

Long-Term Effects of Divorce on Parent–Child Relationships: Within-Family Comparisons of Fathers and Mothers

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Abstract: Using national representative survey data from the Netherlands, this article examines the effects of a parental divorce in childhood on relationships between adult children and their parents. Using a within-family design, we make comparisons between fathers and mothers within the same family. Our approach in part not only replicates earlier findings but it also provides new insights. A divorce not only is most often associated with a deterioration of the relationship with the father but it also occurs that only the relationship with the mother is negatively affected by a divorce. In general, a divorce increases inequality between the relationships that children have with their father and mother. We interpret these effects in terms of compensation between parents on the one hand and lingering feelings of conflicting loyalties among children on the other hand.

Introduction

How a divorce affects the relationships that parents have with their children continues to be an important topic in family sociology and social demography. Some studies focus on young children in the period immediately following the divorce and examine how often the non-resident father has contact with his children and the degree to which he is involved in their life (Scott *et al.*, 2007; Swiss and Le Bourdais, 2009; Cheadle, Amato and King, 2010). Other studies examine the long-term effects of parental divorce by comparing the relationships of married and divorced parents with their adult, independently living children (Grundy, 2005; Daatland, 2007; De Graaf and Fokkema, 2007; Tomassini, Glaser and Stuchbury, 2007; Kalmijn, 2008; Lin, 2008; Yu *et al.*, 2010; Albertini and Garriga, 2011). Consistent evidence exists that there are negative long-term effects of divorce on relationships between fathers and adult children. Although less often noted, there are also negative effects of divorce for relationships with mothers. These effects are smaller in magnitude, however, and often limited to specific indicators (*e.g.* contact frequency).

Although comparisons between fathers and mothers have been made, few studies make comparisons between

fathers and mothers within the same family. Studies that use respondents in their role as parents are unable to make such comparisons because the fathers and mothers are different respondents, unless partners are also respondents. Studies that use children as the unit of analysis are able to compare fathers and mothers but these studies typically present separate models for fathers and mothers. As a result, it is not known how the effects of divorce are *distributed* among parents within a family.

Comparing fathers and mothers within the same family is important for several reasons. First, on a more abstract level, the dyadic approach to parent–child relationships is an unnecessary simplification of reality. There are at least three relationships involved when analyzing the consequences of divorce: between child and mother, between child and father, and between father and mother. The quality and functioning of each relationship would seem to depend in part on the quality and functioning of the other relationships in the triad (King, 2006). Second, dyadic studies do not tell us much about the overall quality of children’s relationships with their parents. Although studies show negative effects of divorce on father–child relationships and (small) negative effects on mother–child relationships, it is unclear if these effects are additive from the

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children's point of view. Are the children who experience a decline in the relationship with their father also the ones who experience a decline in the relationship with their mother, or is there some form of 'compensation' between parents? In the former case, a divorce has even larger effects on children than formerly believed, in the latter case, the effects are smaller and perhaps less problematic. Third, a within-family comparison of fathers and mothers provides a nice addition to an emerging stream of research in which comparisons of intergenerational relationships have been made among children within the same family (Suitor, Pillemer and Sechrist, 2006; Davey, Eggebeen and Savla, 2007). In that line of research, it has been shown that parents sometimes have 'favourites' among their children. In this study, the question is whether children tend to 'favour' one of their parents.

There is one study that we know of which has looked at the relationship with the father and the mother simultaneously. In an analysis of children aged 19–40, Booth and Amato (1994) showed that the effect of divorce on the perceived closeness of the child to one parent is less negative when the child feels less close to the other parent. The interaction effect was found for fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters. Although this effect was not the main topic of the study by Booth and Amato, it is interesting in that it suggests that children to some extent 'choose' between parents after divorce. According to Booth and Amato, a divorce creates a loyalty conflict in children, which makes it difficult for them to maintain good relationships with both parents at the same time. This leads to a deterioration of the relationship with one parent while at the same time, the relationship with the other parent improves. In so far as we know, this result has not been replicated in more recent studies nor has it been analyzed in other national contexts. Moreover, the finding has not been generalized to other aspects of the parent–child relationship such as contact, conflict, and support.

In this article, we examine the effects of divorce on the combined relationships with fathers and mothers. We develop hypotheses on how the effects compare across parents and we test these hypothesis using three recent Dutch surveys in which adult children (aged 18–45) were asked about their father and mother. We focus on four aspects of the parent–child relationship: contact frequency, support exchange, the perceived quality of the relationship, and conflict. The first three of these are positively correlated aspects of intergenerational solidarity (Silverstein *et al.*, 2002). Our primary goal of using more than one indicator is to check whether the evidence is not limited to one specific indicator. Moreover, we suspect that for time-consuming aspects

of the relationship (*e.g.* contact), a divorce may lead to more inequality within families than for other aspects of the relationship. The reason for using conflict as an indicator is that even though relationships with fathers can be less intensive and supporting, they will not necessarily be characterized by conflict. Research on ambivalence shows that conflict often goes together with good and supportive relationships (Birditt *et al.*, 2009). Divorced fathers may represent the other ambivalent type: absent without conflict.

The Netherlands is a fairly standard example of a modernized western context. Divorce rates are high, intergenerational relationships are generally good, and fathers are increasing their involvement in child care (De Graaf, 2005; Dykstra *et al.*, 2006; Bucx, 2011). A recent study showed that after divorce, 76 per cent of the children live with their mother, 6 per cent live with their father, and 15 per cent live partly with their mother and partly with their father (De Graaf, 2005).

Background and Hypotheses

The standard argument in the literature is that only the relationship with the father is affected by divorce and not the relationship with the mother. One reason for this hypothesis is that fathers are less able and/or less willing to invest in their children after a divorce. Fathers rarely get custody and although many divorced fathers remain involved in the lives of their children, this involvement will typically be less intensive than it was before the divorce. An early decline in involvement can be seen as a decline in investment in children which, according to principles of reciprocity, will lead to less frequent support from and contact with children when children are older (Silverstein *et al.*, 2002).

Another reason why primarily relationships with fathers would be affected is that fathers are generally less involved in their children's lives during marriage. Fewer investments in children during marriage may lead to lower quality ties when the children are older. Related to this is that mothers are generally the kin keepers at home so that when fathers divorce, they not only lose a spouse but they also lose a kin keeper (Kalmijn, 2007). As a result, fathers may be less able to maintain ties with their children when the children are adult and the fathers are living on their own, outside of marriage. In other words, marriage and children are often a "package deal" for men (Stephens, 1996).

Although on average, divorced fathers have invested less in children than married fathers, there are also differences within the group of divorced fathers. One important factor here is the timing of divorce. The older the children are when they experience the divorce of

their parents, the shorter the period during which fathers are faced with visitation arrangements, and the more they have been able to invest at normal levels in their children (Stephens, 1996). Several studies in the United States have found positive effects of the child's age at divorce on father-child relationships when the children still live with their mother (Aquilino, 2006; Cheadle, Amato and King, 2010). In the Netherlands, however, De Graaf and Fokkema (2007) found no effect of the age at divorce on father-child relationships for adult children.

Most theoretical arguments have addressed the role of the father and there is less attention for how the mother's ties to the children are affected by a divorce. We believe that there are several reasons why both divorced fathers and divorced mothers will have poorer or less intense relationships with their children. We call this the 'common effects' hypothesis. A first argument has to do with opportunities. Adult children with married parents can visit their parents together or can give support to them simultaneously. For children of divorced parents, such economies of scale do not exist. Hence, children of divorced parents need to divide their time among the parents. Unless the children of divorce decide to make extra time for their parents, one would expect that they spend less time with their father and their mother, compared with the children of married parents.

A second reason for common effects lies in the effects that a divorce has on the psychological well-being of the parents. Many studies have shown that divorced persons have lower well-being and poorer psychological functioning than married persons (Williams and Umberson, 2004). Moreover, the negative effect of divorce on well-being occurs for both men and women, although there are different ways in which such effects manifest themselves (Simon, 2002; Strohschein *et al.*, 2005). Depression and other emotional problems on the part of parents not only affect children's well-being in a negative way, but also lead to less attention and emotional support from parents (Foster *et al.*, 2008; Kiernan and Huerta, 2008; Turney, 2011). For these reasons, one would expect that a divorce leads to poorer relationships with fathers and mothers. Psychological problems on the part of the children after divorce may also play a role, but it is not clear in which direction they will affect the relationships with the father and the mother.

Our third hypothesis argues that a divorce increases differences between the father and the mother in the relationships they have with their children. There are two mechanisms which may explain such a pattern. First, loyalty conflicts may play a role. Research has shown that the conflicts between parents which often occur in the divorce process lead to loyalty conflicts among children

(Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbusch, 1991). Loyalty conflicts create feelings of distress in children (Buchanan, Maccoby and Dornbusch, 1991; Amato and Afifi, 2006) and these feelings in turn motivate children to reconsider their relationships, *e.g.* by investing more in one relationship and less in the other. Because we are looking at divorces that occur at a young age and parent-child relationships at an older age, the question is how long children's loyalty conflicts continue after the divorce. Amato and Afifi (2006) show that even though children's feelings of being caught in the middle tend to decline after divorce, such feelings are still present 6–10 years after the divorce. One reason for this is that conflicts between former partners often linger on after divorce (Fischer, De Graaf and Kalmijn, 2005). As a result, children may still experience a loyalty conflict when they live on their own, and at that time, they can solve that conflict by either strengthening the ties with their mother or strengthening the ties with their father.

A second mechanism lies in compensation. When the relationship with one parent deteriorates after divorce, this not only can create a feeling of loss in the child, but it also leads to a decline in social and emotional support for the child. Especially for young adult children who are setting up an independent life, support from parents can be very important. Rather than viewing children as passive victims of divorce, one can also see children as active agents who are investing in relationships to achieve the goals they set for themselves. Following this reasoning, we argue that children try to compensate for a deteriorating relationship with one parent by intensifying the relationship with the other parent. Similarly, we feel that one parent will also be motivated to fill in the gap that the other parent leaves behind. Parents are often altruistically oriented toward their children (Suitor, Pillemer and Sechrist, 2006) and it is plausible that they want to limit the negative consequences that the children suffer because of the divorce. When one parent is not willing or able to maintain a good relationship with the child, the other parent may compensate. In sum, we think that both the notion of lingering loyalty conflicts and the notion of compensation predict increasing differences between father-child and mother-child relationships after divorce.

Data, Design, and Methods

Data

We combine data from three large-scale surveys from the Netherlands: the Netherlands Kinship Panel Study (NKPS) (Dykstra *et al.*, 2004), the Netherlands Longitudinal Lifecourse Study (NELLS) (De Graaf *et al.*, 2010), and

the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) (Scherpenzeel, 2009). The first two surveys were done face-to-face and the third was internet based. In the last survey, households without internet (or without broadband) received a broadband internet connection and were loaned a computer if they did not have one. All three surveys were based on high-quality national random samples of the population. The NELS contained an oversample of Turkish and Moroccan respondents but this sample is not used here. The main advantage of combining the surveys is that it yields a relatively large number of children with divorced parents. We discuss how we deal with problems of comparability later on.

We select respondents who were 18–45 years of age, whose parents were alive, and who were not living with (one of) their own parents or with other parent figures. The upper age limit of 45 was used because parental divorce is more exceptional in older generations. We excluded cases where the divorce occurred less than 5 years ago because we are interested in long-term effects. We also excluded cases where the divorce occurred after age 18 because divorces occurring at older ages have different effects on parent–child relationships (Aquilino, 1994). The final sample size for the analysis was 5,907 respondents of which 752 respondents experienced a parental divorce. The average age at which the child experienced the divorce of the parents was 9.8. The duration between the divorce and the time of the survey was 22.0 years, with a range from 5 to 43 years (Table 1).

Measurement

Contact refers to the frequency of face-to-face contact with the parent in the last 12 months. There were slight differences between surveys in the answering categories but this was solved by regrouping into five categories [never, one or a few times per year, one or a few times per month, one or a few times per week, and (nearly) every day]. We follow the custom of recoding categories to the approximate number of times for each category (e.g. weekly is coded into 52) and taking the natural logarithm.

Support is measured in the exact same way in NKPS and LISS. Four types of support were distinguished: help with household chores, help with other practical matters, giving advice, and informing about the other's well-being. For each type of support, it was asked how often the support was given or received in the past 3 months (never, occasionally, and often). We construct two scales, one for exchanging support with fathers and one for exchanging support with mothers. Giving support and receiving support were combined to

Table 1. Means and standard deviations of variables used in the analysis

	Mean (SD)	Valid N
NKPS (0/1)	0.413	5,907
NELS (0/1)	0.266	5,907
LISS (0/1)	0.321	5,907
Child's age	33.6 (6.45)	5,907
Daughter (0/1)	0.588	5,907
Child with partner (0/1)	0.738	5,907
Child with children (0/1)	0.546	5,907
Child tertiary educated (0/1)	0.421	5,882
Parents divorced (0/1)	0.127	5,907
Age at divorce	9.8 (5.5)	752
Father repartnered (0/1)	0.080	5,907
Mother repartnered (0/1)	0.057	5,907
Face-to-face contact with mother (ln)	3.29 (1.17)	5,900
Face-to-face contact with father (ln)	3.11 (1.26)	5,900
Support exchange with mother	2.00 (0.43)	4,263
Support exchange with father	1.90 (0.43)	4,263
Perceived quality mother	3.32 (0.79)	5,813
Perceived quality father	3.19 (0.85)	5,813
Conflict with mother (0/1)	0.217	3,846
Conflict with father (0/1)	0.181	3,846

Note: Conflict not in LISS; support not used in NELS.

Source: NKPS, NELS, and LISS (pooled analysis).

increase the reliability of the scale. Each scale had eight items and had a reasonable reliability ($\alpha = 0.72$ and 0.74 for fathers and mothers in NKPS and $\alpha = 0.82$ and 0.80 for fathers and mothers in LISS). The support items from NELS were not used because there was no clear way to make the items comparable with those in LISS and NKPS.

Perceived quality in the NKPS and LISS was measured with a single question asking children to evaluate their relationship with the father and the mother. Answering categories were very good (4), good (3), reasonable (2), and not good (1). In the NELS, the question was how satisfied the respondent was with the relationship. Answering categories were very satisfied (5), satisfied (4), not satisfied, not dissatisfied (3), somewhat dissatisfied (2), and very dissatisfied (1). To make this comparable with the NKPS/LISS, we combine 'somewhat' and 'very' dissatisfied. After this recoding, the frequency distributions of the NELS and NKPS/LISS variables for quality are reasonably similar which gives us confidence in the comparability of the two items.

Conflict was measured with one question about how often the child had conflict with the parent in the past 3 months. In the NKPS, three categories were

distinguished (not at all, once or twice, and several times). In the NELLS, four categories were distinguished (never, seldom, once in a while, and often). Never and seldom were combined to make it comparable with the NKPS, yielding similar frequency distributions. In LISS, no question on conflict was asked.

The following control variables are used: the child's age, the child's sex, the child's partner status, whether the child has children at home, the child's educational level, and the father's and mother's current partner status (living with a new partner or not). All these variables may be related to a parental divorce and are known to have effects on parent-child relationships (Brandt, Haberkern and Szydlik, 2009). We also include a main effect of the survey in all the models to address possible survey effects.

Models

We first use random and fixed effects linear regression models (for conflict, random and fixed effects logit models were used). In this analysis, fathers and mothers are nested within respondents. Hence, parents are the level 1 units ($n=11,814$) and respondents are the level 2 units ($n=5,907$). The random effects model combines differences within and between families. This model not only allows us to look at variables that vary within families but also at variables that are constant within families (e.g. child's education and the effect of divorce itself). The fixed effects model only focuses on differences within families and directly compares fathers and mothers. The model allows us to look at the effect of gender (of the parent) and the interaction of divorce and gender. The interaction effect tells us whether father-mother differences are increased in divorced families. The divorce effect itself is not estimated because it is constant within families.

To exploit the within-family design further, we also use a second approach in which a four-fold typology for each aspect of the parent-child relationship is the dependent variable:

- (a) a poor relationship with both parents,
- (b) a poor relationship with the father and a good relationship with the mother,
- (c) a poor relationship with the mother and a good relationship with the father,
- (d) a good relationship with both parents (the reference category).

To construct this typology, we dichotomized all items. For conflict, we make a distinction between any conflict and no conflict. For support, we use the mean as a cutoff point. For quality, we distinguish between (very) good

relationships on the one hand, and reasonable and not so good relationships on the other hand. For contact frequency, we use weekly contact or more as 'good'. We analyze the four-fold outcome using a multinomial logit model.

Findings

We first present descriptive results for the four aspects of parent-child relationships, using the four-fold typology as a tool (Figure 1). The large majority of children has good relationships with both parents but when parents are divorced, this is less common. Differences between married and divorced parents in the other three types of relationships depend on the aspect of the relationship that we are looking at. For contact and quality, we see that all the other combinations are more common among children of divorced parents. For support, only the types in which there is little support exchange with the father are more common among children of divorced parents. For conflict, combinations in which the child has conflict with either the mother or the father are more common among children of divorced parents. Although we always see a larger number of cases in which only the relationship with the father is poor among children of divorced parents, we also see relatively more cases in which only the relationship with the mother is poor, even though in an absolute sense, this combination remains infrequent.

Random and Fixed Effects Models

To facilitate the interpretation of the effects, the measures are standardized (for parents as whole). Using an empty model, we first examine how much of the variance is due to differences between and within families. For contact and support, rho is 0.75 and 0.72, which indicates high resemblance of parents within families. For quality and conflict, rho is 0.61 and 0.59, which is lower, but still high. Hence, relationships with fathers and mothers are highly correlated within the family and more so for measures that pertain to behaviour. Because parents can be visited or supported simultaneously, this seems plausible.

In the random effects models in Table 2, the main effect of divorce applies to mothers, the interaction of divorce and gender of the parent tells us whether the relationships with fathers are more (or less) affected. We see negative main effects of divorce on contact and quality and positive effects on conflict. This means that divorced mothers have less contact, lower quality relationships, and more conflict with their children than married mothers. No significant effect is observed for

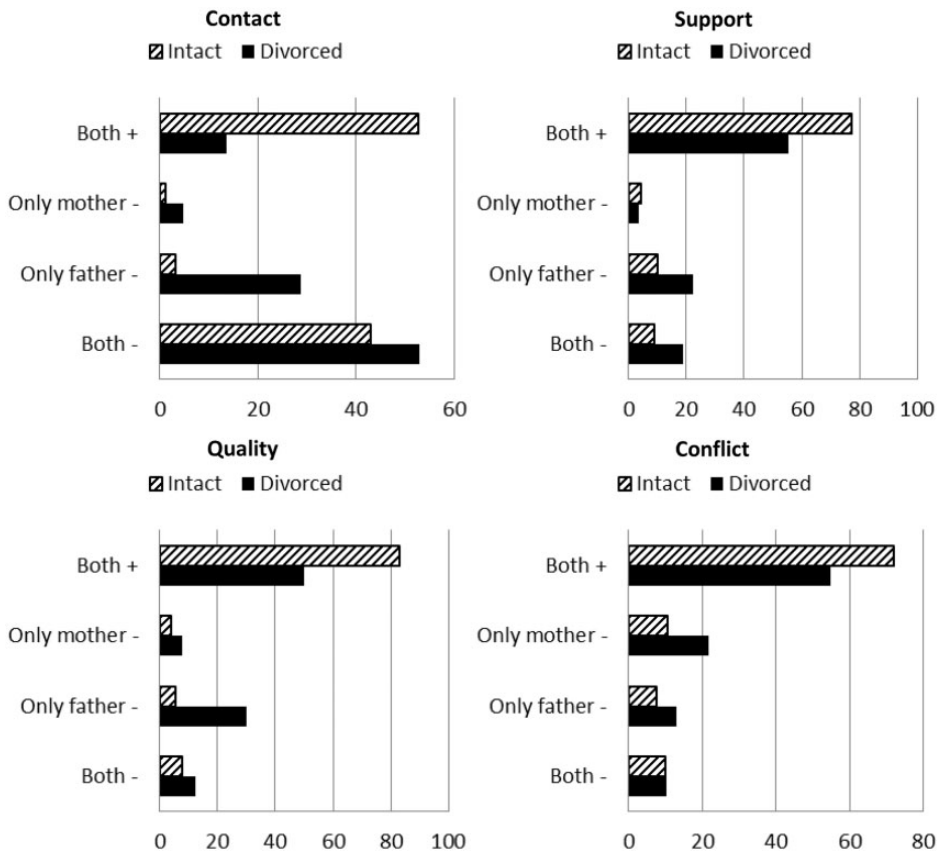


Figure 1 Combined relationships with parents by parental divorce

support exchange. The interaction effects show that the (negative) effects of divorce on contact, support, and quality are more negative for fathers. The implied effects for fathers—which can be interpreted in terms of Cohen's d —are substantial: $d = -1.04$ for contact, $d = -0.75$ for support, and $d = -1.0$ for quality. Conflict with fathers is also increased by divorce, but this effect is not larger than it is for mothers.

In the fixed effects models, the gender effect applies to married parents and the gender–divorce interaction tells us if gender differences are increased for divorced parents. The main effects of gender are negative, showing that among married parents, there is less contact, a lower quality relationship, and less support exchange with fathers than with mothers. After divorce, gender differences are increased, to the disadvantage of fathers, as can be seen from the negative interactions between divorce and gender of the parent. These interaction effects are virtually identical to those in the random effects models. The model for conflict shows a reversed gender difference: among married parents, mothers have more

conflict with children than fathers. The interaction of gender and divorce for conflict is not significant.

We also include repartnering in the model. In both the random effects model and the fixed effects model, we see negative effects of repartnering on contact, support, and quality. Hence, there is less contact, less support exchange, and a lower quality relationship with the repartnered parent than with the parent who did not repartner. The fixed effects model shows that for support exchange, the effect of repartnering is somewhat weaker when comparing repartnered fathers and single mothers than when comparing repartnered mothers and single fathers.

The model also includes an effect of the age at divorce. We imputed the mean age of the child at divorce for children with married parents. The value which we choose for this imputation does not affect the effect of the age at divorce. When imputing at the mean, the effect of parental divorce refers to the difference between children of married parents and children of divorced parents whose parents divorced at an average age.¹ We first discuss the main effect of the age at divorce

Table 2. Random and fixed effects linear and logit models of four aspects of relationships with fathers and mothers: unstandardized regression coefficients

	Face-to-face contact		Support exchange		Perceived quality		Conflict (logit)	
	Random effects	Fixed effects	Random effects	Fixed effects	Random effects	Fixed effects	Random effects	Fixed effects
NELLS	0.022				0.019		0.094	
LISS	−0.018		0.221*		0.072*			
Child's age	−0.019*		−0.030*		−0.022*		−0.020*	
Daughter	0.111*		0.131*		0.034		0.321*	
Child with partner	−0.038		−0.202*		0.081*		−0.861*	
Child with children	0.161*		0.042		−0.024		−0.052	
Child's tertiary educated	−0.313*		0.122*		0.028		0.000	
Father vs. mother	−0.444*	−0.446*	−0.329*	−0.330*	−0.346*	−0.348*	−0.888*	−0.732*
Parents divorced	−0.279*		−0.028		−0.269*		1.046*	
Father * divorced	−0.761*	−0.778*	−0.721*	−0.746*	−0.728*	−0.754*	−0.419	−0.151
Parents repartnered	−0.234*	−0.267*	−0.421*	−0.460*	−0.159*	−0.249*	−0.361	−0.023
Father * repartnered	0.036	0.072	0.218*	0.269*	0.098	0.165**	0.099	−0.081
Age at divorce	0.151*		−0.001		−0.018		−0.315	
Father's * age at divorce	0.404*	0.406*	0.170*	0.171*	0.270*	0.271*	0.590	0.413
Constant	0.611*	0.090*	1.066*	0.142*	0.770*	0.095*	−0.937*	
No. of parents	11,750	11,750	8,476	8,476	11,576	11,576	7,692	1,518
No. of children	5,875	5,875	4,238	4,238	5,788	5,788	3,846	759
Rho	0.772	0.805	0.741	0.783	0.621	0.689	0.591	
Variance between families	0.669	0.815	0.658	0.832	0.569	0.767	4.761	
Variance within families	0.198	0.198	0.230	0.230	0.347	0.347		

Note: Dependent variables standardized (except conflict). Age at divorce imputed at mean for married parents (see text). Survey effect in reference to NKPS. * $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.10$.

Source: NKPS, NELLS, LISS (pooled analysis).

in the random effects model. Because the interaction effect is included, this main effect applies to mothers only. For mothers, we see a positive and significant effect on contact and no effect on the other three aspects. For three aspects of the parent–child relationship (contact, support, and quality), we see significant interactions between gender of the parent and the age at divorce. The implied effects for fathers are all positive, showing that when fathers divorce at a later age of the child, the negative effect of divorce is reduced. For example, when the child was 0 at the time of divorce, the divorce effect on quality is $-0.269 - 0.728 = -0.997$. When the child was 18, the effect is $-0.269 - 0.728 + 1.8 \times (-0.018 + 0.270) = -0.543$, which is 45 per cent smaller. For support, the divorce effect for fathers is 41 per cent smaller when we compare these ages. For contact, the divorce effect for fathers is nullified when the divorce is experienced at age 18.

Multinomial Logit Models

In the multinomial logit model in Table 3, we again examine whether a parental divorce leads to a

deterioration of the child's relationship with his or her parents. In this case, however, three different negative outcomes are examined: a poor relationship with both parents, a poor relationship with only the mother, and a poor relationship with only the father. When we first focus on perceived quality, we see that all three negative outcomes are more common among children of divorced parents than among children of married parents. Hence, there is an increase from 'both parents positive' to 'both parents negative' when parents are divorced, but there are also shifts from 'both positive' to 'only one negative'. Although it is not surprising that the combination in which the relationship with only the father is poor is more common among children of divorced parents, some divorces also lead to a poor relationship with the mother without affecting the relationship with the father. This is clear evidence that a divorce leads to more inequality among parents.

The results for contact frequency are in line with the results for perceived quality. When we compare children of divorced and married parents, there is a shift from 'both frequent' to 'both infrequent', but combinations in

Table 3. Multinomial regression analyses of the combined relationships with father and mother for four aspects of the relationship: regression coefficients

	Face-to-face contact			Support exchange			Perceived quality			Conflict (reversed)			
	(a) Both poor	(b) Only father poor	(c) Only mother poor	(a) Both poor	(b) Only father poor	(c) Only mother poor	(a) Both poor	(b) Only father poor	(c) Only mother poor	(a) Both poor	(b) Only father poor	(c) Only mother poor	
NELLS	0.145*	-0.029	0.396**	-0.121	-0.482*	-0.716*	-0.235**	-0.614*	-0.112	***	0.064	-0.142	0.171
LISS	0.027	-0.333*	-0.477**	0.082*	0.005	0.026**	0.051	-0.153	-0.109	***	-0.021*	0.003	-0.015**
Age	0.039*	0.001	-0.009	-0.184**	0.481*	-0.672*	0.075*	0.024*	0.013	***	0.126	0.079	0.547*
Daughter	-0.281*	0.393*	-0.512*	0.101	-0.033	0.270	0.107	0.057	0.135	***	-0.763*	-0.615*	-0.281*
With partner	0.059	-0.282**	0.261	-0.256**	0.036	0.051	-0.251*	-0.294*	-0.049	***	0.110	-0.220	-0.159
With children	-0.444*	0.184	-0.309	0.056	0.012	0.016	0.034	-0.144	0.144	***	-0.161	0.104	0.231*
Tertiary educated	0.863*	0.224**	-0.051	1.223*	1.562*	-0.100	-0.172**	2.417*	1.009*	***	0.374	0.970*	1.182*
Parents divorced	1.395*	3.193*	2.252*	0.390	-0.320	1.665*	-0.311	-0.396*	0.249	***	-0.186	-0.331	-0.421
Mother repartnered	-0.114	-0.385	0.965*	0.470**	0.220	-0.623	0.391	0.047	0.031	***	-0.219	-0.157	-0.103
Father repartnered	0.771*	1.068*	-0.164	0.237	0.268	0.408	-0.284	-0.265**	0.400	***	0.042	0.154	-0.257
Age at divorce	-0.860*	-0.745*	-0.398	-4.473*	-2.042*	-3.183*	-4.516*	-2.829*	-3.970*	***	-0.893*	-2.029*	-1.434*
Constant	-0.765*	-2.276*	-2.804*										
Divorce effect on:													
F + M versus M	-0.857*			1.323*			0.015				-0.808*		
(a versus c)													
F + M versus F	-1.798*			-0.340			-1.393*				-0.597**		
(a versus b)													
N	5,882			3,135			5,882				3,846		
LR chi-square test	1,243			408			605				191		

*P < 0.05, **P < 0.10, ***P < 0.005. T is chi-square test for differential effects across contrasts.

Note: Reference category for dependent variable is good relationship with both. Survey effect reference category NKPS. See text for definition of 'poor'.

Source: NKPS, NELLS, LISS (pooled analysis).

which contact is infrequent with only one parent are also more common, and not just those combinations in which only contact with the father is infrequent. For support exchange, the results are somewhat different because here, there is no effect of divorce on the odds that only the mother has a poor relationship with the child. The results for conflict are perhaps the strongest evidence for the inequality hypothesis because here we see that there is no shift from 'conflict with neither' to 'conflict with both'. It is only one parent with whom conflict is increased by a divorce, either the mother or the father.

Another way of looking at the results in Table 3, is to focus on the effects on one parent conditional on the relationship with the other parent. In doing so, we follow Booth and Amato (1994), who first analyzed the problem of father–mother comparisons after divorce. Booth and Amato found that the effect of divorce on closeness to one parent was less negative when the child was less close to the other parent. We replicate those results here by examining two contrasts: the odds that there is a poor relation with the father given that the relation with the mother is poor (*i.e.* the contrast between a and c), and the odds that there is a poor relation with the mother given that the relation with the father is poor (*i.e.* the contrast between a and b). The former is a case of compensation by the father, the latter is a case of compensation by the mother. These tests are presented at the bottom of Table 3. For contact, quality, and conflict, we indeed find negative effects, which means that there is some sort of compensation working: if the relationship with one parent is poor, a divorce reduces the odds that the relationship with the other parent is poor. In two of the three cases, this effect operates in both directions (for fathers and mothers), in the case of quality, it only works for compensation by the mother. For support exchange, we find no evidence for compensation. Except for support exchange, these results confirm those of Booth and Amato (1994).

We finally discuss the effects of repartnering. When the mother has a new partner, the odds that only the relationship with the mother is poor are increased (for contact and support). The effects of the father's repartnering are less clear, although we do find that the father's repartnering increases the odds that contact with only the father is infrequent. These findings are partly in line with some earlier studies that suggest negative long-term effects of repartnering on parent–child relations (*e.g.* Clark and Kenney, 2010).

Because we pooled the surveys, it is also important to discuss the effects of the survey variables. There are somewhat higher levels of support in LISS than in NKPS, as can be seen from the effects in both Tables 2 and 3. As the questions were identical, this is probably due to design

differences. There are no other survey effects in Table 2. In Table 3, we see some additional effects, although they tend to be small. In NELS, it is less common that only the relationship with the father is poor. Perhaps, the question wording in NELS in terms of 'satisfaction' may have resulted in a less negative evaluation of fathers ('not good' may not always mean 'dissatisfied'). Omitting the LISS from this part of the analysis did not yield different effects of parental divorce on perceived quality, which gives us confidence in the pooling approach.

Conclusions

The focus in this article has been on comparing children's relationships with fathers and mothers within families. When we use a fixed effects model, we find the same patterns that were found in most previous studies: relationships with fathers are negatively affected by a divorce and relationships with mothers are also affected, but less strongly. When we use a multinomial logit model in which we compare different types of parent–child relationships, the within-family approach does yield new insights.

First, there is evidence for what we called 'common effects'. Among children of divorced parents, it is more common that the relationship with the father and the mother is 'poor'. This applies to contact, support, and the perceived quality. One interpretation is that children of divorced parents cannot see their parents at the same time like the children of married parents are able to do. This increases the chance that they see and support both parents less often. Another interpretation is that mothers and fathers experience psychological problems after divorce which reduces the attention they have for their (adult) children. Children may also blame their parents for the divorce which could lead to a more detached attitude toward both parents.

A second new finding is that a divorce increases inequality between parents. Among divorced parents, it is more common that the relationship with only one parent is poor. Moreover, this is not only because of a drop in the quality of the relationship with the father. Among divorced parents, it is also more common that the child has a poor relationship with the mother and a good relationship with the father. We interpret these results in terms of loyalty conflicts and compensation effects. Because the relationships between parents are strained after divorce, children may experience conflicts of loyalty which they may solve by disengaging from one parent and interacting more with the other parent. Children and parents may also try to compensate for a deteriorating relationship with one parent. When a divorced parent sees that the relationship with the other parent becomes poor,

he or she may try to invest more in the child to ensure that the child receives a sufficient amount of support. In line with this, the models show that when the relationship with one parent is poor, a divorce increases the quality of the relationship with the other parent. The implication of this finding is also important in that it suggests that—from the children's point of view—the disadvantages of having a poor relationship with one parent after divorce can be compensated by a stronger bond to the other parent. In other words, for most children of divorce, there is no accumulation of poor intergenerational relationships.

A third new finding, although one that is not *per se* linked to the within-family design, is that there is no gender difference in the effect of divorce on parent-child conflict. Our interpretation is that even though there may be more conflict with the father after divorce because he gives less support, there is also more opportunity for conflict with the mother because she is more involved in the child's life. Relationships with divorced mothers can be intensive yet also conflictual, a relationship type sometimes called ambivalent (Van Gaalen and Dykstra, 2006).

Although the interpretations need further study, our analyses clearly demonstrate that a divorce is associated with more asymmetry in the relationships that children have with their father and mother. In one sense, this is another way in which (former) partners grow apart after divorce. This is a new finding that is produced by the within-family approach. Past research on parent-child relations which used within-family differences has mainly focused on differences among children in the same family (Suitor, Pillemer and Sechrist, 2006; Davey, Eggebeen and Savla 2007; Leopold and Raab, 2011). Future analyses may combine that approach with the present approach by comparing both among parents and among children. The substantive arguments used in this paper may be informative for such analyses. For example, if there are loyalty conflicts in children, it is possible that some children lean towards one parent while other children lean toward the other parent. Similarly, compensation may take the form of a division of labour between former spouses where the father is more strongly linked with one child and the mother is more strongly linked with the other. Such analyses could shed new light on notions of favouritism, *i.e.* parents favouring one child over the other (Suitor, Pillemer and Sechrist, 2006). We see the present within-family comparison as another step toward the examination of divorce effects on the complex network of family relationships.

Note

1. The model is $Y_i = b_0 + b_1 \text{DIV}_i + b_2 \text{AGEDIV}_i + e_i$. If we impute MEANAGE for non-divorced parents,

the difference between the children of divorced and non-divorced parents is $(b_0 + b_1 + b_2 \text{AGEDIV}_i + e_i) - (b_0 + b_2 \text{MEANAGE} + e_i)$. This difference equals b_1 when $b_2 (\text{AGEDIV}_i - \text{MEANAGE}) = b_1$ when the children of divorced parents experienced the divorce at an average age.

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