

# The Differential Role of Fathers' and Mothers' Parenting Styles, as a Function of the Custody Agreement: Post-divorce Family Adjustment and Children's Symptomatology\*

El rol diferencial del estilo parental de padres y madres como función del acuerdo de custodia: Ajuste familiar post-divorcio

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## ABSTRACT

The present study aims to analyze differences in parenting styles of fathers and mothers, considering the custody arrangements and their impact on children's symptomatology, considering post-divorce family adjustment as a mediator variable. Participants were 286 divorced or separated parents with high interparental conflict. Through ANCOVAs, it was observed that after divorce, fathers' and mothers' parenting practices contributed in equal measure to children's psychological well-being. Non-custodial fathers used a more indulgent style whereas custodial mothers showed a more critical style. In both cases, the mediation results using PROCESS 2.15 showed how each parenting style was related to the children's psychological well-being through postdivorce family adaptation. This study supports the need to consider both the type of custody and postdivorce family adjustment in the comprehension of the impact of parental styles on children's symptomatology. The results have important implications in psychotherapeutic and clinical orientations.

## Keywords

custody; divorce; children's symptomatology; parental styles; family adjustment to divorce.

## RESUMEN

El presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar las diferencias en los estilos de crianza de padres y madres, considerando los acuerdos de custodia y su impacto en la sintomatología de los hijos, considerando el ajuste familiar post-divorcio como variable mediadora.

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Los participantes fueron 286 padres divorciados o separados con alto conflicto interparental. A través de ANCOVA, se observó que después del divorcio, las prácticas parentales de padres y madres contribuyeron en igual medida al bienestar psicológico de los niños. Los padres sin custodia utilizaron un estilo más indulgente mientras que las madres con custodia mostraron un estilo más crítico. En ambos casos, los resultados de la mediación utilizando el PROCESO 2.15 mostraron cómo cada estilo de crianza se relacionaba con el bienestar psicológico de los niños a través de la adaptación familiar posterior al divorcio. Este estudio sustenta la necesidad de considerar tanto el tipo de custodia como el ajuste familiar postdivorcio en la comprensión del impacto de los estilos parentales sobre la sintomatología de los niños. Los resultados tienen implicaciones importantes en las orientaciones psicoterapéuticas y clínicas.

**Palabras clave**

custodia; divorcio; sintomatología de los niños; estilos parentales; ajuste familiar al divorcio.

Many investigations have shown the influence of different types of parenting on children's psychological adjustment (Chang, Olson, Sameroff, & Sexton, 2011; Liem, Cavell, & Lustig, 2010; McKinney, Milone, & Renk, 2011). However, most of these studies have focused on the figure of the mother (Scanlon & Ekins, 2015; Stright & Yeo, 2014), excluding the father's relationship with his children. Although some of these studies argue that the mother's role is the most influential in the child's behavior, increasingly more studies (Lundahl, Tollefson, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2008; Martin, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010; Paquette, 2004; Trautmann-Villalba, Gschwendt, Schmidt, & Laucht, 2006; Yin, Li, & Su, 2012) find at least as significant effects in the fathers' role as in the mothers'.

However, this search for regularity in the parental functions carried out by fathers and mothers can be altered when the structure is modified, as occurs in divorce. Thus, several longitudinal studies have found increases in inconsistent discipline, a decrease in affection, and less emotional availability for the children in divorced families (Lengua, Wolchik, Sandler, & West, 2000; Sutherland, Altenhofen, & Biringen, 2012). In general, parenting styles are negatively affected by divorce, and this alteration is related

to increases in the child's emotional, behavioral, and social problems (Sutherland et al., 2012).

In Spain, 65% of the children undergo the divorce of their parents, and, while there has been a very rapid increase in custody shared by both parents and in the father's sole custody, more than half of the custodies are still maternal (Instituto Nacional de Estadística [National Statistics Institute], INE, 2017).

Studies examining parental styles of post-divorce custodial mothers have indicated the obvious challenge that these mothers face when trying to integrate their new personal situation and the upbringing of the children. This can be a major source of stress for these mothers (Cohen, Finzi-Dottan, & Tangir-Dotan, 2014). Indeed, during the divorce process, custodial mothers tend to show higher levels of stress and hostility influenced by conflicts associated with the divorce (economic problems, conflict with the ex-partner, etc.) and due to the adjustment to new parenting roles and work overload (Sutherland et al., 2012). This situation may affect mother-child relations negatively, reducing the warmth and emotional involvement between them, giving rise to more apathetic relationships or even emotionally or affectively negative relationships (Cooper, McLanahan, Meadows, & Brooks-Gunn, 2009; Jurma, 2015). In fact, some studies (Wallerstein & Lewis, 2004; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Rosenthal, 2013) indicate that, after a separation or divorce, custodial mothers are less receptive to the child's needs, besides being physically less available.

With respect to the fathers, studies addressing the long-term consequences of divorce in children have shown that, after divorce, the emotional father-child bonds usually weaken, due to the allocation of custody to the mothers, which reduces the fathers' opportunities to care for and participate in their children's lives (King & Sobolewski, 2006; Schwartz & Finley, 2005). In this sense, some authors (Adamsons, 2018) indicate the existence of barriers to fathers' positive participation with their children, mainly derived from the social attitudes favoring maternal care. This lower time shared can also lead to a decrease in affection

and control variables (Bastaitis & Mortelmans, 2017), which is linked to greater permissiveness or a more indulgent style that many studies attribute to non-custodial fathers (Campana, Henderson, Stolberg, & Schum, 2008). This finding could be explained from a compensation hypothesis, that is, the non-custodial father would be less willing to set limits in the hopes of favoring the emotional bonding. Precisely, even though the contexts in which children and parents develop can cause parental educational styles to acquire different meanings for the children (Capano, González, & Massonnier, 2016; García & Gracia, 2009), most research on divorced parents supports the hypothesis that this parenting style based on permissive discipline and with the parents being less available is associated with children's emotional, behavioral, and social problems (Guajardo, Snyder, & Petersen, 2009; Schudlich & Cummings, 2007; Stallman & Ohan, 2016; Sutherland et al., 2012). Whereas, on the contrary, parenting based on high levels of warmth, support, positive communication, and low levels of conflict and negativity, as well as consistent and appropriate discipline, usually has a positive impact on children's well-being (Fabricius, Suh, & Lamb, 2017; Mason, Barnett, Lee, Partridge, & Stacks, 2011; Sandler, Wheeler, Braver, & Kaslow, 2013). In any case, there are not many studies (Adamsons, 2018; Bastaitis & Mortelmans, 2017; Bastaitis & Mortelmans, 2016; Elam, Sandler, Wolchik, Tein, & Rogers, 2019) that address the psychological impact of fathers' and mothers' differential parenting practices on their children as a function of postdivorce custody. This would require further studies to deepen our understanding of postdivorce parental styles and their impact on children's symptomatology.

However, it is important to bear in mind that, in this context, parenting practices may be affected by and also affect postdivorce family adjustment. Divorce is not a punctual event, but a lengthy and complex process that involves an important vital readjustment (Amato, 2000; Wang & Amato, 2000; Yilmaz & Fişiloglu, 2005), which is accompanied by changes in almost all areas of the individual's life (emotional, social,

residential, economic) that will affect the parents and the children.

Some essential aspects that hinder adjustment to the parents' divorce, and as a result, of the entire family group, are the parents' psychological and emotional difficulties, conflict with the ex-partner, difficulties in co-parenting, as well as the negative consequences of the separation for the children (Yárnöz-Yaben & Comino, 2010). All these variables can contribute to increase the risk of psychological problems in the children beyond the divorce itself (Yárnöz-Yaben, Comino, & Garmendia, 2012).

To aid our understanding of the role of parenting in this relationship, numerous investigations have shown that, when facing the difficulties of family adaptation to divorce, there are negative changes in the relationship with the children, and parenting difficulties emerge (Anthony et al., 2005; Taylor, Purswell, Lindo, Jayne, & Fernando, 2011; Vandervalk, Spruijt, DeGoede, Meeus, & Maas 2004). This decrease in the quality of parenting and its consequent impact on children's psychological well-being is more prominent in the years following the divorce (Keating, Sharry, Murphy, Rooney, & Carr, 2016) or in more conflictive divorces (Sandler, Miles, Cookston, & Braver, 2008). On the other hand, ineffective parenting (indulgent, hostile) could deteriorate family adaptation to divorce by affecting the postdivorce interparental relationship and the degree of involvement in the parent-child relationship of the non-custodial parent, which could also alter the family arrangements and influence the children's well-being.

In fact, there are several studies developed in other areas (Chen, Wu, & Yeh, 2016) that have confirmed that parenting and the parent-child relationships (Shek, 2001; Li, Bai, Zhang, & Chen, 2018) were significant predictors of family functioning. Specifically, Tancred and Greeff (2015), in a sample of children diagnosed with ADHD, related the parenting styles of the mothers, as well as the quality of the mother-child relationships to the strategies and ability of the families to cope with and adapt to stressors.

However, to date, there are no studies in the field of divorce that have addressed this relationship.

In short, the data highlight the relationship between parenting styles of both parents and children's symptomatology, and the negative impact of divorce and the associated custody arrangements on such parenting styles. In addition, research has pointed out that postdivorce family adjustment difficulties (parents' emotional difficulties, conflict with the ex-partner, economic challenges...) lead to an impoverishment of parenting practices. However, so far, the differential role of the parents' diverse styles depending on the type of custody, how these patterns will affect subsequent family adjustment to divorce, and the joint impact of both variables on the children's symptomatology have not been examined.

The present study aims to contribute to this understanding, focusing on a context of high interparental conflict and analyzing the role of above-mentioned variables on children's internalizing and externalizing symptoms, specifically on anxiety and aggressive behavior, as these variables are the most frequently considered in the research. We propose the hypothesis that both parents, regardless of the type of custody, will play a role in the children's symptomatology, and negative parental styles (i.e., parenting based on criticism and hostility or indulgent parenting) and poorer postdivorce family adjustment will be relevant factors in the comprehension of such symptoms. Specifically, the main hypothesis states that the differences in parenting patterns between non-custodial fathers and custodial mothers will be related to the children's symptomatology through adjustment to divorce. In this sense, non-custodial fathers' higher levels of indulgent parenting patterns will be related to children's higher levels of anxiety/depression and aggressiveness due to the negative relationship with adjustment to divorce. And custodial mothers' higher levels of criticism-rejection will also be related to children's higher levels of anxiety/depression and aggressiveness because of the negative relationship with adjustment to divorce.

This hypothesis involves pre-verification, as the literature points out, of the following aspects:

1) Custodial fathers will show more indulgence than custodial-mothers, non-custodial mothers, and custodial fathers; 2) Custodial mothers will show more criticism than non-custodial fathers, custodial fathers, and non-custodial mothers; 3) Differences in parental patterns (i.e., criticism or indulgence) between noncustodial fathers and custodial mothers will be related to the children's anxious/depressive and aggressive symptomatology through the adjustment to divorce. Specifically, in comparison with non-custodial fathers, the custodial mother will be associated with children's greater anxious/depressive symptomatology through the higher levels of criticism that these mothers show and their negative relationship with the family adjustment to divorce. Likewise, compared with custodial mothers, non-custodial fathers will be associated with children's greater anxious/depressive symptomatology and aggressiveness through the fathers' higher levels of indulgence and the negative relationship of indulgence with family adjustment to divorce.

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants were 286 parents in a situation of divorce/separation who attended family visitation centers and other public facilities for the management of custody due to their high interparental conflict. The sample, of Spanish nationality and Caucasian race in its entirety, was made up of 112 males (39%) and 174 females (61%), with 29% of cases in joint custody. The men and women who made up the sample belonged to different family units. According to the relationship between gender and type of custody, 57% were custodial mothers, 25% non-custodial fathers, 14% custodial fathers, and 4% non-custodial mothers. Most of the participants had been separated from their ex-partner for more than 3 years (52%), or between 1 and 2 years (20%), or 2 to 3 years (14%). Only 13% of

the participants had been separated less than 1 year.

The mean age of the participants was 40.5 years ( $SD = 6.61$ ), and most of them had one (57%) or two children (35%). Less common were parents with 3 (6%), 4 (2%), 5 ( $< 1\%$ ), or 7 children ( $< 1\%$ ). The age of the children ranged from 1 year to the age of majority, with a mean age of 8.34 years ( $SD = 4.22$ ). Concerning gender, 51% of the children were female and 49% were male.

Most of the sample reported being actively working (71%) or unemployed (23%), whereas 6% reported being on sick-leave, disabled, or retired. The predominant educational levels were: high school/vocational training (33%) and primary education (33%), followed by middle careers (15%) and higher careers (12%). Master's Degree/Ph.D. (4%) or studies below primary education (3%) were rare.

Finally, with reference to the sample, two exclusion criteria were taken into account; domestic violence and serious psychopathological problems, as these situations represent specific processes that require adapted interventions. As criteria, the existence of an active restraining order associated with high levels of violence, as well as the existence of prior psychiatric diagnosis collected from the history by psychosocial teams, were taken into account.

### Measures

Some of the variables, such as type of custody and number and age of the children, were collected through an ad hoc questionnaire along with other descriptive variables of the participants.

The rest of the variables were collected through the following instruments:

#### Anxiety/depression.

To evaluate anxiety/depression, the Anxiety/Depression subscale of the *Child Behavior Checklist*, parents reporting on their children's symptoms (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991) was used in its Spanish version adapted by

Sardinero, Pedreira Massa, and Muñiz (1997). This instrument evaluates the presence of psychopathology in the child during the last 6 months. The Anxiety/Depression subscale measures children's feelings of agitation, loneliness, or fear, as reported by the parents. In the subsequent analyses, the raw scores of the variable were used. Examples of items are "Seems sad for no apparent reason" or "Nervous or tense." The items were rated on a 3-point scale (0 = not true; 1 = a bit true, sometimes true; 2 = very often or fairly often true). Mean reliability values were high ( $\alpha = .77$ ,  $\omega = .78$ ). The validity of this instrument has been shown in a significant number of works (Cohen, Costello, & McConaughy, 1982; Sardinero, Pedreira Massa, & Muñiz, 1997).

#### Aggressiveness.

Like anxiety/depression, this variable was measured with the Aggressiveness subscale of the *Child Behavior Checklist*, parents reporting on their children's symptoms (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991) in its Spanish version adapted by Sardinero, Pedreira Massa, and Muñiz (1997). In this subscale, parents are asked how often their children get into fights, break objects, are disobedient, or display other symptoms of aggression. In subsequent analyses, the raw scores of the variable were used. Examples of items are "Breaks family members' or other children's belongings," "Hits other people," or "Is disobedient." The mean reliability was high ( $\alpha = .92$ ,  $\omega = .92$ ).

#### Criticism.

For the study of this variable, we used the Criticism-Rejection subscale of the "Escala de Afecto- versión padres" (EA-P [Scale of Affection - Parent Version]; Bersabé, Fuentes, & Motrico, 2001), which evaluates parents' criticism, rejection, and lack of trust in their children. Examples of items on this scale are "What he/she does is wrong" or "I'd like my child to be different." The subscale consists of 10 items

that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). The reliability of this subscale is high ( $\alpha = .72$ ,  $\omega = .72$ ).

The convergent validity of both this scale and the "Escala de Normas y Exigencias" (ENE; Rules and Demands Scale), used to measure the indulgent style in this study, is supported by the high correlations with other questionnaires that supposedly measure the same constructs (IPPA, PAQ, and 4E) (Bersabé, Fuentes, & Motrico, 2001).

### *Indulgence.*

This variable was studied with a subscale of the "Escala de Normas y Exigencias" (ENE) [Scale of Rules and Demands]; Fuentes, Motrico, & Bersabé, 1999), which assesses parents' indulgent style of establishing and enforcing rules. Examples of items on this scale are "I say 'yes' to everything he/she asks for" or "I give him/her total freedom to do whatever he/she wants." It consists of 8 items that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). The reliability of this subscale is high ( $\alpha = .73$ ,  $\omega = .74$ ).

### *Family group's adjustment to divorce.*

To study this variable, we used the "Cuestionario de Adaptación al Divorcio-Separación" (CAD-S [Questionnaire of Adjustment to the Divorce-separation]; Yárnoz-Yaben & Comino, 2010). It is composed of 20 items that are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). This questionnaire evaluates children's adaptation to divorce as reported by the parent. It consists of 4 factors: psychological and emotional difficulties, which describe anger at the ex-partner, ideas that the separation will never be overcome, difficulty believing that one is really separated, and obsessive interest in the current activities of the ex-partner; conflict with the ex-partner, which reflects arguments and disagreements with the ex-partner; willingness to engage in coparenting, which describes the ex-partner's collaboration to

work together for the benefit of the children, and negative consequences of divorce-separation for children, which reflects the responding parent's belief that the divorce has negatively affected their children: lower school grades, worsening of the parent's relationship with the children, financial difficulties to support the children, etc. Examples of scale items are "Since the divorce, I can't support my children financially as I did before," "Since the divorce, I often feel depressed (insomnia, crying, difficulty getting up in the morning)," "Since the divorce, my ex-partner and I have fought or criticized each other when the children were around," or "My ex-partner helps me to raise our children."

Parental psychological problems, negative consequences in children and conflict with the ex-partner dimensions show negative and significant correlations with each other, with values between .34 and .39. None of the three dimensions relate significantly to the coparentality dimension (Yárnoz-Yaben et al. 2012; Yárnoz-Yaben & Comino, 2012). In line with the original authors (Yárnoz-Yaben & Comino, 2010), the family adaptation to divorce is calculated by subtracting the other three dimensions from coparentality. This global dimension correlates positively and significantly with coparentality ( $r = .77$ ), and negatively and significantly with parental psychological problems ( $r = -.43$ ), negative consequences in the children ( $r = -.48$ ), and conflict with the ex-partner ( $r = -.52$ ) (Yárnoz-Yaben et al. 2012; Yárnoz-Yaben & Comino, 2012).

The reliability index (Cronbach alpha) of the total scale is .77, and .78, .80, .72, and .65 for each of the four factors. The instrument also has adequate construct validity (Yárnoz-Yaben & Comino, 2010).

### *Procedure*

This is a cross-sectional study, which is part of a more extensive longitudinal study. Data were collected during the years 2016 and 2017 in 12 family visitation centers (Spain). The participants had to be in charge of one or more

minor children to participate in the study. All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study. At all times, we guaranteed the voluntariness and confidentiality of the data. The questionnaires were applied individually in the presence of researchers in order to resolve any doubts. The exclusion criterion was having a diagnosis of severe psychopathological disorders or the existence of domestic violence. The criteria of the reference professional or the existence of an active restraining order were considered for this circumstance.

This study was approved by the University of Deusto. All procedures contributing to this work complied with the original declaration of Helsinki.

## Results

Descriptive statistics by group (i.e., non-custodial fathers and custodial mothers) and the correlations between the target variables are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Study Variables

Variable	Total sample (n = 286)		Fathers				Mothers				1	2	3	4	5	6
			Custodial (n = 41)		Non-custodial (n = 71)		Custodial (n = 163)		Non-custodial (n = 11)							
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD						
1. Children's mean age	8.41	4.27	9.40	4.22	8.74	4.57	7.82	4.05	9.55	3.58						
2. Number of children	1.57	0.79	1.58	0.78	1.51	0.69	1.6	0.85	1.36	0.51	0.38**					
3. Criticism	15.27	3.84	14.68	3.97	14.30	3.27	15.79	3.89	14	4.34	0.07	0.04				
4. Indulgence	13.71	4.18	13.88	4.03	14.89	4.32	12.85	3.89	15.18	4.87	0.16	0.04	0.23			
5. Adjustment to divorce	-0.20	1.23	-0.11	1.33	0.06	1.07	-0.3	1.27	-0.79	0.93	0.09	-0.06	-0.16*	-0.19**		
6. Anxiety/ depression	2.06	1.72	1.60	1.43	1.58	1.49	2.35	1.84	2.52	1.49	0.17	0.09	0.32**	-0.33***	0.36**	
7. Aggressiveness	2.34	1.88	1.76	1.48	1.75	1.51	2.74	2.01	2.5	2.11	0.11	-0.04	0.55***	-0.31***	0.08	0.57**

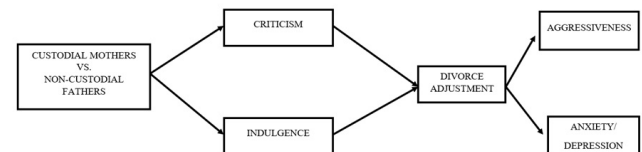
Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

First, we analyzed the differences in parental styles (i.e., criticism and indulgence) among the groups of non-custodial fathers and custodial mothers. For this purpose, we performed two ANCOVAs (one per dependent variable) including the group as factor, and the number of children, the children's mean age, and the time since separation as covariates.

The omnibus effect of the ANCOVA was significant, indicating group differences in criticism,  $F(3, 260) = 3.58, p = .014, \eta^2_p = .04$ ,

and indulgence,  $F(3, 260) = 4.37, p = .005, \eta^2_p = .05$ . In particular, custodial mothers showed higher levels of criticism ( $M = 15.81, SD = 3.85$ ) and lower levels of indulgence ( $M = 12.86, SD = 3.95$ ) than non-custodial fathers (criticism:  $M = 14.43, SD = 3.25$ ; indulgence:  $M = 14.93, SD = 4.34$ ).

Given the significant differences found, we examined how the differences in parental practices (i.e., criticism and indulgence) between custodial mothers and non-custodial fathers could influence the levels of adjustment to divorce and children's symptomatology (i.e., anxiety/depression and aggressiveness) (Figure 1). With this aim, we analyzed our hypotheses through serial mediations with PROCESS 2.15 (Hayes, 2013). In particular, we tested four models, two per dependent variable (i.e., aggressiveness and anxiety/depression) and two per parental style (i.e., criticism and indulgence) (Table 2 and Figure 2). As in ANCOVA, we included the number of children, children's mean age, and time since separation as covariates in all the regression analyses.



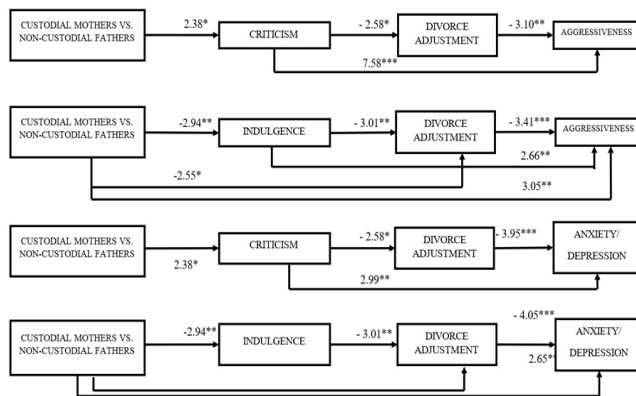
**Figure 1.**  
Hypothesized model for both parental groups (i.e., custodial mothers and non-custodial fathers).

**Table 2**  
*Indirect Differential Effects of the Groups of  
 Custodial Mothers and Non-Custodial Fathers in  
 Children's Symptomatology*

Dependent Variable	Model	$r^2$	Indirect effect	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Aggressiveness	1	0.38	CMvsNCF → Criticism → Adjustment to divorce → Aggressiveness	0.03*	0.02	0.01	0.09
			CMvsNCF → Criticism → Aggressiveness	0.36*	0.16	0.09	0.72
			CMvsNCF → Adjustment to divorce → Aggressiveness	0.09	0.07	-0.02	0.27
	2	0.2	CMvsNCF → Indulgence → Adjustment to divorce → Aggressiveness	-0.05*	0.03	-0.13	-0.02
			CMvsNCF → Indulgence → Aggressiveness	-0.18*	0.09	-0.43	-0.04
			CMvsNCF → Adjustment to divorce → Aggressiveness	0.20*	0.10	0.04	0.44
Anxiety/ depression	3	0.21	CMvsNCF → Criticism → Adjustment to divorce → Anxiety/depression	0.04*	0.02	0.01	0.11
			CMvsNCF → Criticism → Anxiety/depression	0.15*	0.08	0.03	0.36
			CMvsNCF → Adjustment to divorce → Anxiety/depression	0.12	0.09	-0.03	0.31
	4	0.19	CMvsNCF → Indulgence → Adjustment to divorce → Anxiety/depression	-0.06*	0.03	-0.15	-0.02
			CMvsNCF → Indulgence → Anxiety/depression	-0.11	0.08	-0.32	< 0.01
			CMvsNCF → Adjustment to divorce → Anxiety/depression	0.22*	0.11	0.05	0.46

Note. CMvsNCF = Custodial-mother vs.

Non-custodial father (0 = non-custodial father, 1 = custodial mother), SE = Bootstrap standard error, LLCI = Bootstrap 95% lower limit confidence interval, ULCI = Bootstrap 95% upper limit confidence interval. Bootstrap samples = 1000. \*Significant indirect effect at 0.05 level = 95% confidence interval does not



**Figure 2.**  
*Significant results of the final mediation models.*  
 \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Regarding criticism, the results of Models 1 and 3 indicated that belonging to the group of custodial mothers versus non-custodial fathers was not directly related to anxiety/depression or aggressiveness, and only indirectly through differences in criticism and adaptation to divorce. Specifically, two indirect relationships were observed. The first indicated that the differences between parent groups in criticism mediated the relationship between the parental group and children's anxiety/depression and

aggressiveness. Thus, higher levels of criticism-rejection in custodial mothers compared to non-custodial fathers were related to higher levels of anxiety/depression. The second indirect effect showed that the differences in criticism between custodial mothers and non-custodial fathers were related to the levels of children's anxiety/depression due to their effect on adaptation to divorce. Specifically, the custodial mothers showed higher levels of criticism-rejection than the non-custodial fathers, an aspect that was related to lower adaptation to divorce, and at the same time, to children's postdivorce symptoms, to the extent that anxious/depressive and aggressive symptomatology were higher. The first model explained 38% of the variance in aggressiveness, and the third model explained 21% of the variance of the children's anxiety/depression.

Regarding indulgence, Models 2 and 4 indicated that belonging to the group of custodial mothers or non-custodial fathers had both a direct and an indirect relationship with children's anxiety/depression and aggressiveness. The direct effect indicated that custodial mothers perceived higher levels of anxiety and aggressiveness in their children than did non-custodial fathers.

At the same time, two significant indirect relationships, common to anxiety/depression and aggressiveness, were observed. The first indicated that the custodial mothers showed lower levels of adaptation to divorce than the non-custodial fathers, which, in turn, was related to higher levels of anxiety/depression and aggressiveness in the children. In contrast, the second indirect effect identified chained mediation, insofar as the differences between parents in the indulgent style were related to anxiety/depression and aggressiveness, through postdivorce family adaptation. Specifically, lower levels of the indulgent style in the custodial mothers compared to the non-custodial fathers were related to better postdivorce family adaptation and to lower the levels of anxiety/depression and aggressiveness. The third indirect effect indicated that lower levels of the indulgent style in the custodial mothers compared to the non-custodial fathers were not related to



anxiety/depression, but they were related to aggressiveness (Table 2). The second model explained 20% of the variance of aggressiveness, and the fourth model explained 19% of the variance of anxiety/depression in the children.

## Discussion

The goal of this research was to analyze the differential role of fathers' and mothers' parenting practices in their children's symptomatology, taking into account the custody arrangements and postdivorce family adjustment. The results of this study allow us to defend the hypothesis that, in the context of divorce, both parents' child-rearing styles contribute to the children's symptomatology. Similar results were obtained by Bastaits and Mortelmans (2014) and Bastaits, Ponnet, and Mortelmans (2014, who analyzed the parenting styles of both parents after a divorce. The results of this study indicated that belonging to the group of custodial mothers or non-custodial fathers had no direct effect on the children's symptomatology, but it did exert an indirect effect through the differences in parenting and family adjustment to divorce.

Firstly, the results showed a significant difference in the parental roles of the father and the mother regarding the variable criticism-rejection. This factor is characterized by communication based on criticism and the parents' lack of trust in their children (Bersabé et al. 2001). Specifically, the mothers in our sample, most of them custodial mothers, showed higher levels of criticism-rejection than the fathers, mostly non-custodians. In this regard, the results of the available research in the literature (Jurma, 2015; Zimmerman, Brown, & Portes, 2004) reveal that custodial mothers are more likely than mothers from two-parent families to suffer more stress and be less effective in the education of their children, showing higher levels of conflict with them and more negative parenting behaviors. These mothers may be more reactive or more hostile in their parenting style, and may show less warmth, sensitivity, and

flexibility in their relations with their children compared to mothers in two-parent families.

On another hand, the non-custodial men in our study showed higher levels of indulgent parenting style than the custodial mothers. These data are consistent with the literature, as it seems that the mothers or fathers who do not have custody of their children tend to exert a more permissive parenting style compared with custodial fathers and fathers with shared custody (Bastaits et al., 2015; Campana et al., 2008). This has been explained by some authors by the importance of the time that fathers and children spend together (King, 2006; King & Sobolewski, 2006; Pasley & Braver, 2004; Peters & Ehrenberg, 2008). Our data are consistent with the results of Bastaits and Mortelmans (2017), who pointed out that, as the type of custody interferes with the resource of time and limits the parent's role of support and control, the parent would attempt to offset it through a permissive/indulgent style based on affection, but with a low level of normative control.

Secondly, the results of this study suggest that parental practices that can be interpreted as negative (criticism-rejection and indulgent discipline) tend to favor the children's symptomatology, specifically the emergence of anxious and aggressive behaviors. Although this result seems obvious due to the literature on the subject (Guajardo et al., 2009; Park & Bauer, 2002; Querido, Warner, & Eyberg, 2002; Stallman & Ohan, 2016), the present study allows us to demonstrate this link even when controlling for the type of custody, thereby contributing to the existing studies that jointly analyze this variable when attempting to understand the differential role of the two parents.

Thirdly, as indicated by the results of our research, the relationship between fathers' parenting and children's symptomatology could be explained by the family adjustment to divorce, in accordance with the approaches of authors such as Trinder, Kellet, and Swift (2008) or Yárnoz-Yaben et al. (2012). In this sense, in our study, we found that certain parenting styles (criticism-rejection and

indulgent style) by custodial and non-custodial fathers appear to reduce family adjustment to divorce, increasing the children's levels of anxiety/depression and aggressiveness. On the contrary, custodial mothers' lower levels of indulgent style mitigated the negative effect on adjustment to divorce, thereby contributing to reduce the children's levels of anxiety/depression and aggression. The variables that reflect the level of family adjustment to divorce are the parents' psychological difficulties, conflict with the ex-partner, willingness to co-parent, as well as the negative consequences for the children (Yárnoz-Yaben & Comino, 2010). But to date, although the impact on the parental practices of these variables related to adjustment to divorce has been analyzed (Fabricius & Luecken 2007; Lamela, Figueiredo, Bastos, & Feinberg, 2016; Rhoades et al., 2011; Zimmerman et al., 2005), the present study highlights that the impact can have even more explanatory power in the other direction, that is, towards worse parental styles, more conflict with the ex-partner, less willingness to co-parent, greater emotional difficulties in the parents, and negative effects on the children.

Therefore, these data not only support the hypothesis underlined by Yárnoz-Yaben and Comino (2010) or Trinder et al. (2008) about the relevance of postdivorce family adjustment, they also allow us to observe how parenting patterns affect that adjustment, conditioning the children's symptomatology. That is, they reveal the existence of new mechanisms through which the parenting styles affect children's symptomatology, about which it will be necessary to continue investigating in the future through longitudinal studies that allow us to clarify issues of causation. This statement can be maintained regardless of the age and number of children, as these variables were controlled in the study.

This study has some limitations. On the one hand, it is a cross-sectional design. In this sense, future research should focus on how parenting changes over time, through longitudinal studies. On the other hand, despite that it is a very specific sample, the number of participating parents is low, which limits the statistical power of the analysis. In this sense, it would be essential

to continue studies in the future, increasing the number of participants. In this sense, in relation to the children, one of the strengths of the study was controlling for their age. In the future, the number of children and their age could be increased, if more comprehensive studies were performed from an evolutionary point of view.

On the other hand, with regard also to the study sample (high interparental conflict), it would be desirable in future studies to contrast the results with samples of different levels of conflict, as performed by authors such as Elam, Sandler, Wolchik, and Tein (2016); the children's symptomatology can probably be compromised by high levels of interparental conflict (Fehlberg, Smyth, Maclean, and Roberts, (2011), so it would be interesting to see what role the quality of parenting of both parents plays in this relationship.

Lastly, whereas this study has addressed the research of parents of independent families, an interesting line of research would be to investigate the parenting style of both parents conjointly, that is, to conduct dyadic studies (mother-father), following the line of authors such as Bastais, Ponnet, and Mortelmans (2012) and Falconier (2013) and analyzing the role that the other parent could play in the relationship of each parent with their children. This issue could be particularly relevant in cases of shared custody, an increasingly common reality in most European countries.

In conclusion: the results of our research have revealed that the parenting style exhibited by each parent can affect their children's psychological adjustment through its impact on postdivorce family adaptation.

The parental style carried out by the parents, and the consequences of this on the children's symptomatology seems to be related to the type of custody. The confirmation of this hypothesis would lead us to explore the forms of parentality both of custodial and noncustodial parents that could be more important for the children's psychological development, as well as the possible benefits of attending divorce programs that consider the difficulties associated with the exercise of parentality, taking into

account custody arrangements and addressing the adaptation problems of these families after divorce, such as psychological difficulties and conflict with the ex-partner, difficulties in coparentality, etc.

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## Notes

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