports of positive items (Factor 2) also had a strong, positive relationship across parents, $r(266) = .68, p < .001$, mothers; $r(266) = .64, p < .001$, fathers. See Table 9 for a comprehensive list of correlations. Denigration reports for monozygotic (MZ) twin pairs were more highly correlated than dizygotic (DZ) twin pairs and sibling pairs ($r(98) = .85, p < .001$, mothers; $r(98) = .81, p < .001$, fathers), but denigration reports for non-MZ sibling pairs still had strong associations ($r(166) = .64, p < .001$, mothers; $r(166) = .66, p < .001$, fathers). The high consistency in sibling reports provides good inter-rater reliability support for the PDS. See table 9 for a comprehensive table of siblings' correlation between scores on Factor 1 (positively worded items) and Factor 2 for mothers and fathers and the similarity of scores among siblings for both factors.

Table 9.

Correlations Between Siblings' report of Parental Denigration Across Factors

		Sibling 1				Sibling 2			
		Factor2M	Factor1M	Factor2F	Factor1F	Factor2M	Factor1M	Factor2F	Factor1F
Sibling 1	Factor2M	1							
	Factor1M	-.67	1						
	Factor2F	.85	-.49	1					
	Factor1F	-.47	.63	.63	1				
Sibling 2	Factor2M	.68	-.59	.58	-.44	1			
	Factor1M	-.53	.74	.45	.53	-.67	1		
	Factor2F	.58	-.44	.64	-.55	.86	-.49	1	
	Factor1F	-.37	.52	.46	.73	-.49	.70	.57	1

Note. Factor1 denotes total scores for positively worded items for mothers and fathers. Factor2 denotes total denigration scores for mothers and fathers.

$N = 266$ sibling pairs, including MZ twins, DZ twins, and UVa sibling pairs.

All p -values for correlations were $< .001$

Influence of Age. In order to assess whether older siblings reported more parental denigration than younger siblings, UVa sibling data ($N = 157$ pairs) were sorted by age and split into two groups: older siblings and younger siblings. A paired t -test revealed no significant difference in denigration reports between older and younger siblings ($t(156) = -1.68, p = .09$).

Sibling reports of attachment to parents ($r(155) = .32, p < .001$, mothers; $r(155) = .58, p < .001$, fathers), closeness with parents ($r(155) = .33, p < .001$, mothers; $r(155) = .55, p < .001$, fathers), and conflict ($r(155) = .67, p < .001$) were positively correlated across parents and marital status. Interestingly, sibling reports of depressive symptoms ($r(155) = .04, p = .63$) and anxiety symptoms ($r(155) = .14, p = .07$) were not significantly related, and satisfaction with life

was negatively correlated ($r(155) = -.29, p < .01$). See Table 10 for comprehensive correlations between older and younger sibling reports of outcomes.

Table 10.

Comprehensive Correlations Table for Sibling Reports of Parent-Child Relationship Quality and Psychological Well-being

		Older Sibling								
		DenM ¹	IPPAM ²	NRIM ³	CESD ⁴	DenF ¹	IPPAF ²	NRIF ³	Conflict ⁵	SWL ⁶
Younger Sibling	DenM ¹	.63***	.33***	.31***	.28***	.49***	.33***	.31***	.51***	.36***
	IPPAM ²	-.24**	.32***	.33***	-.12	-.20*	.14	.17*	-.25**	.24**
	NRIM ³	-.20*	.32***	.33***	-.08	-.18*	.09	.09	-.22**	.20**
	CESD ⁴	.07	-.03	-.14	.04	.22**	-.05	-.10	.09	-.15
	DenF ¹	.29***	-.09	-.12	.20*	.65***	.39***	.27***	.45***	-.26**
	IPPAF ²	-.12	.23**	.21**	-.25**	-.36***	.58***	.49***	.38***	.27***
	NRIF ³	-.11	.21**	.21**	-.21**	-.36***	.60***	.55***	.37***	.24**
	Conflict ⁵	.45***	.32***	.28***	.22**	.55***	.45***	.40***	.67***	-.36**
	SWL ⁶	-.22**	.22**	.25**	-.15	-.24**	.20*	.18*	-.21*	-.29**

Note: Data presented are for the 157 non-twin sibling pairs from the UVa sample.

¹DenM and DenF are the total denigration scores on the Denigration scale for mothers and fathers.

²IPPAM and IPPAF are the total attachment for both mothers and fathers.

³NRIM and NRIF are the closeness scores for mothers and fathers

⁴CESD is total depression scores

⁵Conflict is total conflict scores,

⁶SWL is total satisfaction with life scores.

There were no significant associations between siblings for anxiety symptoms, so the STAI total score is not included here.

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Additionally, sibling reports of painful feelings about divorce were significantly,

positively associated for the Paternal Blame ($r(45) = .62, p < .001$), the Loss and Abandonment ($r(45) = .62, p < .001$), the Maternal Blame ($r(45) = .40, p < .01$), and the Divorce Acceptance ($r(45) = .32, p < .01$) subscales. See Table 11 for correlations between sibling reports on all PFAD subscales.

Table 11.

Correlations between Sibling Reports of Painful Feelings about Divorce

		Sibling 1					
		PBlame ¹	Loss ²	Filter ³	MBlame ⁴	SBlame ⁵	Accept ⁶
Sibling 2	PBlame ¹	.62***	.32*	.26	-.27	.08	-.08
	Loss ²	.44**	.62***	.17	.09	.16	-.27
	Filter ³	.15	.29*	.29	.01	.18	-.41**
	MBlame ⁴	-.57***	-.17	-.24	.40**	.20	-.26
	SBlame ⁵	.19	.17	.06	.01	.07	-.05
	Accept ⁶	-.20	-.32*	-.31*	-.16	-.19	.32*

Note: Data presented are for the 157 non-twin sibling pairs from the UVa sample.

¹PBlame are total scores on the Paternal Blame scale of the PFAD.

²Loss are total scores on the Loss and Abandonment scale of the PFAD

³Filter are total e scores on the Filter of Divorce scale of the PFAD

⁴MBlame are total scores on the Maternal Blame scale of the PFAD.

⁵SBlame are total scores on the Self Blame scale of the PFAD.

⁶Accept are total scores on the Divorce Acceptance Scale of the PFAD.

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Discrepant Reports. In order to examine whether more discrepant reports of parental denigration between siblings were associated with more discrepant reports of parent-child relationship quality and internalizing symptoms, difference scores for UVa siblings were calculated. In order to calculate difference scores, younger siblings' scores on all measures (e.g., PDS, CESD, STAI, NRI, IPPA, Involvement, SWL) were subtracted from older siblings' scores. The difference score for mothers and father denigration were then correlated with difference scores for the outcomes listed above.

Denigration difference scores were negatively correlated with attachment difference scores ($r(155) = -.31, p < .001$, Mother; $r(155) = -.35, p < .001$, Father) and closeness difference scores ($r(155) = -.23, p < .01$, Mother; $r(155) = -.26, p < .01$, Father). Denigration difference scores were also positively correlated with conflict difference scores ($r(155) = .46, p < .001$) across parents. Interestingly, denigration difference scores for *mothers* only were significantly, positively correlated with anxiety difference scores ($r(155) = .19, p = .02$), and denigration difference scores for *fathers* only were significantly, negatively correlated with satisfaction with life difference scores ($r(155) = -.18, p = .02$). See table 12 for a comprehensive correlation table of difference scores.

Table 12.

Correlations Between Siblings' Difference Scores

		Difference Scores										
		DenM ¹	DenF ¹	IPPAM ²	IPPAF ²	NRIM ³	NRIF ³	CESD ⁴	STAI ⁵	SWL ⁶	Conflict ⁷	
Difference Scores	DenM ¹	1										
	DenF ¹	.57***	1									
	IPPAM ²	-.31***	-.10	1								
	IPPAF ²	-.27***	-.37***	.54***	1							
	NRIM ³	-.23*	.02	.79***	.40***	1						
	NRIF ³	-.20*	-.26***	.33***	.70***	.44***	1					
	CESD ⁴	-.12	.12	-.17*	-.24**	-.04	-.10	1				
	STAI ⁵	.19**	.05	-.01	-.04	.02	.10	.16*	1			
	SWL ⁶	-.05	-.18*			.23**	.32***	.46***	.10	1		
	Conflict ⁷	.46***	.46***	.28***	.32***	.23**	.32***	.46***	.10	.15	1	
												1

Note: Data presented are for the 157 non-twin sibling pairs from the UVa sample.

¹DenM and DenF are the denigration difference scores for older and younger siblings.

²IPPAM and IPPAF are the IPPA difference scores for older and younger siblings.

³NRIM and NRIF are the NRI difference scores for older and younger siblings.

⁴CESD is the CESD difference score for older and younger siblings.

⁵STAI is the STAI difference score for older and younger siblings.

⁶SWL is the satisfaction with life difference score for older and younger siblings.

⁷Conflict is the conflict difference score for older and younger siblings.

p < .05*, p < .01**, p < .001***

Unilateral Denigration. In the ten cases of unilateral denigration (reported above), sibling data were available for three families. Sibling denigration scores in these cases were not highly similar. In all three cases, older siblings reported unilateral denigration, whereas younger siblings' reports did not meet criteria for unilateral denigration. Older sibling scores for denigrator parents ranged from 60-70, and scores for denigrated parents ranged from 25-32. In contrast, younger sibling scores for denigrator parents ranged from 36-55, and scores for denigrated parents ranged from 24-27. It appears that younger siblings reported that denigrator

parents engaged in denigration behaviors more often than denigrated parents, just not as frequently as older siblings reported. Furthermore, older siblings reported lower satisfaction with life, more depressive symptoms, less attachment and closeness to the denigrator parent, and less involvement on the part of the denigrator parent than younger siblings. Thus, the sibling who reported experiencing more frequent parental denigration also reported poorer parent-child relationships and poorer psychological well-being, which is consistent with the current pattern of results. See Table 13 for score comparisons.

Table 13.

ID	NriM ¹	NRIF ¹	InvM ²	InvF ²	IPPAM ³	IPPAF ³	Conflict ⁴	DenM ⁵	DenF ⁵	CESD ⁶	STAI ⁷	SLS ⁸
78	39	48	21	33	77	94	61	70	32	56	51	17
78	59	46	29	20	84	94	59	55	27	35	49	23
101	43	51	25	28	66	91	56	65	29	60	44	16
101	57	61	33	22	95	89	51	36	25	22	43	21
125	51	60	29	32	74	108	35	60	25	28	53	23
125	64	68	34	26	102	105	41	43	24	24	51	33

Instances of one-sided Denigration: Comparison of Sibling Scores

Note: ID is the participants ID number.

¹NRIM and NRIF are closeness scores for mothers and fathers.

²InvM and InvF are the Involvement subscales of the Parenting measure for mothers and fathers.

³IPPAM and IPPAF are the scores on the IPPA measure for both mothers and fathers.

⁴Conflict is total interparental conflict score.

⁵DenM and DenF are the total denigration scores for mothers and fathers.

⁶CESD is total depression scores.

⁷SWL is total satisfaction with life scores.

⁸STAI is total anxiety scores.

Total *N* = 994 child reporters. The *N* reported here are the 3 participants who reported unilateral denigration and their siblings.

Using Sibling Reports of denigration to predict Relationship Quality. In order to utilize a multi-informant approach and avoid inflating correlations by relying on a single informant,

participant reports of relationship quality and psychological well-being were correlated with sibling reports of denigration. First, older siblings' reports of denigration for mothers and fathers were correlated with younger siblings' reports of parent-child relationship quality with each parent. Older siblings' denigration scores were negatively correlated with younger siblings' reports of closeness with mothers ($r(155) = -.20, p = .01$), closeness with fathers ($r(155) = -.36, p < .001$), attachment to mothers ($r(155) = -.24, p < .01$), and attachment to fathers ($r(155) = -.36, p < .001$). Additionally, older siblings' denigration scores for mothers and fathers were negatively correlated with younger siblings' reports of satisfaction with life ($r(155) = -.23, p < .01$), and older siblings' denigration scores for fathers were significantly, positively correlated with younger siblings' reports of depressive symptoms ($r(155) = .22, p < .01$).

Next, younger siblings' reports of denigration for mothers and fathers were correlated with older siblings' reports of parent-child relationship quality. Younger siblings' denigration scores were significantly, negatively correlated with older siblings' reports of closeness with mothers ($r(155) = -.31, p < .001$), closeness with fathers ($r(155) = -.27, p < .001$), attachment to mothers ($r(155) = -.33, p < .001$), and attachment to fathers ($r(155) = -.39, p < .001$). Additionally, younger siblings' denigration scores for mothers and fathers were negatively correlated with older siblings' reports of satisfaction with life ($r(155) = -.36, p < .001$, Mothers; $r(155) = -.25, p = .001$, Fathers) and were positively correlated with older siblings' reports of depressive symptoms ($r(155) = .27, p < .01$, Mothers; $r(155) = .20, p = .01$, Fathers). The significant correlations between one sibling's report of denigration and the other sibling's reports of outcomes provides support for the validity of the relationships between variables, since data are from multiple informants. Further, they provide support for the consistent pattern of results that children feel closer with the denigrated parent.

Study 3: Reports of Denigration and Acrimony across Three Samples of Parent Reporters.

Self and Co-parent Denigration Scores across Samples. Parents rated the frequency with which they denigrated their co-parent (self denigration) and the frequency with which their co-parent denigrated them (co-parent denigration) in front of their children. On average, parents across all samples reported infrequent to mild frequency denigration behaviors, which is consistent with child reports of overall denigration.

In the MCC population, the average reported frequency of self denigration fell within the lowest quartile ($M=19.58$, $SD=4.576$). In contrast, the average reported frequency of co-parent denigration behavior fell within the second quartile ($M=30.28$, $SD=14.067$). An independent-samples t-test revealed that reports of co-parent denigration frequency were significantly greater than reports of self denigration frequency ($t(110) = 8.34$, $p < .001$). This is consistent with the hypothesis that parents would underreport their denigration behaviors and present the other parent's behavior more unfavorably, especially in divorced families.

Divorced UVa parents reported similarly discrepant accounts of self ($M = 27.48$, $SD = 7.980$) and co-parent ($M = 30.66$, $SD = 7.980$) denigration frequencies. Consistent with the MCC sample, reports of co-parent denigration frequency in the UVa divorced sample were significantly greater than reports of self denigration frequency ($t(59) = 5.78$, $p < .001$). In contrast, reported self denigration ($M = 20.58$, $SD = 4.397$) and co-parent denigration frequency ($M = 21.11$, $SD = 8.242$) for married UVa parents did not significantly differ ($t(199) = 0.36$, $p = 0.72$) (see Table 14). This appears consistent with child reports, where denigration reports for married parents were very low in frequency and highly consistent for mothers and fathers.

Table 14.

Comparisons of Denigration Within and Between Parent Samples

Sample	Self Den Score	CoP Den Score	t-value	p-value
<i>Married UVa</i>				
Mothers	20.59	20.54	-.05	>.05
Fathers	20.36	20.01	.09	>.05
<i>Divorced UVa</i>				
Mothers	24.50	29.02	-3.89	<.001
Fathers	24.90	33.34	-4.88	<.001
<i>MCC</i>				
Mothers	19.70	29.60	-6.13	<.001
Fathers	19.42	31.17	-5.68	<.001

Note: Self den score is parents' reports of the frequency with which they engage in denigration behaviors. CoP den score is parents' reports of the frequency with which their co-parent engages in denigration behaviors.

Married $N = 130$, Divorced $N = 171$. Divorced UVa parents, Married UVa parents, and MCC Parents.

Reported co-parent denigration frequency in both the MCC and divorced UVa samples was significantly greater than reported co-parent denigration frequency in the married UVa sample ($t(265) = 8.55, p < .001$; $t = 10.19, p < .001$). This is consistent with child reports that denigration occurs more frequently in divorced families, overall. Additionally, divorced UVa parents reported significantly greater self denigration frequency than married UVa parents ($t(265) = 5.02, p \leq 0.001$), though this difference was not significant between married UVa parents and MCC parents ($t(308) = 1.54, p = 0.12$) (Table 15). In other words, MCC parents, who are in the middle of litigation, report that they engage in denigration behaviors as often as married parents, while UVa divorced parents report that they denigrate their co-parent more often than their married counterparts. This suggests that MCC parents are, perhaps, motivated to present themselves in a positive light and place the "blame" on their co-parent.

Table 15.

Comparisons Between Self and Co-parent Reported Denigration Scores

Sample	Self Den Score	Sample	CoP Den Score	t-value	p-value
Married Mothers	20.59	Married Fathers	20.01	-1.36	>.05
Married Fathers	20.36	Married Mothers	20.54	.86	>.05
Divorced Mothers	24.50	Divorced Fathers	33.30	-4.19	<.001
Divorced Fathers	24.90	Divorced Mothers	29.02	-4.65	<.001

Note: Self den score is parents' reports of the frequency with which they engage in Denigration behaviors. CoP den score is parents' reports of the frequency with which their co-parent engages in denigration behaviors.

Married $N = 130$, Divorced $N = 171$. Divorced UVa parents, Married UVa parents, and MCC Parents.

Acrimony. The highest possible score on the Acrimony Scale is 100, with higher scores indicating more interparental hostility and conflict. The mean Acrimony score for MCC parents ($M = 50.01$) and divorced UVa parents ($M = 47.75$) did not significantly differ ($t(110) = 1.11, p = 0.27$), and married UVa parents did not complete this scale. Acrimony scores for MCC parents had a strong, positive relationship with reported co-parent denigration behavior ($r(110) = 0.71, p < .001$), while acrimony scores for the divorced UVa parents had a weak, positive relationship with reports of co-parent denigration frequency ($r(59) = 0.19, p = .12$). Interestingly, it appears that reported co-parent denigration is only associated with hostile feelings in currently litigating parents, which is likely a product of their current engagement in the adversarial process of litigation.

Co-parent Reports. Data were collected from 105 pairs of co-parents across samples ($N = 63$ married, $N = 42$ Divorced). Given the lack of variance in married families, computing correlation coefficients for reports of self and co-parent denigration was uninformative.

In divorced couples, reports of self denigration by one parent and self denigration by the other parent had a weak, positive relationship ($r(40) = .26, p = .10$). Reports of co-parent denigration by one parent and co-parent denigration by the other parent had a positive relationship ($r(40) = .33, p = .001$). In order to examine the consistency between co-parents' reports of denigration, self denigration reports for one parent were correlated with co-parent denigration reports by the other parent. Reports of self denigration by mothers and co-parent denigration by fathers had positive relationship ($r(40) = .35, p = .03$), as did reports of self denigration by fathers and co-parent denigration by mothers ($r(40) = .33, p = .03$). Overall, it appeared that while divorced parents as a whole presented their behavior as more desirable than their co-parent's, parents within families reported a relatively similar level of denigration.

Study 4: Association between Parent and Child Reports of Parental Denigration and Psychological Outcomes.

Parent and Child Denigration Reports. In divorced families, mother reports of self denigration were significantly lower than child reports of mother denigration ($t(51) = -4.68, p < .001$), and father reports of self denigration were significantly lower than child reports of father denigration ($t(24) = -3.37, p < .01$). In contrast, parent and child reports of denigration in married families did not significantly differ for mothers ($t(111) = 1.78, p = .08$) or fathers ($t(74) = .45, p = .66$). This is consistent with the hypothesis that parents, especially in divorced families, would underreport the frequency with which they denigrated their co-parent, compared to child reports. Correlational analyses revealed that the associations between parent and child reports of denigration behaviors were not significant in divorced families ($r(50) = .20, p = .15$, mothers; $r(24) = .23, p = .15$, fathers), but were significant in married families ($r(110) = .19, p = .04$, mothers; $r(73) = .34, p < .01$).

Reports from fathers and children about the frequency with which mothers denigrated did not significantly differ in divorced families ($t(24) = -1.40, p = .17$) or married families ($t(74) = .73, p = .47$). In contrast, reports from mothers and children about the frequency with which fathers denigrated significantly differed in married families ($t(111) = -3.94, p < .001$), but not divorced families ($t(51) = .98, p = .33$). Correlational analyses revealed that the association between reports from children and fathers about mother denigration was significant in both married ($r(73) = .59, p < .001$) and divorced families ($r(23) = .53, p < .01$), but the association between reports from mothers and children about father denigration was not significant for either married ($r(110) = .17, p = .08$) or divorced families ($r(50) = .05, p = .73$). Thus, there appears to be a high level of agreement between children and parents about the other parent's denigration behaviors. Again, this provides support for the inter-rater reliability of the PDS. See Tables 16 & 17 for comprehensive correlations.

Table 16.

Correlations Between Parent and Child Denigration Scores: Divorced Families

	Child Report of Mom Den	Child Report of Dad Den
Mom Report of Self Den	.20	.04
Mom Report of CoP Den	.15	.05
Dad Report of Self Den	.34**	.23
Dad Report of CoP Den	.53***	.02

$N = 190$ UVa parent-child (Married $N = 130$, Divorced $N = 77$)

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Table 17.

Correlations Between Parent and Child Denigration Scores: Married Families

	Child Report of Mom Den	Child Report of Dad Den
Mom Report of Self Den	.19	.18
Mom Report of CoP Den	.11	.17
Dad Report of Self Den	.32**	.34**
Dad Report of CoP Den	.59***	.53***

$N = 190$ UVa parent-child (Married $N = 130$, Divorced $N = 77$)

$p < .05^*$, $p < .01^{**}$, $p < .001^{***}$

Association between Parent and Child Reports of Relationship Quality. In married families, child reports of attachment with mothers and mother reports of children's attachment to them had a weak, positive association ($r(110) = .17, p = .67$). Child reports of attachment with fathers and father reports of children's attachment to them had a positive association ($r(73) = .48, p < .001$). In contrast, these associations in divorced families were weak and negative ($r(50) = -.08, p = .15$, mothers; $r(23) = -.33, p = .11$, fathers).

Child reports of closeness with parents and parental reports of closeness with children had a positive association for mothers ($r(110) = .28, p < .01$) and fathers ($r(73) = .51, p < .001$) in married families. In contrast, while child and father reports of closeness in divorced families resembled those in married families ($r(23) = .32, p = .12$), child and mother reports of closeness in divorced families had a weak, negative association ($r(50) = -.10, p = .49$). Child reports of closeness with mothers were significantly, positively associated with father reports of children's closeness with mothers ($r(73) = .59, p < .001$, married; $r(23) = .60, p < .001$, divorced) and attachment with mothers ($r(73) = .39, p < .001$, married; $r(23) = .72, p < .001$, divorced), across marital status. In contrast, the relationships between child reports of closeness with fathers and mother reports of children's attachment and closeness with fathers were not significant.

In general, parental report of co-parents' denigration behaviors were negatively correlated with parental reports of co-parents' relationship quality with children. This was true in divorced families for both attachment ($r(50) = -.65, p < .001$, mothers; $r(23) = -.82, p < .001$, fathers) and closeness ($r(50) = -.48, p < .001$, mothers; $r(23) = -.56, p < .01$, fathers). In contrast, this was true for mothers in married families ($r(110) = -.56, p < .001$, attachment; $r(110) = -.22, p < .02$, closeness), but these associations were not significant for fathers in married families ($r(73) = -.15, p = .21$, attachment; $r(73) = .10, p = .40$, closeness).

Associations between Parent and Child Reports of Psychological Well-being and Conflict. Associations between child reports of satisfaction with life and parental reports of children's satisfaction with life were significant and positive in divorced families ($r(50) = .35, p = .02$, mothers; $r(23) = .54, p = .03$, fathers), but were not significant in married families ($r(110) = .14, p = .13$, mothers; $r(73) = .18, p = .13$, fathers). In divorced families, associations between child reports of depressive symptoms and parental reports of children's depressive symptoms were significant and positive for mothers ($r(50) = .35, p = .01$) and fathers ($r(23) = .54, p < .01$). Similarly, associations between child reports of depressive symptoms and parental reports of children's depressive symptoms were significant and positive in married families for mothers ($r(110) = .29, p < .01$) and fathers ($r(73) = .34, p < .01$). Associations between child reports of anxiety symptoms and parental reports of child anxiety symptoms were not significant for mothers or fathers in either married or divorced families.

Child reports of interparental conflict and parental reports of conflict behaviors were significantly, positively associated in married families ($r(110) = .37, p < .001$, mothers; $r(73) = .47, p < .001$). In divorced families, conflict reports were significantly associated between children and fathers ($r(23) = .59, p < .01$), but they were not significantly associated for children

and mothers ($r(50) = .14, p = .31$). See Tables 18-21 for comprehensive correlations.

Table 18.

Correlations Between Parent & Child Scores for Relationship Quality and Psychological Health Outcomes : Married Moms

		Child Reports							
		IPPAM ¹	NRIM ²	IPPAF ¹	NRIF ²	CESD ³	STAI ⁴	Conflict ⁵	SWL ⁶
Mother Reports	IPPAM ¹	.17	.28**	.08	.16	.16	.19*	-.19	-.08
	NRIM ²	.08	.28**	.11	.21**	.18	.18	.04	.01
	IPPAF ¹	.12	.12	.06	.06	-.09	.04	-.12	.05
	NRIF ²	.09	.14	.10	.17	-.14	.14	-.03	.20*
	CESD ³	-.02	.01	.01	.06	.29**	.03	.21*	-.19*
	STAI ⁴	.05	.05	.03	.03	.05	.07	-.06	.01
	Conflict ⁵	-.07	-.02	.01	.05	.13	.05	.37***	-.06
	SWL ⁶	-.01	-.01	-.06	-.04	-.25**	-.02	-.18	.14

Note: Data presented are for the 113 of mother-child dyads from married families

¹IPPAM and IPPAF are the scores on the IPPA measure (attachment) for both mothers and fathers.

²NRIM and NRIF are the closeness scores for mothers and fathers

³CESD is total depression score

⁴STAI is total anxiety score

⁵Conflict is total conflict score

⁶SWL is total satisfaction with life score.

p < .05*, p < .01**, p < .001***

Table 19.

Correlations Between Parent & Child Scores for Relationship Quality and Psychological Health Outcomes: Married Dads

		Child Reports							
		IPPAM ¹	NRIM ²	IPPAF ¹	NRIF ²	CESD ³	STAI ⁴	Conflict ⁵	SWL ⁶
Father Reports	IPPAM ¹	.48***	.43***	.33**	.30**	-.10	.11	-.04	.30**
	NRIM ²	.51***	.51***	.44***	.45***	-.07	.09	-.08	.25*
	IPPAF ¹	.21	.19	.36***	.39***	-.07	.09	-.13	.23*
	NRIF ²	.24*	.25*	.42***	.59***	.01	.17	.01	.19
	CESD ³	-.08	-.04	-.04	-.04	.34**	-.03	-.01	.36**
	STAI ⁴	.05	.08	-.01	.09	.03	.11	.03	.10
	Conflict ⁵	-.08	.02	-.01	.04	-.02	-.03	.47***	-.03
	SWL ⁶	.31*	.13	.08	.02	.10	-.01	-.25*	.18

Note: Data presented are for the 75 of father-child dyads from married families

¹IPPAM and IPPAF are the scores on the IPPA measure (attachment) for both mothers and fathers.

²NRIM and NRIF are the closeness scores for mothers and fathers

³CESD is total depression score

⁴STAI is total anxiety score

⁵Conflict is total conflict score

⁶SWL is total satisfaction with life score.

p < .05*, p < .01**, p < .001***

Table 20.

Correlations Between Parent & Child Scores for Relationship Quality and Psychological Health Outcomes: Divorced Moms

		Child Reports							
		IPPAM ¹	NRIM ²	IPPAF ¹	NRIF ²	CESD ³	STAI ⁴	Conflict ⁵	SWL ⁶
Mother Reports	IPPAM ¹	-.20	.28*	.13	.09	-.09	-.20	-.15	.08
	NRIM ²	-.08	-.10	-.02	-.10	-.12	-.10	-.13	.17
	IPPAF ¹	-.02	-.14	.20	.15	-.13	-.15	-.27*	.12
	NRIF ²	-.09	-.13	.18	.11	-.04	-.02	-.24	.11
	CESD ³	.19	.18	-.10	-.07	.35**	.14	-.08	-.21
	STAI ⁴	-.04	-.06	-.08	-.14	.10	.01	-.08	.07
	Conflict ⁵	-.12	-.01	.01	.01	.05	.14	.14	-.07
	SWL ⁶	.04	-.10	.16	.07	-.14	-.32*	-.22	.32*

Note: Data presented are for the 52 of mother-child dyads from divorced families

¹IPPAM and IPPAF are the scores on the IPPA measure (attachment) for both mothers and fathers.

²NRIM and NRIF are the closeness scores for mothers and fathers

³CESD is total depression score

⁴STAI is total anxiety score

⁵Conflict is total conflict score

⁶SWL is total satisfaction with life score.

p < .05*, p < .01**, p < .001***

Table 21.

Correlations between Parent & Child Scores for Relationship Quality and Psychological Health Outcomes: Divorced Dads

		Child Reports							
		IPPAM ¹	NRIM ²	IPPAF ¹	NRIF ²	CESD ³	STAI ⁴	Conflict ⁵	SWL ⁶
Father Reports	IPPAM ¹	-.33	-.14	.19	.12	-.29	.15	-.01	-.01
	NRIM ²	.07	.32	-.19	-.16	-.05	.07	.13	-.19
	IPPAF ¹	-.32	-.21	.72***	.72***	-.39*	.15	-.47**	.48**
	NRIF ²	-.27	-.23	.46*	.60***	-.29	-.11	-.21	.52**
	CESD ³	.42*	.49**	-.42*	-.44*	.54**	-.05	.18	-.28
	STAI ⁴	.24	.25	-.12	-.02	.02	.14	-.01	.11
	Conflict ⁵	-.02	-.03	-.26	-.12	.42*	.25	.59**	-.45*
	SWL ⁶	-.32	-.29	.35	.40*	-.44*	-.01	-.20	.43*

Note: Data presented are for the 25 of father-child dyads from divorced families

¹IPPAM and IPPAF are the scores on the IPPA measure (attachment) for both mothers and fathers.

²NRIM and NRIF are the closeness scores for mothers and fathers

³CESD is total depression score

⁴STAI is total anxiety score

⁵Conflict is total conflict score

⁶SWL is total satisfaction with life score.

p < .05*, p < .01**, p < .001***

In sum, these results provide empirical support for five important implications that are consistent with the original hypotheses of this study. First, parental denigration occurs across marital status. Though denigration frequency is higher in divorced families overall, it occurs with substantial frequency in some married families. Second, parental denigration can be measured

reliably. Between the current factor analysis and the previous factor analysis, it is clear that there is a single factor that accounts for denigration behaviors, with good internal consistency. Additionally, the PDS demonstrated good test-retest reliability, indicating that denigration reports were consistent over time. Third, there is agreement between reporters within the same family about measurement. Sibling reports were highly consistent, and parent-child reports about the other parent were consistent, as well. Additionally, there was agreement between co-parents about denigration frequency, which was especially true in married families. Fourth, parental denigration is associated with poorer parent child relationships and poorer child adjustment, such as more symptoms of depression, less satisfaction with life, and more psychological pain. This finding was consistent across samples, marital status, and parent, child, and sibling reports. Fifth, in the few instances of unilateral denigration, children feel less close with the denigrator parent, not the denigrated parent. In the entire sample of 994 child reporters, there was not a single instance of a child reporting alienation from the denigrated parent.

Chapter 4: Discussion

Very little empirical research has focused on extreme parental behaviors where parents continuously demean each other in front of their children and attempt to interfere with the child's relationship with the other parent. The current study sought to explore extreme parental behaviors and investigate the ways in which they are associated with parent-child relationship quality and young adults' psychological well-being. This was the first study to explore the construct of parental denigration using multiple informants and a large sample of university students and community-based participants. This is also one of only a handful of studies to empirically examine the underlying assumptions of parental alienation. Namely, this study

investigated whether denigration is reciprocal and distances children from both parents, as is typical of parental conflict or whether denigration is one-sided and distances children from the parent who is denigrated, which is consistent with parental alienation

In general, denigration was found to be reciprocal and associated with children feeling less close to the parent who was doing the denigrating rather than the parent being denigrated. Sibling reports of parental denigration were consistent across all sibling pairs, and reports did not significantly differ by age. Divorced parents reported that their co-parent denigrated significantly more frequently than they did, and co-parent denigration was correlated with interparental acrimony in separating/litigating parents. Parents in divorced families under-reported their own denigration behaviors compared to child reports, but child and parent reports of co-parent denigration behavior were moderately correlated. Consistency in denigration reports among family members, the good internal consistency of the PDS, and the high test-retest reliability of the PDS provided strong evidence that the PDS is a psychometrically reliable and valid measure, which should be available as a new tool for assessing parental denigration behaviors. Finally, data supported the hypothesis that parental denigration is a form of conflict that distances children from both parents. There was no evidence to support claims associated with parental alienation, where children feel closer with denigrator parent, in general or in instances of unilateral denigration.

Study 1: Prevalence and Characteristics of Parental Denigration in Three Samples of Child Reporters.

The first aim of this study was to examine the prevalence and characteristics of parental denigration in a sample of university students and community participants and assess the psychometric properties of the Parental denigration Scale. The Parental denigration Scale (PDS)

demonstrated good internal consistency (alpha coefficient ranged from .88 to .95) and fit best as a two-factor solution, which separated negative items and positive items. Since the behaviors targeted for investigation in this study were fully encompassed within Factor 1 (negative items), Factor 1 was used primarily in analyses. Focusing on Factor 1 was consistent with the finding from our previous study that denigration items were best accounted for by a single factor (Rowen & Emery, in press). Thus, while a two-factor solution fit best for *all* items on the PDS, denigration behaviors (accounted for by only the negatively worded items) were consistently accounted for by a single factor across studies. It is important to note that the current sample was larger and more representative, which allowed for more fine-grained analyses and more generalizable results. The PDS also demonstrated good test-retest reliability (r ranged from .80 to .89) over a one month interval and good inter-rater reliability, given the high consistency of denigration reports across individuals in the same family. Taken together, these results suggest that the PDS is a psychometrically reliable measure of parental denigration behaviors and should be added to the literature base for the assessment of parental denigration behaviors.

Parental denigration was reported by adult children across married, divorced, and never married families, with greater frequency in divorced and never married families. In married families, denigration occurred rarely, and children reported that both parents mutually refrained from denigrating each other. The correlation between children's reports of mother and father PDS scores in married families was .73, reflecting the high level of reported similarity in married parents' behaviors. In divorced and never married families, denigration behaviors were more commonly reported (see Table 4). While parents living apart also engaged in reciprocal denigration, reports were less strongly correlated for mothers and fathers ($r = .49$), indicating less similarity in denigration behaviors between divorced parents than married parents. Mothers were

reported to denigrate significantly more frequently than fathers across marital status. This finding, which was especially strong in divorced families, may be due to the fact that children generally spend more time in their mother's care. Alternatively, it may be that mothers are more likely than fathers to engage in conversations about the other parent or about the family as a whole with children. Overall, these findings were consistent with previous work (Rowen & Emery, in press) and suggest that denigration behaviors occur across marital status and are important to assess in work with families, especially in the case of divorce.

Children who reported experiencing more frequent parental denigration also reported feeling less close to *both* parents, which is consistent with the conflict hypothesis. More specifically, reports of denigration were correlated with reports of feeling less mutual trust, poorer communication quality, and increased feelings of isolation from both parents. While denigration behaviors distance children from both parents, children felt especially distanced from the denigrator parent. This directly contradicts the main hypothesis of parental alienation, which states that children feel aligned with the denigrator parent and will reject the denigrated parent.

Children who reported more frequent parental denigration also reported higher levels of depressive symptoms, less satisfaction with life, and more frequent parental conflict. Further, children from divorced families reported experiencing more painful feelings about divorce, namely, feelings of loss and abandonment, either maternal or paternal blame, and an increased propensity to see life through the filter of divorce. Consistent with the original hypotheses of this study, individuals who experienced more frequent parental denigration also experienced poorer parent-child relationship quality and poorer psychological well-being in young adulthood. These findings, which are consistent with our previous work, demonstrate the potential harm of denigration behaviors on the individual and the family system.

In addition, the significant positive associations between denigration frequency and interparental conflict (r ranged from .50 to .65) and denigration frequency and psychological pain (r ranged from .25 to .37) provide good convergent validity for the PDS.

Since the proposed outcomes of parental alienation are hypothesized by some child custody evaluators to occur only in a subset of intensely denigrating families (Baker, 2007; Bow, 2009), unilateral denigration was explored in individual families. Ten cases (1% of the total child sample) were identified, in which one parent was reported to denigrate frequently (a total score above 60), while the other parent was reported to rarely denigrate (a total score below 30). In five of the ten cases, parents were divorced, and nine of the ten parents who were identified as “denigrators” were mothers. In nine of the ten cases, the parent-child relationship appeared to suffer according to children’s ratings of either one parent or both parents.

Importantly, nine out of ten children reported feeling more attached to and closer with the parent who was *denigrated*. In the remaining case, the participant reported feeling securely attached to both parents, closer with the denigrator parent, and that both parents were similarly involved. These results indicate that none of the 994 children in this sample of university students and community participants had a profile consistent with the parental alienation construct, where unilateral denigration was associated with children’s reports of feeling closer to the parent who was performing the denigration. Even in cases of unilateral denigration, the data actually indicate the opposite result of alienation; not only do children fail to reject denigrated parents, they report feeling closer to them than the denigrator parent.

Consistent with the hypotheses of this study and consistent with results of prior research (Rowen & Emery, in press), results from two linear mixed effects models demonstrated that parental denigration predicted children’s attachment to parents. Interestingly, mother denigration,

father denigration, gender, and conflict were significant predictors of attachment to mothers, whereas father denigration, marital status, and conflict were significant predictors of attachment to fathers. Denigration on the part of mothers was associated with children feeling *less attached* to them, and the same was true for fathers. Additionally, higher levels of denigration on the part of fathers was associated with *more attachment* to mothers, but this was not true of mother denigration and father attachment. It is possible that either children are more sensitive to father denigration, father denigration is more severe, or there is a different quality about father denigration, which compels children to feel closer to mothers. Thus, while children report that mothers perform denigration behaviors more frequently, mother denigration does not lead children to feel closer to fathers in the same way that father denigration leads children to feel closer to mothers. These findings are again consistent with the conflict hypothesis, where children report feeling less close with to parent who denigrates most frequently, not the parent who is being denigrated.

Study 2: Relationship Between Siblings' Reports of Parental Denigration.

The relationships between sibling reports of parental denigration and associated psychological outcomes were examined using non-twin sibling pairs from a university sample and twin pairs from a community sample. Overall, monozygotic twin, dizygotic twin, and sibling reports of parental denigration were highly consistent across parent and marital status (r ranged from .64 to .85). The high consistency between sibling reports of parent denigration provides support for the inter-rater reliability and construct validity of the PDS. Contrary to the hypothesis that older siblings would report experiencing higher levels of denigration, there was no significant difference in denigration reports between older and younger siblings.

Sibling reports of attachment to parents, closeness with parents, and reports of conflict were positively correlated across parents and marital status. Additionally, sibling reports of

painful feelings about divorce were significantly associated for the Paternal Blame, the Loss and Abandonment, the Maternal Blame, and the Divorce Acceptance subscales. Taken together, these findings indicate that siblings, regardless of birth order, report similar levels of denigration for both parents, similar parent-child relationship quality, similarly painful feelings about divorce, and similar levels of interparental conflict. Interestingly, sibling reports of depressive symptoms and anxiety symptoms were not significantly related, and satisfaction with life was significantly, negatively correlated. These dissimilar reports support the validity of sibling agreement on other constructs and demonstrate that similarities are not the result of a large response bias factor. Additionally, in the instances where sibling reports about parental denigration differed, reports of closeness and attachment to both parents were significantly different as well. Overall, sibling reports of denigration and interparental conflict were consistent, which indicates that, regardless of age, children within the same family witness similar parental behaviors, and these negative parental behaviors are similarly painful.

Examination of individual cases of unilateral denigration (in the three instances of unilateral denigration where sibling reports were available) revealed that younger sibling reports, while similar to those of older siblings, did not meet criteria for unilateral denigration. This finding was contrary to the hypothesis that sibling reports of unilateral denigration would be consistent. Consistent with the current pattern of results, however, older siblings, whose reports met criteria for unilateral denigration, reported poorer relationship quality with the *denigrator* parent. Additionally, older siblings reported more depressive symptoms, less satisfaction with life, more psychological pain, and poorer psychological well-being outcomes than younger siblings. Thus, even though siblings did not report denigration behaviors to the same extent, the sibling who experienced more frequent denigration behaviors also reported poorer parent-child

relationship quality and psychological well-being, which is consistent with the current pattern of results.

In order to utilize a multi-informant approach and avoid inflating correlations by relying on a single informant, one sibling's reports of relationship quality were correlated with the other sibling's reports of denigration. Older siblings' denigration scores were significantly, negatively correlated with younger siblings' reports of closeness with mothers, closeness with fathers, attachment to mothers, and attachment to fathers. Additionally, older siblings' denigration scores for mothers and fathers were significantly, negatively correlated with younger siblings' reports of satisfaction with life, and older siblings' denigration scores for fathers were significantly, positively correlated with younger siblings' reports of depressive symptoms. The same associations between younger siblings' denigration scores and older sibling outcomes were significant. This indicates that significant associations between denigration scores and outcomes are present across multiple informants, which provides further supports for the validity of the data.

The high consistency in sibling reports provides support for a number of implications. First, denigration behaviors can be measured reliably within families. Second, the PDS is measuring what it was created to measure. Third, experiencing frequent denigration leads *both* siblings within the same family to feel distanced from parents, providing further support for the conflict hypothesis. Fourth, siblings who report frequent denigration also report more frequent interparental conflict and psychological pain, which indicates that, regardless of individual differences, denigration is associated with more painful feelings for both siblings.

Study 3: Reports of Denigration and Acrimony across Three Samples of Parent Reporters.

Study 3 aimed to explore the associations between co-parent reports of parental denigration using data from parents of university students from married and divorced families and data from currently litigating/separating parents from the community. Reported self and co-parent denigration frequency varied within and between community and university samples. Overall, the frequency of denigration behaviors within married couples was significantly lower than divorced couples, and married parents appear to provide more accurate accounts of both their behavior and their co-parent's behavior. Reported co-parent denigration frequency was significantly greater than reported self denigration within both the divorced UVa sample and the MCC sample. In contrast, there was no significant difference between reported self and co-parent denigration frequency within the married UVa sample. Additionally, it appears that MCC parents, who are currently separating and litigating child custody, underestimate their own negative behaviors and tend to place the majority of the "blame" on their co-parent. This suggests that newly separating and custody litigating parents demonstrate a lack of insight and empathy and are, perhaps, motivated to paint their behavior in a favorable light.

Reports of self denigration frequency in the divorced UVa sample were significantly greater than reports of self denigration frequency in the MCC sample. However, there was no significant difference in co-parent denigration frequency between these samples. These findings suggest that UVa divorced parents may display more insight into their own negative behaviors than MCC parents, though both groups portray the co-parent as exhibiting significantly more negative behaviors than they do.

Across samples, there was an overall positive relationship between reported co-parent denigration frequency and interparental acrimony. However, this relationship was strong in the MCC sample ($r = 0.71$), and weak ($r = 0.19$) in the divorced UVa sample. This suggests that

reports of high, discrepant co-parent denigration (as compared to self denigration) are associated with hostility in currently separating/litigating parents, but they are not associated with hostility in a sample of parents who have older children and most likely have been divorced for a longer period of time. In addition, previous research has indicated that it is common for one individual within high-conflict couples to have difficulty accepting the end of the relationship (Emery & Sbarra, 2008). It is possible that parents in the MCC sample are experiencing these difficult emotions, which has contributed to high levels of acrimony, coupled with an overestimation of co-parent denigration behaviors. These represent important elements for mediators, educators, and psychologists to consider when designing effective intervention strategies for high-conflict parents.

Study 4: Association between Parent and Child Reports of Parental Denigration and Psychological Outcomes.

The relationships between parent and child reports of parental denigration and psychological outcomes were explored using data from the university sample. Consistent with the hypothesis that parents would underreport denigration behaviors, mothers and fathers in divorced families reported engaging in denigration behaviors significantly less frequently than children reported. In contrast, parent and child reports of denigration in married families did not significantly differ for mothers or fathers. These results demonstrate divorced parents' difficulty identifying their own negative behaviors. Interestingly, in general, reports from fathers and children about the frequency with which mothers denigrated and reports from children and mothers about the frequency with which fathers denigrated did not significantly differ across marital status. Thus, contrary to the hypothesis that parents would over report co-parent denigration behaviors, parents' reports of co-parent denigration behaviors appear to be relatively accurate and significantly correlated with children's reports of co-parent behaviors. Given the

social undesirability of denigration behaviors, it is not surprising that parents underreport the frequency with which they engage in these behaviors. These findings suggest that children are more accurate reporters of parental denigration behaviors than parents, which is important to consider for assessing denigration in the future.

Child reports of attachment and parent reports of child attachment were not significantly associated, with the exception of married mothers and children. However, child and parent reports of closeness were significantly, positively associated, with the exception of divorced mothers and children. Child reports of closeness with mothers were significantly, positively associated with father reports of children's closeness with mothers and attachment with mothers, across marital status. In contrast, the relationships between child reports of closeness with fathers and mother reports of children's attachment and closeness with fathers were not significant. In general, parental report of co-parents' denigration behaviors were significantly, negatively correlated with parental reports of co-parents' relationship quality with children. This was true in divorced families for both attachment and closeness. In contrast, this was true for mothers in married families, but these associations were not significant for fathers in married families. Again, it appears that there is inconsistency between child reports and parent report, where parents tend to overestimate their relationship with children and underestimate their co-parent's relationship with children. This was especially true for divorced mothers.

Associations between child reports of satisfaction with life and parental reports of children's satisfaction with life were significant and positive in divorced families but were not significant in married families. In divorced families, associations between child reports of depressive symptoms and parental reports of children's depressive symptoms were significant and positive for mothers and fathers across marital status. Child reports of interparental conflict

and parental reports of conflict behaviors were significantly, positively associated in married families and for fathers in divorced families, but they were not significantly associated for children and mothers in divorced families.

Overall, the results from the parent-child data indicate that married parents and children have consistent reports of denigration behaviors. Divorced parents have consistent reports with children about the other parent's denigration behaviors, but not their own. When parents reported high co-parent denigration, they also reported that children had poorer relationships with co-parents, which is consistent with the current patterns of results.

Overall Implications

There are a number of important overall implications from the collective results of this study. First, all of the hypotheses and predictions consistent with the alienation construct were unsupported or contradicted. In the current study, there was not one case of documented parental alienation or rejection in nearly 1,000 reports. The overwhelming evidence suggests that alienation is not occurring, and that, in fact, children feel closer to the parent who is being denigrated. If proponents of alienation continue to assert that alienation is occurring, the burden of proof is on them regarding the existence of alienation. It is clear that alienation is certainly not occurring with the frequency which alienation experts claim, so there is a need for judges and legal professionals to examine these testimonies in greater depth.

Second, parental denigration is a type of conflict that needs to be studied more in divorced and married families. The findings seem consistent with Cummings' emotional security hypothesis (Cummings & Davies, 2011), which states that "...maintaining a sense of protection, safety, and security is a central goal for children in family settings, including contexts of marital conflict" (p. 30). Parental denigration has not been studied as a part of conflict research and

findings from the current study suggest that it is a rich new area of exploration that should be included within the conflict literature. Additionally, future work on parental denigration, and perhaps the alienation construct, should shift the framework of denigration to reflect the theoretical components of the conflict hypothesis.

Third, it appears that parental denigration does not impact children in a manner consistent with modeling, where children simply mimic the negative things parents say about one another. Instead, children appear to feel angry, torn, and confused, because they love both parents, and it is painful to hear negative things about either of them. This confusion and pain appear to lead children to withdraw from both parents. Thus, parental denigration is a family systems issue that is not contained to conflict between parents or a child's rejection of a parent. Thinking of parental denigration more systemically will aid in future research and will help mediators, parent educators, and therapists more effectively identify denigration and intervene.

Limitations, Strengths, and Future Research

Certain limitations of the current investigation should be noted. First, there were limitations with respect to participants. Approximately one third of the data was collected from university students. This allowed for the collection of a large sample of family data, but the homogeneity of data is a limit to generalizability. The MTurk sample was collected online, which allowed for the collection of a large community-based sample. However, researchers were not able to oversee survey completion or contact participants directly to assure quality control. A number of measures were taken to ensure data accuracy, such as asking age and marital status-related questions multiple times throughout the survey and embedding a number of dummy questions within individual measures to ensure that participants were completing the measures thoughtfully. Finally, the MCC parents were limited to residents of central Virginia, which is not a nationally representative sample of the country. Data collection was also limited by resources

at the Mediation Center of Charlottesville, since that was the primary site of data collection for this sample.

Second, the retrospective reports are both a limitation and strength. Retrospective reports are imperfectly related to actual behavior and may be biased in several ways. Further, the social-cognitive developmental level of children during the ages at which they experienced denigration may impact their memories of denigration behaviors and, thus, their responses. However, the ultimate goal was to assess how children perceive and feel about their parents, and young adults' reflections are of considerable interest from this perspective. Additionally, the self-report aspect of the study limits objectivity in reporting. However, it would be very difficult to conduct an observational study of parental denigration, given the social undesirability of those behaviors.

A third limitation is that the response options on the PDS reflect participants' subjective perception of frequency. Operationalizing frequency (e.g., sometimes = once per week) may have allowed for better estimates.

Finally, while this study had well over 1,000 participants in total, the sample of divorced fathers could have been larger for increased power. The original goal of the study was not to compare mothers and fathers within married and divorced families (rather, just compare married parents with divorced parents), so data collection efforts were not focused on recruiting participants in this specific group.

This study also had a number of strengths. First, this study added to the limited literature base on extreme parental negativity carried out in front of children. The majority of research is on interparental conflict, generally, and there are a handful of empirically grounded studies on the parental alienation construct. This was the first study to empirically investigate a new construct

from the perspective of the family system and provide empirical support for a new, psychometrically reliable and valid measure. In addition, this study had the largest sample size of child reporters from both married and divorced families on parental negativity in the literature, which allowed for good statistical power and generalizability

A second strength is the multi-informant design of the study. In addition to parent and child samples, family dyads were collected to explore the denigration construct within and between families. This allowed data to be cross-validated, in the case of siblings, and it allowed for direct comparisons to be made, in the case of parent-child dyads. A high conflict parent sample was also collected to explore parental denigration in the population which it is hypothesized to most commonly occur. The comprehensive nature of this study provided an empirical basis for the denigration construct and provided important insight into family dynamics surrounding parental negativity.

Third, data was collected on multiple measures of constructs related to parental denigration. A number of measures were used to collect data about parent-child relationship quality, such as warmth, closeness, attachment, and involvement, from the perspective of both parents and children. Additionally, a number of measures were used to gain a comprehensive understanding of children's psychological well-being in young adulthood, such as depressive symptomology, anxiety traits, satisfaction with life, and psychological pain. Data on interparental conflict was also collected in order to examine the relationship between denigration and a closely related construct.

Given the consistency of our findings with the conflict hypothesis, future studies should examine denigration behaviors within a conflict-related framework rather than a parental

alienation framework. In doing so, future studies will be able to explore the ways in which conflict resolution interventions can be most effective at reducing post-separation conflict and fostering healthy co-parent relationships. Mental health professionals and researchers need to focus more attention on denigration and its potential impact on parent-child relationships and children's well-being. This is especially true in the context of divorce and custody disputes, since denigration occurs more frequently in divorced and never married families. Mental health professionals should also use more caution when asserting that behaviors within families are consistent with parental alienation, given the lack of support for hypotheses and outcomes associated with this construct.

Future work should also aim to gain comprehensive knowledge of how children are affected during the time in which they live with their parents. Results from the MCC data indicated that a large percentage of parents believed their children were presently experiencing emotional difficulties, which suggests that children are suffering in the moment. This will provide important insight into children's experiences of parental denigration *while it is happening* (which may also be a solution to retrospective reporting). In addition, if data is collected from children while they are still living at home, a longitudinal design should be implemented in order to collect data about parental denigration reports over time and assess any trends in reporting.

Since observational studies of parental denigration would be difficult to conduct, given the socially undesirable nature of these behaviors, future work should focus on analogue studies. Mark Cummings and colleagues (Cummings, Davies & Simpson, 1994) have successfully examined the impact of interparental conflict on children's adjustment using analogue studies. Children completed measures of marital conflict, were shown video clips of conflict between adult strangers, and were asked what they would have done and how they would have felt if the

scenarios happened between their parents. A similar design could be implemented to explore parental denigration, where children are first asked to complete the PDS, shown a clip where adults denigrate each other, and then asked what they would have done and how they would have felt if they witnessed this between their own parents. This could provide valuable insight into the ways in which denigration affects children while they are still young and may help create effective interventions for parents.

Finally, in future work, proponents of parental alienation should provide empirical support for the reliability and validity of the alienation “diagnosis” and the construct in general. Parental alienation is still hotly contested in courtrooms, and expert witnesses continue to testify that alienation is occurring in families. If this construct is to stand up to the rigors of science, it will be imperative to provide empirical grounding for the claims associated with alienation, especially since this study has provided evidence that contradicts all said claims.

Conclusions

This study was the first to explore the construct of parental denigration using multiple informants and a large sample of university students and community-based participants. In general, denigration was found to be reciprocal and associated with children feeling less close to the parent who was doing the denigrating rather than being denigrated. Sibling reports on parental denigration were consistent across all types of sibling pairs, and reports did not significantly differ by age. Divorced parents reported that their co-parent denigrated significantly more frequently than they did, and co-parent denigration was correlated with interparental acrimony in separating/litigating parents. Parents under-reported their own denigration behaviors compared to child reports, but child and parent reports of co-parent denigration behavior were moderately correlated. Finally, consistency in denigration reports among family members, the good internal consistency of the PDS, and the high test-retest reliability of the PDS provided

strong evidence that the PDS is a psychometrically reliable and valid measure, which should be available as a new tool for assessing parental denigration behaviors.

These results hold implications for valuable interventions such as mediation, parenting education, and parenting coordination, which are designed to help parents navigate the difficult separation/custody transition. These professionals, as well as couple and family therapists, can educate parents about the adverse consequences of conflict generally and denigration in particular. Judges should exercise caution in upholding claims of parental alienation in the courtroom, given the dearth of empirical evidence for its existence and the contrary findings regarding its proposed outcomes from this study. Finally, mental health professionals might warn angry parents that conflict strategies may backfire. Parents who put down their co-parent appear to be more likely to make their children feel less close to them, not to their other parent.

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Appendix

Part 1: Items and Measures for the Student Participants and Siblings

Please enter your email address.

Please enter your sibling's UVa email address.

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

The following question refers to your racial/ethnic background.

Please check the categories below that describe you. Select all that apply.

Caucasian/White

African American/Black

American Indian

Hispanic or Latino

Asian

Middle Eastern

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

Other (please specify)

What is your marital/household status?

Married

Divorced

Living with significant other

Single

Do you have children?

Yes, and in a relationship with other parent

Yes, and not in a relationship with other parent

No

What was the highest grade in school that you completed?

No education

Completed elementary school

Completed middle school

Completed high school

Completed Associates Degree

Completed Bachelors Degree

Completed some post-baccalaureate training

Completed a graduate program

What is your occupation?

What was the highest grade in school that your biological MOTHER completed?

No education

Completed elementary school

Completed middle school

- Completed high school
- Completed Associates Degree
- Completed Bachelors Degree
- Completed some post-baccalaureate training
- Completed a graduate program

What is your biological MOTHER’S occupation?

What was the highest grade in school that your biological FATHER completed?

- No education
- Completed elementary school
- Completed middle school
- Completed high school
- Completed Associates Degree
- Completed Bachelors Degree
- Completed some post-baccalaureate training
- Completed a graduate program

What is your biological FATHER’S occupation?

Answer the following questions based on how often you have contact with your biological MOTHER.

Response choices: *Not at all; Once a year; Several times a year; 1-3 times a month; Once a week; Several times a week*

- How often did you visit your biological mother in the past year?
- How often did you talk on the phone with your biological mother in the past year?
- How often did you text or email your biological mother in the past year?

Total number of days visited: _____

Answer the following questions based on how often you have contact with your biological FATHER.

Response choices: *Not at all; Once a year; Several times a year; 1-3 times a month; Once a week; Several times a week*

- How often did you visit your biological mother in the past year?
- How often did you talk on the phone with your biological mother in the past year?
- How often did you text or email your biological mother in the past year?

Total number of days visited: _____

Are your biological parents in a committed relationship with each other?

- Yes
- No

What is your age?

NRI Mom:

We are interested in the different kinds of things young adults experience in relationships. For the following questions, please check the box that best describes your CURRENT relationship with your biological/adoptive MOTHER.

Response choices: *Never/not at all; A little; Somewhat; Quite a bit; Extremely much*

1. How much does your mother teach you how to do things that you don't know how to do?
2. How much does your mother help you figure out or fix things?
3. How often does your mother help you when you need to get something done?
4. How much do you talk about everything with your mother?
5. How much do you share your secrets and private feelings with your mother?
6. How much do you talk to your mother about things that you don't want others to know?
7. How much does your mother like or love you?
8. How much does your mother really care about you?
9. How much does your mother have a strong feeling of affection (loving or liking) toward you?
10. How often do you turn to your mother for support with personal problems?
11. How often do you depend on your mother for help, advice, or sympathy?
12. When you are feeling down or upset, how often do you depend on your mother to cheer you up?
13. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your mother?
14. How good is your relationship with your mother?
15. How happy are you with the way things are between you and your mother?

NRI Dad:

We are interested in the different kinds of things young adults experience in relationships. For the following questions, please check the box that best describes your CURRENT relationship with your biological/adoptive FATHER.

Response choices: *Never/not at all; A little; Somewhat; Quite a bit; Extremely much*

1. How much does your mother teach you how to do things that you don't know how to do?
2. How much does your mother help you figure out or fix things?
3. How often does your mother help you when you need to get something done?
4. How much do you talk about everything with your mother?
5. How much do you share your secrets and private feelings with your mother?
6. How much do you talk to your mother about things that you don't want others to know?
7. How much does your mother like or love you?
8. How much does your mother really care about you?
9. How much does your mother have a strong feeling of affection (loving or liking) toward you?
10. How often do you turn to your mother for support with personal problems?
11. How often do you depend on your mother for help, advice, or sympathy?
12. When you are feeling down or upset, how often do you depend on your mother to cheer you up?
13. How satisfied are you with your relationship with your mother?

14. How good is your relationship with your mother?
15. How happy are you with the way things are between you and your mother?

Parenting mom:

These questions ask about interactions with your biological/adoptive MOTHER when you were between the ages of 8-18.(NOTE: only respond N/A if you had absolutely no contact with this parent or he has been deceased for more than 10 years)

Strongly Disagree, Disagree Somewhat, Agree Somewhat, Strongly Agree

1. I could count on my mother to help me out, if I had some kind of problem.
2. My mother said that you shouldn't argue with adults.
3. My mother kept pushing me to do my best in whatever I did.
4. My mother said that you should give in on arguments rather than make people angry.
5. My mother kept pushing me to think independently.
6. When I got a poor grade in school, my mother made my life miserable.
7. My mother helped me with my schoolwork if there was something I don't understand.
8. My mother told me that her ideas are correct and that I should not question them.
9. When my mother wanted me to do something, she explained why.
10. Whenever I argued with my mother, she said things like, "You'll know better when you grow up."
11. When I got a poor grade in school, my mother encouraged me to try harder.
12. My mother let me make my own plans for things I wanted to do.
13. My mother knew who my friends are.
14. My mother acted cold and unfriendly if I did something she doesn't like.
15. My mother spent time just talking with me.
16. When I got a poor grade in school, my mother made me feel guilty.
17. My mother and I did things fun together.
18. My mother wouldn't let me do things with her when I did something she didn't like.

Parenting dad:

These questions ask about interactions with your biological/adoptive FATHER when you were between the ages of 8-18. (NOTE: only respond N/A if you had absolutely no contact with this parent or he has been deceased for more than 10 years)

1. I could count on my father to help me out, if I had some kind of problem.
2. My father said that you shouldn't argue with adults.
3. My father kept pushing me to do my best in whatever I did.
4. My father said that you should give in on arguments rather than make people angry.
5. My father kept pushing me to think independently.
6. When I got a poor grade in school, my father made my life miserable.
7. My father helped me with my schoolwork if there was something I don't understand.
8. My father told me that his ideas were correct and that I should not question them.
9. When my father wanted me to do something, he explained why.
10. Whenever I argued with my father, he said things like, "You'll know better when you grow up."
11. When I got a poor grade in school, my father encouraged me to try harder.
12. My father let me make my own plans for things I wanted to do.
13. My father knew who my friends were.
14. My father acted cold and unfriendly if I did something he didn't like.
15. My father spent time just talking with me.

16. When I got a poor grade in school, my father made me feel guilty.
17. My father and I did fun things together.
18. My father wouldn't let me do things with him when I did something he doesn't like.

IPPA Mom:

Directions. This section asks about your feelings about your CURRENT relationship with your biological/adoptive MOTHER Please check the response that best describes how you feel about each parent. (NOTE: only respond NA if you had absolutely no contact with this parent or they has been deceased for more than 10 years)

1. My mother respects my feelings.
2. I feel that my mother is successful as a parent.
3. I wish I had a different mother.
4. My mother accepts me as I am.
5. I like to get my mother's point of view on things I'm concerned about.
6. I feel it is no use letting my feelings show around my mother.
7. My mother senses when I'm upset about something.
8. Talking over my problems with my mother makes me feel ashamed or foolish.
9. My mother expects too much from me.
10. I get upset easily when I'm with my mother.
11. I get a lot more upset than my mother knows.
12. When we discuss things, my mother considers my point of view.
13. My mother trusts my judgment.
14. My mother has her own problems, so I don't bother her with mine.
15. My mother helps me to understand myself better.
16. I tell my mother about my problems and troubles.
17. I feel angry with my mother.
18. I don't get much attention when I'm with my mother.
19. My mother encourages me to talk about my difficulties.
20. My mother understands me.
21. When I am angry about something, my mother tries to be understanding.
22. I trust my mother.
23. I feel as if my mother doesn't understand what I'm going through these days.
24. I can count on my mother when I need to get something off my chest.
25. If my mother knows something is bothering me, she asks me about it.

IPPA dad:

This next section asks you to recall times when your parents had arguments while you were living with them between the ages of 8-18. Please rate how true each statement is (Only respond N/A if you had absolutely no contact with this parent or they have been deceased for more than 10 years.)

1. I never saw my parents arguing or disagreeing.
2. My parents got really mad when they argued.
3. They may have thought I didn't know it, but my parents argued or disagreed a lot.
4. When my parents had a disagreement, they discussed it quietly.

5. My parents were often mean to each other, even when I was around.
6. I often saw my parents arguing.
7. When my parents had an argument, they said mean things to each other.
8. My parents hardly ever argued.
9. When my parents had an argument, they yelled a lot.
10. My parents often nagged and complained about each other.
11. My parents hardly ever yelled when they had a disagreement.
12. My parents broke or threw things during arguments.
13. My parents pushed or shoved each other during arguments.

Conflict

This next section asks you to recall times when your parents had arguments while you were living with them between the ages of 8-18. Please rate how true each statement is.

1. I never saw my parents arguing or disagreeing.
2. My parents got really mad when they argued.
3. They may have thought I didn't know it, but my parents argued or disagreed a lot.
4. When my parents had a disagreement, they discussed it quietly.
5. My parents were often mean to each other, even when I was around.
6. I often saw my parents arguing.
7. When my parents had an argument, they said mean things to each other.
8. My parents hardly ever argued.
9. When my parents had an argument, they yelled a lot.
10. My parents often nagged and complain about each other.
11. My parents hardly ever yelled when they had a disagreement.
12. My parents broke or threw things during arguments.
13. My parents pushed or shoved each other during arguments.

Negative Parent Characteristics Mom

Read the statements below and rate how often each was true for your MOTHER growing up.

1. My mother was not involved in my daily activities.
2. My mother did not contribute financially to my well-being.
3. My mother broke her promises.
4. When my mother and I were supposed to spend time together, she would cancel or fail to show up.
5. When I would have a special event at school or outside of school, my mother would not come.
6. My mother was physically abusive to me.
7. My mother was physically abusive to my father.
8. My mother was physically abusive to my siblings.
9. My mother was emotionally abusive to me.
10. My mother was emotionally abusive to my father.
11. My mother was emotionally abusive to my siblings.
12. My mother was angry all the time and yelled frequently.
13. My mother was depressed or very sad most of the time that I saw her.
14. My mother's behavior was very unpredictable.

15. My mother was mentally unstable or had a known psychological disturbance.
16. My mother was not warm or caring.
17. My mother never tried to see things from my point of view.
18. My mother never tried to understand how I felt about difficult situations.
19. My mother did not communicate well with me.
20. My mother was a rigid and/or overly restrictive parent.
21. I felt like my mother could have fought harder for a better relationship with me.
22. I did not want to have a relationship with my mother.

Negative Parent Characteristics Dad

Read the statements below and rate how often each was true for your FATHER growing up

1. My father was not involved in my daily activities.
2. My father did not contribute financially to my well-being.
3. My father broke his promises.
4. When my father and I were supposed to spend time together, he would cancel or fail to show up.
5. When I would have a special event at school or outside of school, my father would not come.
6. My father was physically abusive to me.
7. My father was physically abusive to my mother.
8. My father was physically abusive to my siblings.
9. My father was emotionally abusive to me.
10. My father was emotionally abusive to my mother.
11. My father was emotionally abusive to my siblings.
12. My father was angry all the time and yelled frequently.
13. My father was depressed or very sad most of the time that I saw him.
14. My father's behavior was very unpredictable.
15. My father was mentally unstable or had a known psychological disturbance.
16. My father was not warm or caring.
17. My father never tried to see things from my point of view.
18. My father never tried to understand how I felt about difficult situations.
19. My father did not communicate well with me.
20. My father was a rigid and/or overly restrictive parent.
21. I felt like my father could have fought harder for a better relationship with me.
22. I did not want to have a relationship with my father.

Denigration mom

These questions ask about how your relationship with your biological/adoptive mother when you were between the ages of 8-18. Please indicate how frequently each item occurred during this time.(NOTE: only respond N/A if you had absolutely no contact with this parent or she has been deceased for more than 10 years)

1. My mother said bad things about my father in front of me
2. My mother made me feel guilty if I enjoyed time with my father
3. I feel like my mother tried to create conflict between me and my father.
4. When my parents were in the same room, my mother spoke to my father very respectfully in front of me.
5. My mother put down my father's values.
6. My mother asked me to choose between her and my father.

7. My mother told me that my father was mentally unstable.
8. My mother encouraged me to spend less time with my father.
9. My mother made comments to indicate that my relationship with my father was not important.
10. My mother encouraged me to have a strong relationship with my father.
11. My mother was excited when I spoke positively about my father.
12. When talking about my father, my mother used a tone of voice that made me think she had negative feelings about my father.
13. I feel like my mother tested me to make sure I was on her side.
14. My mother made me feel like I was free to give love to or receive love from my father.
15. When my parents were in the same room, my mother talked down to my father in front of me.
16. My mother quizzed me after I spent time alone with my father.
17. My mother spoke positively about my father.
18. My mother wanted me to feel very close to both of my parents.
19. My mother talked to me about my father's flaws.
20. My mother told me that my father is a bad person.
21. My mother spoke positively about presents given to me by my mother.
22. My mother undermined my father's authority.

Denigration dad

These questions ask about your relationship with your biological/adoptive FATHER when you were between the ages of 8-18. Please indicate how frequently each item occurred during this time.(NOTE: only respond N/A if you had absolutely no contact with this parent or she has been deceased for more than 10 years)

1. My father said bad things about my mother in front of me.
2. My father made me feel guilty if I enjoyed time with my mother.
3. I feel like my father tried to create conflict between me and my mother.
4. When my parents were in the same room, my father spoke to mother very respectfully in front of me.
5. My father put down my mother's values.
6. My father asked me to choose between him and my mother.
7. My father told me that my mother was mentally unstable.
8. My father encouraged me to spend less time with my mother.
9. My father made comments to indicate that my relationship with my mother was not important.
10. My father encouraged me to have a strong relationship with my mother.
11. My father was excited when I spoke positively about my mother.
12. When talking about my mother, my father used a tone of voice that made me think that he had negative feelings about my mother.
13. I feel like my father tested me to make sure I was on his side.
14. My father made me feel like I was free to give love to or receive love from my mother.
15. When my parents were in the same room, my father talked down to my mother in front of me.
16. My father quizzed me after I spent time alone with my mother.
17. My father spoke positively about my mother.
18. My father wanted me to feel very close to both of my parents.
19. My father talked to me about my mother's flaws.
20. My father told me that my mother is a bad person.
21. My mother spoke positively about presents given to me by my father.
22. My father undermined my mother's authority.

CESD

Below is a list of ways you may have felt or behaved in the past week. Please rate how often you have felt this way in the past week using the given scale.

Response Choices: *Rarely or None of the Time (less than 1 day); Some or a Little of the Time (1-2 days); Occasionally or a Moderate Amount of Time (3-4 days); Most or All of the Time (5-7 days)*

1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.
2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor.
3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.
4. I felt that I was just as good as other people.
5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.
6. I felt depressed.
7. I felt that everything I did was an effort.
8. I felt hopeful about the future.
9. I thought my life had been a failure.
10. I felt fearful.
11. My sleep was restless.

12. I was happy.
13. I talked less than usual.
14. I felt lonely.
15. People were unfriendly.
16. I enjoyed life.
17. I had crying spells.
18. I felt sad.
19. I felt that people dislike me.
20. I could not get "going."

STAI - Trait

A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then write the appropriate number next to the statement to indicate how you generally feel. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement but give the answer which seems to describe how you generally feel.

Response Choices: *Almost Never, Sometimes, Often, Almost Always*

1. I feel pleasant.
2. I feel nervous and restless.
3. I feel satisfied with myself.
4. I wish I could be as happy as others seem to be.
5. I feel like a failure.
6. I feel rested.
7. I am "calm, cool, and collected."
8. I feel that difficulties are piling up so that I cannot overcome them.
9. I worry too much over something that really doesn't matter.

10. I am happy.
11. I have disturbing thoughts.
12. I lack self-confidence.
13. I feel secure.
14. I make decisions easily.
15. I feel inadequate.
16. I am content.
17. Some unimportant thought runs through my mind and bothers me.
18. I take disappointments so keenly that I can't put them out of my mind.
19. I am a steady person.
20. I get in a state of tension or turmoil as I think over my recent concerns and interests.

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by rating your responses on how much you agree/disagree with the statement. Please be open and honest in your responding. Response Choices: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Slightly Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Slightly Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree

- 1) in most ways my life is close to ideal.
- 2) The conditions of my life are excellent.
- 3) I am satisfied with my life.
- 4) So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
- 5) If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Which of the following best describes your parents' marital status?

- Married
- Divorced
- Never married and not living together
- Never married but living together

If your biological parents are divorced or otherwise not living together, please answer the following:

1. What is your mother's current marital status? (never remarried/cohabitating with a partner for an extended period, currently remarried/cohabiting with first new partner, multiple remarriages/extended cohabitation since parents' separation)
2. What is your father's current marital status? (never remarried/cohabitating with a partner for an extended period, currently remarried/cohabiting with first new partner, multiple remarriages/extended cohabitation since parents' separation)

Painful Feelings about Divorce:

1. My father is still in love with my mother.

2. If my father had been a better (nicer, stronger) person, my parents would still be together. (P B)

3. My friends seem to have happier lives. (loss and abandonment)

4. My parents' divorce/separation relieved a lot of the tensions in my family. (acceptance of divorce)
5. My parents' divorce/separation still causes struggles for me.
6. I probably would be a different person if my parents had not gotten divorced/separated. (seeing life through filter of divorce)
7. Before my parents' divorce/separation, it was my father who usually made my family unhappy.
8. My mother caused the breakup of my family. (maternal blame)
9. My mother caused most of the trouble in my family.
10. I still think a lot about the time around my parents' divorce/separation.
11. Sometimes I feel angry at my father for my parents' divorce/separation.
12. I sometimes wonder if I could have prevented my parents' divorce/separation. (self blame)
13. Sometimes I feel angry at my mother for my parents' divorce/separation.
14. I feel comfortable talking to my friends about my parents' divorce/separation.
15. I feel doomed to repeat my parents' problems in my own relationships.
16. I wish I had tried harder to keep my parents together.
- 17. I sometimes dream that my parents will get back together.**
18. If I had been an easier child, my parents might not have gotten divorced/separated.
19. My parents eventually seemed happier after they separated.
20. If my mother had been a better (nicer, stronger) person, my parents would still be together.
21. I really missed not having my father/mother around.
22. I often wonder how life would be different if my parents were (still) together.
23. My father caused most of the trouble in my family. (paternal blame)
24. My childhood was cut short.
25. I still haven't forgiven my mother for the pain she caused our family.
- 26. My mother is still in love with my father.**
27. A lot of my parents' problems were because of me.
28. I feel like I might have been a different person if my father (mother) had been a bigger part of my life. (loss and abandonment)
29. I had a harder childhood than most people.
30. I worry about big events, like graduations or weddings, when both of my parents will have to come. (filter of divorce)
31. Before my parents' divorce/separation, it was my mother who usually made my family unhappy.
32. I still haven't forgiven my father for the pain he caused my family.
33. My father caused the breakup of my family. (paternal blame)
- 34. I often wish that my family could be like it was before my parents' separation.**
35. I wish my father (mother) had spent more time with me when I was younger.
36. Even though it was hard, divorce was the right thing for my family.
- 37. I sometimes wonder if my father really loves me.**
38. My parents' divorce/separation was the most painful thing I've ever been through.
39. I wish I had grown up in a never-divorced/married family.
40. I have often felt secretly embarrassed that my parents are divorced/no not live together.

Painful Feelings about Conflict:

Many of these questions ask about your experience of painful feelings regarding issues between your parents. If your parents had a good relationship and there were no issues between them, you can check the "does not apply" option. If your parents had issues in their relationship and you have certain feelings about those issues, please answer the questions accordingly. The questions referring to "your father" or "your mother" should

be understood as your biological or adoptive father and mother, even if you spend more time with a step-parent or other caretaker.

1. My father is still in love with my mother.

2. If my father had been a better (nicer, stronger) person, my parents' relationship would be better. (paternal blame)

3. My friends seem to have happier lives. (loss and abandonment)

4. My parents' relationship caused a lot of the tensions in my family.

5. My parents' relationship still causes struggles for me.

6. I probably would be a different person if my parents had a better relationship.

7. It was my father who usually made my family unhappy.

8. My mother caused the breakup of my family. (maternal blame)

9. My mother caused most of the trouble in my family.

10. I still think a lot about the times my parents fought.

11. Sometimes I feel angry at my father for my parents' relationship.

12. I sometimes wonder if I could have prevented my parents' fighting. (self blame)

13. Sometimes I feel angry at my mother for my parents' conflict.

14. I feel comfortable talking to my friends about my parents' conflict.

15. I feel doomed to repeat my parents' problems in my own relationships.

16. I wish I had tried harder to keep my parents from fighting.

17. I sometimes dream that my parents will have a better relationship.

18. If I had been an easier child, my parents might not have fought so much.

19. If my mother had been a better (nicer, stronger) person, my parents would have a better relationship.

20. I really missed not having my father/mother around.

21. I sometimes feel that people look down on me because my parents fight.

22. I often wonder how life would be different if my parents had a better relationship.

23. My father caused most of the trouble in my family.

24. My childhood was cut short.

25. I still haven't forgiven my mother for the pain she caused our family.

26. My mother is still in love with my father.

27. A lot of my parents' problems were because of me.

28. I feel like I might have been a different person if my father (mother) had been a bigger part of my life.

29. I had a harder childhood than most people.

30. I worry about big events, like graduations or weddings, when both of my parents will have to be together in public.

31. It was my mother who usually made my family unhappy.

32. I still haven't forgiven my father for the pain he caused my family.

33. My father caused the issues between my parents.

34. I often wish that my family could be like it was before my parents stopped getting along.

35. I wish my father (mother) had spent more time with me when I was younger.

36. I sometimes wonder if my father really loves me.

37. My parents' conflict was the most painful thing I've ever been through.

38. I wish I had grown up in a different family.

39. I have often felt secretly embarrassed that my parents do not have a good relationship.

Part 2: Items and Measures for Parents

Please enter your UVa child's email address

What is your gender?

Male

Female

Other

The following question refers to your racial/ethnic background.

Please check the categories below that describe you. Select all that apply.

Caucasian/White

African American/Black

American Indian

Hispanic or Latino

Asian

Middle Eastern

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander

Other (please specify)

What is your marital/household status?

Married

Divorced

Never married and in a romantic relationship with my child's co-parent

Never married and not living with/in a relationship with my child's co-parent

What was the highest grade in school that you completed?

No education

Completed elementary school

Completed middle school

Completed high school

Completed Associates Degree

Completed Bachelors Degree

Completed some post-baccalaureate training

Completed a graduate program

What is your occupation?

What was the highest grade in school that your co-parent completed?

No education

Completed elementary school

Completed middle school

Completed high school

Completed Associates Degree

Completed Bachelors Degree

Completed some post-baccalaureate training

Completed a graduate program

What is your co-parent's occupation?

Answer the following questions based on how often you have contact with your UVa child.

How often did you visit your child in the past year?

How often did you talk on the phone with your child in the past year?
How often did you text or email your child in the past year?

What is your age?

Network of Relationships Inventory – Parent

We are interested in the different kinds of things young adults and parents experience in relationships. For the following questions, please check the box that best describes your CURRENT relationship with your child.

- 1: How much do you teach your child how to do things s/he doesn't know how to do?
- 2: How much do you help your child figure out or fix things?
- 3: How often do you help your child when s/he needs to get something done?
- 4: How much does your child talk about everything with you?
- 5: How much does your child share secrets and private feelings with you?
- 6: How much does your child talk to you about things s/he doesn't want others to know?
- 7: How much does your child think you like or love him/her?
- 8: How much does your child think you really care about him/her?
- 9: How much does your child feel that you have a strong feeling of affection toward him/her?
- 10: How often does your child turn to you for support with personal problems?
- 11: How often does your child depend on you for help, advice, or sympathy?
- 12: When s/he is feeling down or upset, how often does your child depend on you to cheer him/her up?
- 13: How satisfied is your child with his/her relationship with you?
- 14: How good is your child's relationship with you?
- 15: How happy is your child with the way things are between the two of you?

We are interested in the different kinds of things young adults and parents experience in relationships. For the following questions, please check the box that best describes your CO-PARENT'S current relationship with your child.

- 1: How much does your co-parent teach your child how to do things s/he doesn't know how to do?
- 2: How much does your co-parent help your child figure out or fix things?
- 3: How often does your co-parent help your child when s/he needs to get something done?
- 4: How much does your child talk about everything with your co-parent?
- 5: How much does your child share secrets and private feelings with your co-parent?
- 6: How much does your child talk to your co-parent about things s/he doesn't want others to know?
- 7: How much does your co-parent like or love your child?
- 8: How much does your co-parent really care about your child?
- 9: How much does your co-parent have a strong feeling of affection toward your child?
- 10: How often does your child turn to your co-parent for support with personal problems?
- 11: How often does your child depend on your co-parent for help, advice, or sympathy?
- 12: When s/he is feeling down or upset, how often does your child depend on your co-parent to cheer him/her up?
- 13: How satisfied is your child with his/her relationship with your co-parent?
- 14: How good is your child's relationship with your co-parent?
- 15: How happy is your child with the way things are between him/her and your co-parent?

Parenting Styles Index, Acceptance/Involvement Scale – Parent

These statements reflect interactions with your child when s/he was between the ages of 8-18. Please read the following statements about your relationship with your child and check the box that corresponds to how strongly you agree with each statement.

- 1: My child can count on me to help him/her out, if s/he has some kind of problem.
- 2: I say that children shouldn't argue with adults.
- 3: I keep pushing my child to do his/her best in whatever s/he does.
- 4: I say that you should give in on arguments rather than make people angry.
- 5: I keep pushing my child to think independently.
- 6: When my child gets a poor grade in school, my child feels like I make his/her life miserable.
- 7: I help my child with his/her schoolwork if there is something s/he doesn't understand.
- 8: I tell my child that my ideas are correct and s/he should not question them.
- 9: When I want my child to do something, I explain why.
- 10: Whenever my child argues with me, I say things like "You'll know better when you grow up".
- 11: When my child gets a poor grade in school, I encourage him/her to try harder.
- 12: I let my child make his/her own plans for things s/he wants do.
- 13: I know who my child's friends are.
- 14: I can act cold and unfriendly if my child does something I don't like.
- 15: I spend time just talking with my child.
- 16: When my child gets a poor grade in school, I make him/her feel guilty.
- 17: I do fun things with my child.
- 18: I won't let my child do things with me when s/he does something I don't like.

These statements reflect your CO-PARENT's interactions with your child when s/he was between the ages of 8-18. Please read the following statements about your CO-PARENT'S relationship with your child and check the box that corresponds to how strongly you agree with each statement.

- 1: My child can count on my co-parent to help him/her out, if s/he has some kind of problem.
- 2: My co-parent says that our child shouldn't argue with adults.
- 3: My co-parent keeps pushing our child to do his/her best in whatever s/he does.
- 4: My co-parent says that you should give in on arguments rather than make people angry.
- 5: My co-parent keeps pushing our child to think independently.
- 6: When our child gets a poor grade in school, s/he feels like my co-parent makes his/her life miserable.
- 7: My co-parent helps our child with his/her schoolwork if there is something our child doesn't understand.
- 8: My co-parent tells our child that his/her ideas are correct and that our child should not question them.
- 9: When my co-parent wants our child to do something, s/he explains why.
- 10: Whenever our child argues with my co-parent, my co-parent says things like "You'll know better when you grow up".
- 11: When our child gets a poor grade in school, my co-parent encourages him/her to try harder.
- 12: My co-parent lets our child make his/her own plans for things our child wants to do.
- 13: My co-parent knows who our child's friends are.
- 14: My co-parent can act cold and unfriendly if our child does something s/he doesn't like.
- 15: My co-parent spends time just talking with our child.

- 16: When our child gets a poor grade in school, my co-parent makes him/her feel guilty.
- 17: My co-parent does fun things with our child.
- 18: My co-parent won't let our child do things with him/her when our child does something s/he doesn't like.

Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment – Parent

This section asks about your child's relationship with your co-parent and you. Please read each of the following statements and check the response that best describes how strongly you agree with each statement. (NOTE: only respond N/A if you had absolutely no contact with your child during this period.)

- 1: I respect my child's feelings.
- 2: I feel that I am successful as a parent.
- 3: My child wishes s/he could replace me as a parent.
- 4: I accept my child as s/he is.
- 5: My child likes to get my point of view on things s/he is concerned about.
- 6: My child feels it is no use letting his/her feelings show around me.
- 7: I sense when my child is upset about something.
- 8: Talking over his/her problems with me makes my child feel ashamed or foolish.
- 9: I expect too much from my child.
- 10: My child gets upset easily when s/he is with me.
- 11: My child gets a lot more upset than I probably know.
- 12: When we discuss things, I consider my child's point of view.
- 13: I trust my child's judgment.
- 14: My child doesn't bother me with his/her problems, because s/he knows I have problems of my own to deal with.
- 15: I help my child to understand himself/herself better.
- 16: My child tells me about his/her problems and troubles.
- 17: My child feels angry with me.
- 18: My child doesn't get much attention when s/he is with me.
- 19: I encourage my child to talk about his/her difficulties.
- 20: I understand my child.
- 21: When my child is angry about something, I try to be understanding.
- 22: My child trusts me.
- 23: My child feels as if I don't understand what s/he is going through these days.
- 24: My child can count on me when s/he needs to get something off his/her chest.
- 25: If I know something is bothering my child, I ask him/her about it.

This section asks about your child's relationship with your co-parent and you. Please read each of the following statements and check the response that best describes how strongly you agree with each statement. (NOTE: please only respond N/A if your co-parent has no contact with your child or is deceased.)

- 1: My co-parent respects our child's feelings.
- 2: My co-parent feels that s/he is successful as a parent.
- 3: My child wishes s/he could replace my co-parent.
- 4: My co-parent accepts our child as s/he is.
- 5: My child likes to get my co-parent's point of view on things s/he is concerned about.
- 6: My child feels it is no use letting his/her feelings show around my co-parent.
- 7: My co-parent senses when our child is upset about something.

- 8: Talking over his/her problems with my co-parent makes our child feel ashamed or foolish.
- 9: My co-parent expects too much from our child.
- 10: My child gets upset easily when s/he is with my co-parent.
- 11: My child gets a lot more upset than my co-parent knows.
- 12: When they discuss things, my co-parent considers our child's point of view
- 13: My co-parent trusts our child's judgment.
- 14: My child doesn't bother my co-parent with his/her problems because my child knows that my co-parent has his/her own problems.
- 15: My co-parent helps our child to understand himself/herself better.
- 16: Our child tells my co-parent about his/her problems and troubles.
- 17: My child feels angry with my co-parent.
- 18: My child doesn't get much attention when s/he is with my co-parent.
- 19: My co-parent encourages our child to talk about his/her difficulties.
- 20: My co-parent understands our child.
- 21: When our child is angry about something, my co-parent tries to be understanding.
- 22: My child trusts my co-parent.
- 23: If you are reading this survey, please respond Almost Always True.
- 24: My child feels as if my co-parent doesn't understand what s/he is going through these days.
- 25: My child can count on my co-parent when s/he needs to get something off his/her chest.
- 26: If my co-parent knows something is bothering our child, my co-parent asks him/her about it.

Conflict Scale – Parent

This next section asks you to recall times when you and your co-parent had arguments while your children were living with you between the ages of 8-18. Please rate how true each statement is. (Only respond N/A if you had absolutely no contact with your co-parent or s/he has been deceased for more than 10 years.

1. My child never saw me and my co-parent arguing or disagreeing.
2. My co-parent and I got really mad when we argued.
3. My co-parent and I argued or disagreed a lot.
4. When my co-parent and I had a disagreement, they discussed it quietly.
5. My co-parent and I were often mean to each other, even when our child was around.
6. My child often saw me and my co-parents arguing.
7. When my co-parent and I had an argument, we said mean things to each other.
8. My co-parent and I hardly ever argued.
9. When my co-parent and I had an argument, they yelled a lot.
10. If you are reading this survey, please respond Strongly Agree.
11. My co-parent and I often nagged and complained about each other.
12. My co-parent and I hardly ever yelled when they had a disagreement.
13. My co-parent and I broke or threw things during arguments.
14. My co-parent and I pushed or shoved each other during arguments.

Acrimony Scale – For divorced or never married parents who are not currently in a romantic relationship

For the following questions, select the response that most accurately reflects your feelings regarding your former spouse.

1. Do you feel friendly toward your former spouse?
2. Do your children feel friendly toward your former spouse?

3. Are gifts to the children a problem between you and your former spouse?
4. Is visitation a problem between you and your former spouse?
5. Do you have friendly talks with your former spouse?
6. Is your former spouse a good parent?
7. Do your children see your former spouse as often as you would like?
8. Do your children see your former spouse as often as he would like?
9. Do you and your former spouse agree on discipline for the children?
10. Are your children harder to handle after a visit with your former spouse?
11. Do you and your former spouse disagree in front of the children?
12. Do the children take sides in disagreements between you and your former spouse?
13. Are alimony or child support payments a problem between you and your former spouse?
14. Do your children feel hostile toward your former spouse?
15. Does your former spouse say things about you to the children that you don't want them to hear?
16. Do you say things about your former spouse to the children that he wouldn't want them to hear?
17. Do you have angry disagreements with your former spouse?
18. Do you feel hostile toward your former spouse?
19. Does your former spouse feel hostile toward you?
20. Can you talk to your former spouse about problems with the children?
21. Do you have a friendly divorce or separation?
22. Are pick-ups and drop-offs of the children between you and your former spouse a difficult time?
23. Does your spouse encourage your child to live with him or her?
24. Have you adjusted to being divorced/separated from your former spouse?
25. Has your former spouse adjusted to being divorced from you?

Parental Denigration Scale – Parent

These questions ask about your relationship with your biological/adoptive child when s/he was between the ages of 8-18. Please indicate how frequently each item occurred during this time. (NOTE: only respond N/A if you had absolutely no contact with your child during this period).

- 1: I said bad things about my co-parent in front of my child.
- 2: I made my child feel guilty if s/he enjoyed time with my co-parent.
- 3: I tried to create conflict between my child and my co-parent.
- 4: When my co-parent and I were in the same room, I spoke very respectfully to him/her in front of my child.
- 5: I put down my co-parent's values.
- 6: I asked my child to choose between me and my co-parent.
- 7: I told my child that my co-parent was mentally unstable.
- 8: I encouraged my child to spend less time with my co-parent.
- 9: I made comments to indicate that my child's relationship with my co-parent was not important.
- 10: I encouraged my child to have a strong relationship with my co-parent.
- 11: I was excited when my child spoke positively about my co-parent.
- 12: When talking about my co-parent, I used a tone of voice that communicated negative feelings about my co-parent.
- 13: I tested my child to make sure s/he was on my side.
- 14: I made my child feel like s/he was free to give love or to receive love from my co-parent.
- 15: when my co-parent and I were in the same room, I talked down to him/her in front of my child.

- 16: I quizzed my child after s/he spent time with my co-parent.
- 17: I spoke very positively about my co-parent.
- 18: I wanted my child to feel very close to both me and my co-parent.
- 19: I talked about my co-parent's flaws.
- 20: I told my child that my co-parent was a bad person.
- 21: I spoke positively about presents given to my child by my co-parent.
- 22: I undermined my co-parents authority.

These questions ask about your CO-PARENT'S relationship with your biological/adoptive child when s/he was between the ages of 8-18. Please indicate how frequently each item occurred during this time. (NOTE: only respond N/A if your co-parent had absolutely no contact with your child during this period, or has been deceased for more than 10 years.)

- 1: My co-parent said bad things about me in front of our child.
- 2: My co-parent made our child feel guilty if s/he enjoyed spending time with me.
- 3: My co-parent tried to create conflict between my child and me.
- 4: When my co-parent and I were in the same room, my co-parent spoke very respectfully to me in front of our child.
- 5: My co-parent put down my values.
- 6: My co-parent asked our child to choose between him/her and me.
- 7: My co-parent told our child that I was mentally unstable.
- 8: My co-parent encouraged our child to spend less time with me.
- 9: My co-parent made comments that our child's relationship with me was not important.
- 10: My co-parent encouraged our child to have a strong relationship with me.
- 11: My co-parent was excited when your child spoke positively about me.
- 12: When talking about me, my co-parent used a tone of voice that communicated negative feelings about me.
- 13: My co-parent tested our child to make sure our child was on his/her side.
- 14: My co-parent made our child feel like s/he was free to give love or to receive love from me.
- 15: When my co-parent and I were in the same room, my co-parent talked down to me in front of our child.
- 16: My co-parent quizzed our child after our child spent time with me.
- 17: My co-parent spoke very positively about me.
- 18: My co-parent wanted our child to feel very close to both him/her and me.
- 19: My co-parent talked about my flaws.
- 20: My co-parent told our child that I was a bad person.
- 21: My co-parent spoke positively about presents I gave our child.
- 22: My co-parent undermined my authority.

Center for Epidemiological Studies: Depression – Parent

Below is a list of ways your child may have felt or behaved in the past week. Please rate how often you believe your child has felt this way in the past week using the given scale.

1. My child was bothered by things that usually don't bother him/her.
2. My child did not feel like eating; his/her appetite was poor.
3. My child felt that s/he could not shake off the blues even with help from his/her family or friends.
4. My child felt that s/he was just as good as other people.
5. My child had trouble keeping his/her mind on what s/he was doing.

6. My child felt depressed.
7. My child felt that everything s/he did was an effort.
8. My child felt hopeful about the future.
9. My child thought his/her life had been a failure.
10. My child felt fearful.
11. My child's sleep was restless.
12. If you are reading this survey, please respond Most or All of the Time.
13. My child was happy.
14. My child talked less than usual.
15. My child felt lonely.
16. People were unfriendly to my child.
17. My child enjoyed life.
18. My child had crying spells.
19. My child felt sad.
20. My child felt that people disliked him/her.
21. My child could not get "going."

State Trait Anxiety Inventory – Parent

A number of statements which people have used to describe themselves are given below. Read each statement and then write the appropriate number next to the statement to indicate how your child generally feels. Do not spend too much time on any one statement but give the answer which seems to describe how your child generally feels.

1. My child feels pleasant.
2. My child feels nervous and restless.
3. My child feels satisfied with him/herself.
4. My child wishes s/he could be as happy as others seem to be.
5. My child feels like a failure.
6. My child feels rested.
7. My child is “calm, cool, and collected”.
8. My child feels that difficulties are piling up so that s/he cannot overcome them.
9. My child worries too much over something that really doesn't matter.
10. My child is happy.
11. My child has disturbing thoughts.
12. My child lacks self-confidence.
13. My child feels secure.
14. My child makes decisions easily.
15. My child feels inadequate.
16. My child is content.
17. Some unimportant thought runs through my child's mind and bothers him/her.
18. My child takes disappointments so keenly that s/he can't put them out of his/her mind.
19. My child is a steady person.
20. My child gets in a state of tension or turmoil as s/he thinks over his/her recent concerns and interests.

Satisfaction With Life Scale – Parent

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by rating your responses on how much you agree/disagree with the statement. Please be open and honest in your responding.

1. In most ways, I think my child's life is close to ideal.
2. I think the conditions of my child's life are excellent.
3. I think my child is satisfied with his/her life.
4. So far I think my child has gotten the important things s/he wants in life.
5. If my child could live his/her life over, I think s/he would change almost nothing.

If your and your co-parent are divorced or otherwise not living together, please answer the following:

- 1) What is your current marital status?
 - a. Never remarried/cohabiting with a partner for extended period
 - b. Currently remarried/cohabiting with first new partner
 - c. Multiple remarriages/extended cohabitation since parents' separation

- 2) What is your co-parent's current marital status?
 - a. Never remarried/cohabiting with a partner for extended period
 - b. Currently remarried/cohabiting with first new partner
 - c. Multiple remarriages/extended cohabitation since parents' separation