

A profile of conflict tactics during divorce

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North-West University

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to the children's courts of South Africa who are faced with high conflict divorce proceedings.

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- The participants who took the time to complete the questionnaires and the open-ended question. I wish you well.
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- My parents, who encouraged me.
- God, who has touched me in so many ways.

PREFACE

This thesis is presented in an article format in accordance with the guidelines set out in the *Manual for Postgraduates*, 2013, of the North-West University. The technical editing of the referencing was done according to the guidelines and requirements set out for the APA Referencing style.

Articles are structured and submitted according to the specific guidelines provided by the accredited academic journals to which the articles are being submitted: *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, and *Journal of Family Psychology*. The guidelines for submission guidelines are attached in Appendix I.

DECLARATION BY THE RESEARCHER

I, Susanna Johanna van der Merwe, herewith declare that the thesis entitled *A profile of conflict tactics during divorce*, which I herewith submit to the North-West University Potchefstroom Campus, is my own work and that all references used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged.



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Kind regards



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DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING



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A Profile of Conflict Tactics during Divorce

for **Dr Susanna van der Merwe** for the purpose of submission as a PhD.

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Yours sincerely

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A PROFILE OF CONFLICT TACTICS DURING DIVORCE

for the thesis of S.J. van der Merwe submitted for the degree
PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR in PSYCHOLOGY at the
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Regards

Celia Kruger

ABSTRACT

The use of conflict tactics during divorce, particularly with children involved is, an understudied subject. The comparison of couples' responses to conflict revealed how divorce drives the experiences of parents, and how they make use of conflict tactics. The conflict tactics applied by divorcing couples have a huge impact on their family. Conflict tactics can be ethical or unethical, and these tactics determine the nature of divorce proceedings.

The following research questions were formulated: (a) What are the conflict tactics applied by couples during divorce within a South African context? (Article one); (b) What are the gender differences in the application of conflict tactics during divorce? (Article two); and (c) How can the acquired knowledge regarding the different conflict tactics contribute to the implementation of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce? (Article three).

The objectives of the study were: (a) To determine the conflict tactics that were applied by couples during divorce in a group of participants within a South African context; (b) To determine gender differences in the application of conflict tactics during divorce; (c) To develop a conflict management model for conflict during divorce to aid professionals when dealing with divorce cases.

Males and females apply different conflict tactics during divorce. Fifty divorcing couples in Gauteng, South Africa, between the ages of 20-60 years participated in the study. Snowball sampling was used for a heterogeneous sample. Participants were purposively selected by professionals within the field of divorce. The researcher made use of a cross-sectional convergent mixed methods design by utilizing quantitative and qualitative approaches concurrently. In the quantitative leg of the research a standardised measuring tool, the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2), was used to investigate the conflict tactics applied by

couples (n=100). In addition, a biographical questionnaire was administered. An open-ended question was used to obtain qualitative data. For the qualitative data, an exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis was done in consultation with the statistical consultation services of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. The qualitative data were categorized according to conflict tactic themes using axial coding and selective coding. The quantitative results showed no significant gender differences in applied conflict strategies. However, the qualitative results provided an in-depth understanding of the conflict tactics applied by different genders. Females predominantly make use of protective gatekeeping, while males make use of avoidance of an unwanted option, minor psychological aggression, emotional negotiation, and parental alienation.

The results of the two sets were integrated and used to develop a conflict management model for professionals in the field of divorce by using a three-step modified Delphi method to establish its effectiveness. Ten panel experts were selected to reach consensus regarding the development of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce.

The need for a conflict management model for conflict during divorce within a South African context is evident. Although there are programmes available for the continual professional development of professionals in the field of divorce, no specific model exists that provides professionals with the necessary guidance to safeguard the well-being of divorcing families.

Keywords: conflict tactics, divorce, conflict management, gender differences, South Africa

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SECTION A

Introduction and Background of the Study

“Peace is not absence of conflict; it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means.”

Ronald Reagan

1. Introduction

In recent times, conflict during divorce appears to be increasing along with an escalating divorce rate in South Africa (Robinson, 2009; Van Jaarsveld, 2018). The contemporary debate that divorce might also positively affect children is challenged by the negative consequences pertaining to economic and social resources that have a negative impact on children during and after divorce (Eshleman, 2011; Pedro-Carroll, 2020; Robinson, 2010; Schwartz & Scott, 2010; Van Jaarsveld, 2018). One of the contributing factors includes changes made in child legislation. The support of the best-interest-of-the-child principle is argued to have escalated conflict between parents during divorce (Viljoen, 2013). The urgency and relevancy of the research topic are revealed when divorce is considered as one of the most stressful life experiences that humans can experience (Robinson, 2009; Van Jaarsveld, 2018).

Divorce is defined as the legally sanctioned dissolution or termination of marriage, often preceded by a period of separation that may also be legally ratified (Robinson, 2015). According to Robinson (2015), Pierson and Thomas (2002), and the Divorce Act (70 of 1979), such a decree may be granted on the following grounds: (1) the irretrievable breakdown of a marriage; (2) mental illness; or (3) the continuous unconsciousness of a partner. Divorce can be described as a significant life transition (Feeney & Monin, 2018), and conflict during divorce appears to be escalating along with an increasing divorce rate in South Africa (Van Jaarsveld, 2018).

In this research study, the application of conflict tactics of divorcing couples was explored, together with contributing factors that might exacerbate conflict during divorce. The acquired knowledge contributed to the development of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce.

2. Problem Formulation

Literature provides valuable insight regarding the effects and negative implications of divorce – especially on children – and side-effects on mental health, family relations, sexuality, and thought processing (Anderson, 2014; Jónsson et al., 2000). It was found that the degree of hostility and/or conflict prior to a divorce has an impact on children's reactions to divorce (Appleyard & Osofsky, 2003; Louw et al., 1998; Pedro-Carroll, 2020). The White Paper on Parent and Child-custody (Republic of South Africa, 2007), states that the current high divorce rates can be ascribed in South Africa's children's courts to hostile and angry parents who fight for contact, access, and care of their children. Some research suggest that the best-interest-of-the-child principle combined with the joint-custody concept further increase and intensify parental and gender conflict in child custody litigation (Gardner, 1998; Pieterse, 2002; Scott & Emery, 2014). The Children's Act of South Africa 38 of 2005 requires the best-interest-of-the-child standard to be applied in custody disputes (Bosman-Sadie & Corrie, 2010; Nevondwe et al., 2016). The "best interests" are indeterminate and more of a statement of an aspiration than a legal rule to guide custody decision making (Scott & Emery, 2014). The vagueness and indeterminacy of the "best-interest-of-the-child" principle make outcomes uncertain and yields a broad discretion in court to consider almost any factor thought to be relevant to the custody decision (Scott & Emery, 2014). This often results in litigation in which parents are motivated to produce hurtful evidence of each other's deficiencies that might have a lasting, deleterious impact on their ability to act cooperatively in the actual best interests of their children. According to Scott and Emery (2014), mothers'

legal advisors have conformed to the notion that a parent who has engaged in domestic violence will be disfavoured in court. As a result, fathers resorted to seeking to persuade courts to assign negative weight to a parental alienation by the other parent (Scott & Emery, 2014).

Robinson (2009) argues that this change in legislation has precipitated in the intensification of custody litigation and conflict between parents (Bickerdike & Littlefield, 2000; Bosman-Sadie & Corrie, 2010; Gardner, 1998; Pieterse, 2002; Scott & Emery, 2014). A growing debate in literature, therefore, arises about whether shared parenting time should be assigned in order to increase quality time for children with both parents, despite the presence of conflict during divorce (Mahrer et al., 2016).

In family evaluations, evaluators and mediators, are not only asked to focus on whether children will benefit from a positive relationship with both their parents, but also to consider whether children will benefit from a positive relationship under the specific conditions that exist in a particular family. It must be noted that family evaluations are usually conducted in a select sub-group of divorcing families when there is a high level of conflict between the parents.

The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) defines conflict situations as situations in which the concerns of two people appear to be incompatible (Thomas & Kilmann, 2007). According to conflict theory, the assumption is made that conflict is an inevitable part of all human association. A further assumption is made that violence is a chosen tactic to deal with conflict (Straus, 1979).

Consistent with behavioural theories, Birditt et al. (2010) found that, over time, conflict tactics have important implications for divorce. Conflict tactics within conflict situations is a complex construct that requires further investigation, as there is a paucity in

existing research. It must further be noted that behavioural theories of marriage suggest that conflict tactics have important implications for couples, namely their perceptions of marriage and divorce (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Fincham, & Beach, 2010). According to Thomas and Kilmann (2007), the behaviour of individuals can be described according to two basic dimensions, namely assertiveness (the attempt to satisfy their own needs), and cooperativeness (the attempt to satisfy the concerns of others).

South Africa's divorce statistics have been constantly increasing between 2012 and 2017, and divorce has become a phenomenon of modern society (Statistics South Africa, 2018). According to South African Statistics, an increase occurred in 2012 to 2016 from 21 998 cases to 25 326 and constitutes an increase of 0.3% (Statistics South Africa, 2018). Amongst the nine provinces in South Africa, Gauteng led with the highest number of divorces granted with a total of 6 623 (26.19%), the Western Cape followed with 6 274 (24.81%), and KwaZulu-Natal with 3 868 (15.30%) (Statistics South Africa, 2018). According to Statistics South Africa's report (2018), irrespective of the population group, a higher proportion (80%) of divorces came from first-time marriages. These marriages typically lasted five to nine years (Statistics South Africa, 2018). In 2016, 13 922 (55, 0%) divorce cases involved children younger than 18 years. According to Robinson (2009), "divorce takes place between two people, [but] it affects the whole family and other systems".

Children can be influenced by dynamic family variables, such as parenting quality, parenting time, and inter-parental conflict. According to Mahrer et al. (2016), children are affected by all three variables, and it is important to understand how they are affected by the various combinations of these aspects in a post-divorce family environment in order to inform decisions made during care and contact evaluations. Recently reviewed studies

showed progress in understanding the relations between the quality of parenting by both the mother and father and, child well-being during varying levels of inter-parental conflict and parenting time (Golombok, 2015).

Although the implications need to be tempered by the limitations of these studies, the findings support the preposition that quality parenting can be a protective factor when parents and children have moderate to frequent contact. The positive effect that high-quality parenting has on the well-being of children, however, does not negate the pathological effects that inter-parental conflict has on the well-being of children. The research reviewed in Sandler et al. (2013) adds confidence to the conclusion that high inter-parental conflict places the well-being of children at risk, and it highlights the importance of developing protective factors in both parents that boosts high-quality parenting, and enable them to develop strategies to reduce the level of inter-parental conflict. From the findings it appears that conflict situations are evident in divorce processes. However, no specific reference was made to the conflict tactics applied by each member of the divorcing couples. A deeper insight into the variety of applied conflict tactics would, therefore, add a richer understanding and management of high conflict divorces. Unfortunately, only limited research sheds light on the implementation of conflict tactics by couples, specifically during divorce. Mahrer et al. (2016) confirm that more research is needed on current divorces to assess how parenting time and the role of gender in contemporary post-divorce families relate to child adjustment. Anger-based marital conflict is associated with aggression and behaviour problems, and such parents and children have similar self-regulating abilities (Carrasco et al., 2009; Katz & Gottman, 1993). The management of conflict during divorce can, therefore, assist not only parents, but also their children to regulate negative effects. Destructive conflict behaviour or tactics (e.g., criticism, yelling, insults, belligerence, and contempt) predict an increase in divorce (McCoy et al., 2009; Orbuch et al., 2002). Little is however known about the

implications of constructive behaviour or tactics (e.g., calm discussions, listening), and even less is understood about the implications of withdrawal tactics (e.g., keeping quiet, leaving to cool down, disengaging) during or after divorce (Birditt et al., 2010; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). The presence of self-regulation and/or absence of self-regulation is therefore evident. Regardless of the grouping terms to categorize conflict behaviours — defined as negative or positive affect expressions, hostile, warm, or disengaged — conflict behaviour might influence the marriage and divorce process of couples.

According to behavioural theories of marriage, destructive behavioural tactics ensue negative evaluations of marriage, and a decline in marital satisfaction and stability. In contrast, constructive behavioural tactics lead to improvements in evaluations of marriages, and marital satisfaction and stability increase (Birditt et al., 2010; Bloch et al., 2014; Kelly et al., 2003; Orbuch et al., 2002).

Behavioural theories, such as social learning theory or the enduring dynamics model, propose that individuals enter a marriage with individual differences and individual tactics that remain consistent over time and can eventually predict divorce (Birditt et al., 2010; Huston et al., 2001). It is further important to note that several life course factors predict divorce (Rogers, 2004): (1) couples who have had children prior to marriage; (2) couples who have cohabited before marriage; (3) couples who have grown up with divorced parents; and (4) young married couples showed higher rates of divorce (Clements et al., 2004; Whiton et al., 2009). According to Steinberger (2006), the hallmark of conflict during divorce is where a partner's intense anger or animosity is disproportionate with the reasons given by the partner for that anger or animosity.

From the author's personal experiences in private practice, in addition to the phases of divorce as conceptualized by Benokraitis (2015), it seems as if the divorce process can be

characterized by different phases of legal intervention (Benokraitis, 2015): (1) the parents decide to divorce or even separate, but no legal action is taken (emotional divorce); (2) legal action is in process, but no settlement has been reached (legal divorce and economic divorce); (3) a settlement has been reached (community divorce and psychic/religious divorce) (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

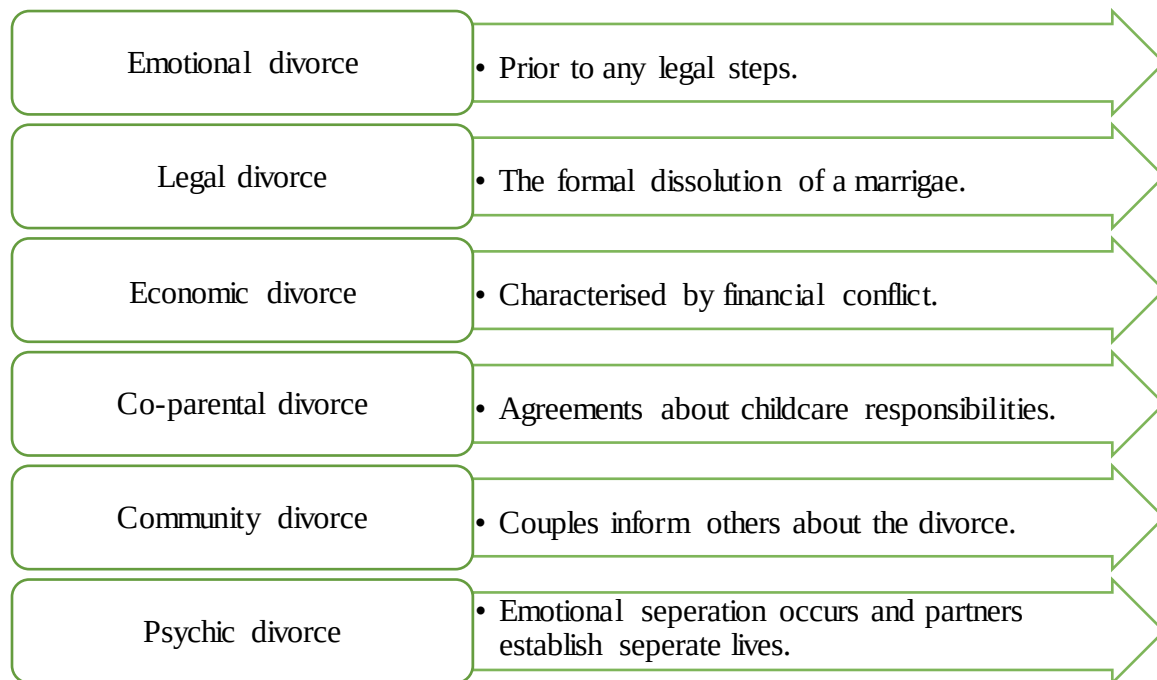


Figure 1. Phases of Divorce

Benokraitis (2015:431)

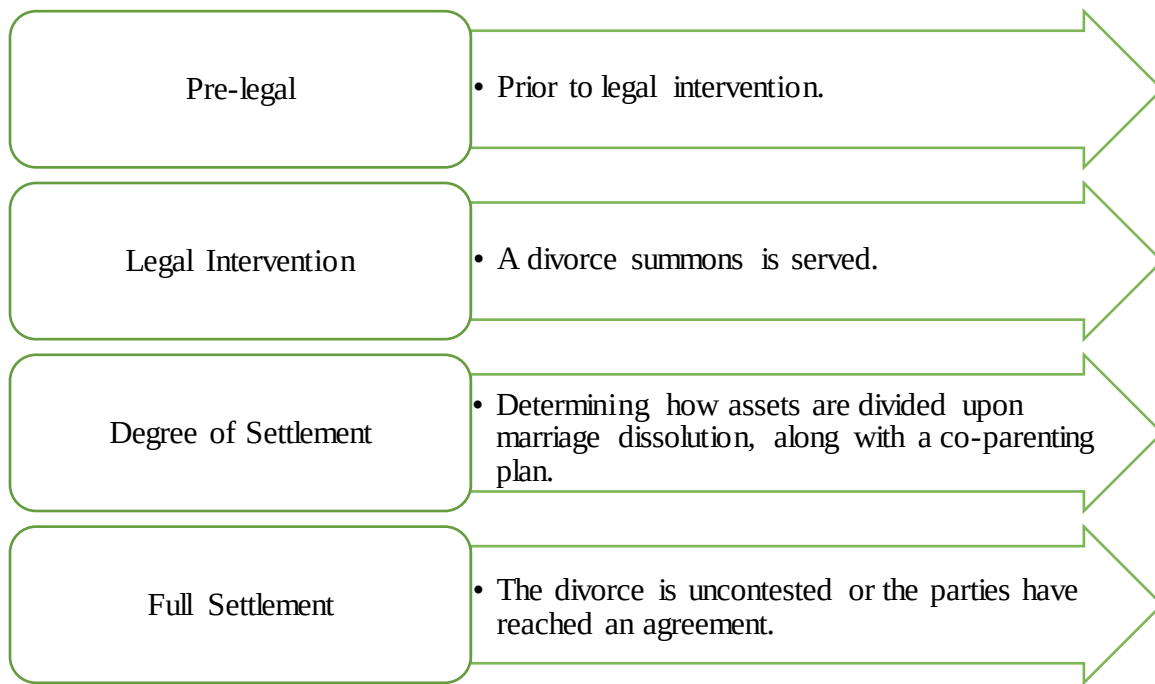


Figure 2. Phases of Legal Intervention during Divorce

Different phases in the divorce process, as described above, have an impact on different types of conflict tactics, and that different types of conflict tactics steer the thought processes, decision making, and behaviour of divorcing couples. It appears that conflict tactics may influence the marriages of couples, and their estimations of divorce (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kelly et al., 2003).

Thomas and Kilmann (2007) hypothesized that conflict during divorce is the result of a poor integration of conflict management tactics. Conflict during divorce is, according to Combrinck (2014) and Johnston (1997), the product of a multi-layered divorce impasse between parents. Often, this impasse has its roots in one or both parents' vulnerability to issues, such as narcissistic injury, loss, anger, and/or a sense of loss of control.

In addition, Garber (2004) pointed out that psychologists should be very attentive to conflicting parents and their children, but no references were made to the nature or tactics implemented within high conflict situations of divorce. It is hoped that an awareness of

different conflict tactics, and the role these tactics play in the effective management of conflict situations during a divorce process, will assist psychologists involved in psycho-legal work in the process of anger management in mediation, and the development of effective parenting plans (Hirschberger et al., 2013).

The identification of the different conflict tactics implemented during a divorce process equips expert professionals to provide sound and accurate reflections of the divorce proceedings of clients (Grall, 2018; Robinson, 2009). Swanepoel (personal communication, January 27, 2015) indicated that the use of the latest quantitative measuring instrument could assist with more accurate reflections of the divorce process. Accurate reflections will contribute to a deeper understanding of the origins of conflict between parents who are going through divorce. The dynamic interchange between parenting and conflict might have implications for a divorce process, might aid in the understanding of a family for legal purposes (e.g., when care and contact and access are determined), and will simultaneously aid in the process to develop a divorce-intervention programme for high conflict families (DiGiuseppe & Tafrate, 2004; Slocum, 2009).

According to Lamb (2012), conflict between parents commonly precedes, emerges, or increases during separation and divorce proceedings, and often continues for some time beyond divorce. Inter-parental conflict positively correlates with children's psychosocial maladjustment (Cummings et al., 2010; Cummings et al., 2004; Johnston, 1997). The negative impact of high levels of marital conflict on the quality of parenting has been well documented. Limited research is available on how mothers and fathers (gender differences) experience conflict during divorce, and the different tactics applied by them.

Some studies have shown that destructive conflict increases the risk of divorce, but many unanswered questions remain. Findings regarding conflict tactics have been

inconsistent, and most studies examined or observed conflict behavioural tactics within small samples of white American couples (Birditt et al., 2010).

2.1. Problem Statement and Contribution

Conflict situations are evident in divorce processes and according to conflict theory, conflict situations are inevitable during divorce. It is, however, uncertain, which conflict tactics are applied by divorcing couples, and whether gender differences in conflict behaviour exist. Professionals working in the field of divorce will continue to handle conflict during divorce; instead of conducting successful professional interventions, unless research about different conflict tactics, as well as gender differences in the use of conflict tactics, becomes available and accessible.

The contribution of this research is, therefore, evident on several levels:

- Possible expansion of the knowledge base in psychology.
- Psychologists and social workers can be aided on a psycho-legal and therapeutic level. In the psycho-legal field of psychology, contributions can be made in the field of family mediation, care and contact, and psychometric evaluations. Parents and children might also benefit through therapeutic intervention since psychologists should have a heightened and additional understanding of anger and the impact of conflict on divorce proceedings.
- Parent and child/minor clients might gain new insight through their process of divorce due to more effective, more competent, and refined interventions made by psychologists as part of treatment plans.
- The knowledge gained from the results can aid psychologists, especially recently qualified, inexperienced psychologists to avoid pitfalls concerning therapy with divorcing couples.

- The research focuses on current divorces and assesses the use of contemporary conflict tactics.
- The presentation of a conflict management model which will assist professionals in the field of divorce to identify the conflict tactics applied by each partner.
- Finally, the development of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce will equip professionals to change the communication between divorcing couples into ethical and constructive conflict management to act in the best interest of their children.

It is, therefore, clear that the lack of research regarding the implementation or use of conflict tactics during a divorce process warrants further investigation to determine whether any associations exist between the phenomenon and the divorce process.

3. Research Questions

The main research question to address the problem, was: How can the acquired knowledge regarding the different conflict tactics contribute to the implementation of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce?

In order to answer the main questions, the following subsequent questions were formulated:

- Which tactics of conflict are applied by couples during divorce within a South African context?
- What are the gender differences in the implementation of conflict tactics during divorce?

4. Research Aim and Objectives

In order to answer the above research questions the researcher formulated the aim of this investigation as follows: To develop a conflict management model for conflict during divorce to aid professionals when dealing with divorce cases.

In order to develop such a model, the following objectives were formulated:

- To contextualise the impact of destructive conflict tactics during divorce on the divorce process, the family, and the detrimental effects thereof on the mental well-being of the family members using concepts from the theoretical framework of conflict theory and attachment theory.
- To explore and discuss couples' application of different conflict tactics during divorce by using a biographical questionnaire and the quantitative measuring instrument, namely the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2) to address the first research aim.
- To explore and discuss gender differences in the application of conflict tactics during divorce by using the theoretical framework from conflict theory and attachment theory.
- To analyse the responses to the open-ended question using thematic analysis to determine whether gender differences exist in the application of conflict tactics. An integration of quantitative and qualitative data followed.
- To use the Delphi method and obtain the views of ten practising professionals on the proposed conflict management model and explore their recommendations for development of an effective conflict management model.

- To draw conclusions and develop a conflict management model, with user-friendly checklists for implementing constructive divorce interventions in South Africa for professionals working with these families.

5. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework from which the researcher approached this study was based upon conflict theory. According to Straus (2005) and Vallacher et al. (2013), conflict is an inherent property of human interaction. The inevitability of conflict within family systems stems from the fact that while family members share many interests, they also have interests that differ (Straus, 2005; Vallacher et al., 2013). This assessment of conflict was applied to the research: All family systems have a degree of conflict present, which is aggravated during the divorce process. Although conflict is an unavoidable part of human interaction, Straus (1979) is of the opinion that violence as a tactic should be avoided during conflict (Carvalho Relva et al., 2013).

Divorce, from the perspective of conflict theory, can be described as the competition for resources and power within the marriage, when the couple is unable to reach an agreement. The grapple over resources results in tension which precipitates in a change of the marital status. Conflict during divorce can be explained by conflict theory, which theorises that conflict often occurs due to the oppression or exploitation of subordinate individuals by dominant individuals (Neil et al., 2017).

Although attachment theory does not describe specific factors that influence divorce, the researcher used the approach as an additional theoretical framework which guided this study. Attachments are the emotional ties we have with others that result in affectional bonds (Ainsworth, 1989; Kobak & Madsen, 2011). Human beings have an aptness to create affectional bonds with significant others. This inherent human characteristic seeks to find

proximity – first as an essential skill for survival during infancy and later as a behaviour to attain and retain connectedness in adulthood. According to Bowlby (1998), times of pain, illness, and distress cause individuals to seek proximity. These proximity-seeking behaviours are characteristic of attachment behaviours that seek to bring comfort, provide a haven, and reduce anxiety.

The proximity-seeking behaviours that Bowlby (1969) described are called the attachment system (Bosman et al., 2015). The term disorganisation refers to conflict at the level of the attachment level which impair the expression thereof and causes disruption (Duschinsky, 2018; Main & Solomon, 1986). The paradox of proximity-seeking to an attachment figure, activates the attachment system and causes the individual to both approach and flee from the attachment figure, when disorganisation takes place as an event that causes alarm to an individual (Duschinsky, 2018). The classification of a disorganized attachment has been associated with avoidance and externalizing as conflict tactics in adulthood (Duschinsky, 2018).

The concept of ‘holding’ is related to attachment. Holding can be conceptualized as attachment as it stabilizes and anchors individuals, providing a sense of safety, while attachment can be conceptualized as the reassurance of our relationship to others. This process of attachment and holding is essential to our human being as without being held (attached) we fragment/fracture, and we are isolated and directionless (Josselson, 1992).

This approach to attachment has been applied to the study in that an individual’s internal working model of interaction, that is attachment style, relates to their individual conflict interactions and conflict tactics applied. Attachment styles are influenced by the experiences of a caregiver’s warmth, trustworthiness, and responsiveness that precipitate in adulthood as generalized beliefs and expectations of others, as well as a sense of self

worthiness (Crowley, 2006; Mohammadi, 2016). The learnt thought- and behavioural patterns that emerge from attachment experiences are used throughout adulthood and influence how individuals react to situations, specifically conflict situations. Attachment styles and strategies persist into adulthood and are often activated during conflict situations (Bowlby, 1998; Simpson & Rholes, 2017).

The theoretical framework provided a starting point for the researcher to apply deductive reasoning throughout the research process.

6. Research Methodology

6.1. Literature Review

A literature analysis of previous research and related literature on divorce processes was conducted to obtain relevant background information on the experiences of couples and their implementation of conflict tactics.

An electronic database search, internet explorations, and investigations of relevant journal articles were conducted. Previous research on related topics was also examined. Relevant concepts pertaining to conflict tactics and the divorce process are discussed under the literature review. Finally, limitations in current research were explored and highlighted.

Various databases were utilized in the literature review, such as Nexus; EbscoHost; Science Direct; Google Scholar; Academic Search Complete; CHINAL; Global Health; Humanities International Complete; Psychologies and Behavioural Science Collection and Psych Info; South African Magazines; International Magazines; South African Journals; International Journals; and other relevant book sources.

6.2. Empirical Research Methods

6.2.1. Research Design: Cross-sectional Convergent Mixed Methods Design

Qualitative and quantitative approaches have their specific advantages, disadvantages, and limitations. Both approaches include assumptions that can potentially have an impact on the richness and depth of conclusions (Babbie, 2007; Bryman, 2000; Bryman, 2012; Zheng, 2015). The development and perceived legitimacy of making use of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches in the social and human sciences — mixed methods research — have gained popularity. This popularity is due to the continual evolvement and development of research methodology, and the mixed methods design is another step forward — utilizing the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell, 2015).

The mixed methods design is more than simply collecting two independent strands of quantitative and qualitative data. Essentially, this design involves the connection, integration, and linking of both quantitative and qualitative data where quantitative and qualitative data strands intersect (Creswell, 2013; Creswell, 2015).

According to Zheng (2015), more and more researchers in the health sciences have become interested in using complex mixed methods designs. Creswell (2015) presented three basic mixed methods designs, namely the convergent design, the explanatory sequential design and lastly, the exploratory sequential design. For this study, the convergent mixed methods design was used (Creswell, 2015). In a convergent design, quantitative data and results yield common trends and relationships, whereas qualitative data and results provide in-depth personal perspectives of individuals. The researcher decided to use this specific research design, because the combination or merging of both qualitative and quantitative results add up to not only more data but create a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. In the convergent design the qualitative and quantitative processes also run

simultaneously, where the one is not dependent on the other. This was applicable to this study, because the participants simultaneously answered the qualitative and quantitative questions on the questionnaires. As a result, multiple perspectives were gained by the researcher and manifold databases could be validated with each other.

A cross-sectional study was used within this design. A cross-sectional research design is a type of observational study. The researcher investigates the exposures and subsequent outcomes in participants, concurrently (Setia, 2016). The participants are selected based on a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria (Setia, 2016). The data collected is used to make inferences about the population of interest at one point in time (Lavrakas, 2008).

Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered concurrently after which they were analysed, integrated, and interpreted. Maggs-Rapport (2000) supports the application of the mixed methods design through the integration of data. According to Maggs-Rapport (2000), insight and a deeper understanding of the different responses provided by participants are achieved.

Neuman (2014) states that positivism perceives social science as an organized method to combine deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behaviour and therefore conflict theory was integrated to emphasize the inevitable presence of conflict during divorce (Vallacher et al., 2013) and attachment theory's perspective that learnt thought- and behavioural patterns that emerge from attachment experiences, such as marriage, are used throughout adulthood and influence how individuals react to situations, specifically conflict situations. As a result, a set of causal laws that can be used to predict common patterns of human behaviour, can be discovered, and confirmed. Researchers who utilize this perspective use quantitative terms to explain how variables interact, form, and produce outcomes. Research questions guide an investigation, and researchers develop and

test these explanations in experimental studies (Tuli, 2010). Quantitative research is deductive in nature, and states a hypothesis that involves the gathering, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of numerical data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012). Data is collected at a specific time within a specific population (Saint-Germain, 2001; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

According to Neuman (2014), the advantages of using a quantitative style are that standardised data occur; empirical facts are measured; the focus stays on variables; reliability is key; it is unbiased and independent of context; and researchers are detached. In addition, the procedures are standard, and replication is assumed to be possible.

The qualitative approach included the inclusion of one open-ended question. A thematic analysis of the response to this question was included to enhance trustworthiness when the data were interpreted (Creswell, 2015).

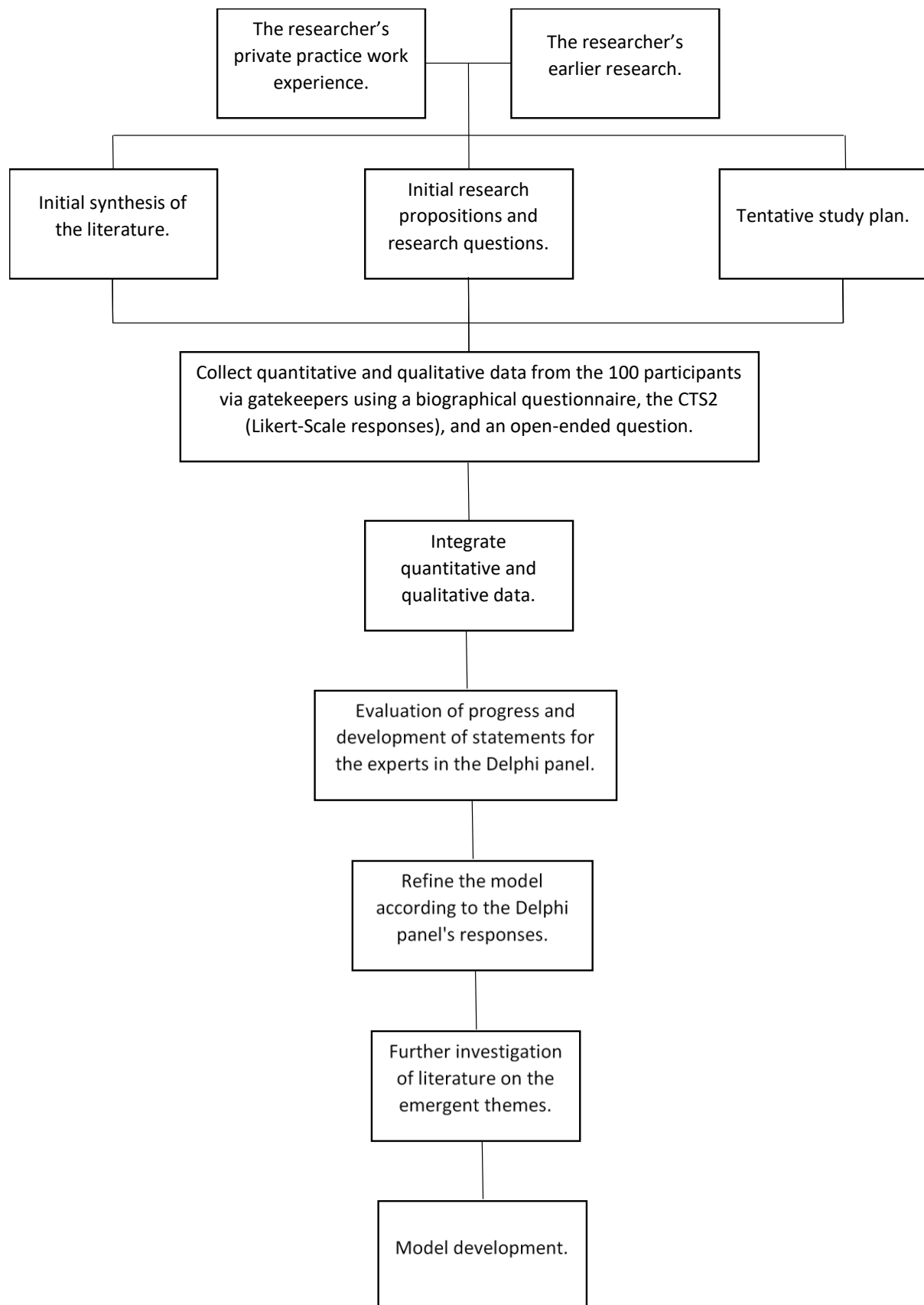


Figure 3. Conceptual Model of the Research Process

6.2.2. Research Context and Participants

The purposive sample consisted of 50 divorcing couples (100 participants) who were required to complete the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2), and a biographical questionnaire. The participants also answered an open-ended question individually, (completed by each partner) in order to obtain sufficient data for an exploratory and/or confirmatory factor analysis (as determined by the statistical consultations services of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus). The minimum number of 50 couples was determined by a statistician (employed by the statistical consultations services of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus), who made use of a power analysis. The power to determine a statistical significance of an alpha level of .05 to obtain a power of 80% for medium effect sizes.

The selection of participation was based on the participants' report of conflict during divorce. During the selection process, no same-gender couples showed interest to participate in the study. The participants were all permanent South African citizens. The participants (divorcing couples) were gathered from referrals of psychologists, social workers, general practitioners, psychiatrists, and legal representatives of the private sector who acted as gatekeepers for the study. During the selection process, no same-gender couples showed interest to participate in the study. The participants were proficient in English because the psychometric testing was administered in English.

The gatekeepers received a preparation letter from the researcher that contained: (a) Information on how to address potential participants in order to still protect their rights to receive continual professional treatment from gatekeepers; and to protect the unbiased stance of gatekeepers when potential participants chose to participate or not; (b) The purpose of the study; (c) Instructions for administration of the quantitative measuring instrument, the open-

ended question, and the biographical questionnaire; (d) The set of inclusion and exclusion criteria; (e) The process of informed consent.

The process of informed consent was explained in detail to the gatekeepers. The participants were under no pressure to give consent to participate in this study. If one of the partners decided not to participate in the study, there was no obligation for that participant to take part in the study, and his/her decision was respected, and did not have any impact on the professional services delivered by a specific gatekeeper. Voluntary participation was an inclusion criterion for the partners to take part in the study.

The various professionals acted, therefore, only as gatekeepers throughout the duration of the study. These professionals are registered with a professional board within their scope of practice.

There are four types of purposive sampling procedures that are based on the gradual selection principle of sampling (Palinkas et al., 2013; Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The four types of purposive sampling include: theoretical sampling, confirming and disconfirming cases, opportunistic sampling, and snowball sampling (also known as chain sampling) (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). According to Teddlie and Yu (2007) and Naderifar et al. (2017), purposive snowball sampling is a method of gradual selection that can be conceptualized as the sequential selection of units or cases based on their relevance to the research question, and not their representativeness. This non-probability sampling technique was applied to acquire participants for this study. The advantage of purposive snowball sampling is that it allowed the researcher to reach populations that might be difficult to sample otherwise. The disadvantage of this technique lies in its biases. It is, therefore, probable that the participants shared similar traits and characteristics, and the sample might not have been representative of the entire population, but rather represented a sub-population (Raina, 2015). It must be noted,

that during the selection process, no same-gender couples showed interest to participate in the study. The sample is not representative and, therefore, no generalizations can be made to a larger population.

6.2.3. Research Process and Recruitment

The research was divided into the following phases:

Phase 1: During this phase, a thorough and, critical literature analysis was conducted, focusing on the nature of the different conflict tactics applied by couples during their divorce process, and the impact of conflict on parenting and divorce proceedings. Furthermore, conflict theory and attachment theory were integrated as theoretical frameworks and were used to navigate the research study.

Phase 2: Permission and approval were obtained from the different organizations and individuals to be able to conduct the research. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) under the clearance number: NWU-00025-16-A1. Individuals, such as the Director of the Institute of Psychology and Wellbeing at the North-West University in Potchefstroom and, professional practitioners in private practice, were asked to participate. The researcher scheduled appointments with the directors of targeted organizations and private practices during which the aims and nature of the research were explained. Goodwill permission letters were obtained from the professionals and Professor Pieter Kruger (Head: Institute of Psychology and Wellbeing). These individuals were asked to identify possible couples who met the relevant criteria. They were then asked to obtain permission from these possible future participants, and to provide the researcher with their respective email addresses. The contact detail allowed the researcher to contact them individually and explain the purpose of

the study. The researcher asked the participants who committed to take part in the study, to complete the consent form. No incentive or remuneration was offered to the participants.

The informed consent form was then returned to the researcher's email address. The psychologists and clients were assured that the results obtained in this study would not be made known to any third-party referring professional. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. The researcher distributed hard copies of the CTS2, the biographical questionnaire, and the self-designed open-ended question to the gatekeepers to give to the participants. The open-ended question was: "*How do you handle conflict during your separation/divorce?*". The question was derived from conflict theory, as well as from attachment theory that hold the perspective that conflict is present in divorce and individuals handle conflict in response to their attachment styles (Mohammadi, 2016; Straus, 2005; Vallacher et al., 2013). This open-ended question was added to account for any possible methods of handling conflict during separation/divorce which may not have been addressed in the quantitative questionnaires. The questionnaires were completed anonymously by making use of only a numerical system to ensure the privacy and anonymity of all the participants.

Phase 3: The researcher gathered all the completed questionnaires and the responses to the open-ended question.

Phase 4: The data of the questionnaires were subsequently statistically analysed and interpreted in correlation with the information obtained from the statistical consultation services of the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). The answers to the open-ended question were searched for common patterns, and initially occurred by reading the data produced by the participants. The transcriptions were then organized into meaningful groups

through a coding system, and collated. The search for themes took place after that. Themes were reviewed, defined, and named.

Phase 5: The integration of the two sets of data was implemented during this phase.

Phase 6: The results of the study were reported on in Article 1 to outline the conflict tactics that were applied by couples during divorce in a group of participants within a South African context. Article 2 describes possible differences when the conflict tactics were applied during divorce.

Phase 7: Based on the results reported on in Article 1 and 2, Article 3 presents the conflict management model for conflict during divorce for professionals within the field. The two unpublished articles were authored by the researcher, namely *Conflict Tactics during Divorce within a South African Context* (Van der Merwe, in press a), and *Gender Differences in Conflict Tactics during Divorce* (Van der Merwe, in press b). In these two unpublished articles, the method, procedure, the analysis of data; and the results obtained were described to provide the researcher with enough data for model development.

In general, the primary goals are to minimize complications in communication between parents during divorce, the finalization and settlement of parenting plans, to maximize functional independence and quality of life, and to minimize family distress (Myers & Plauché Johnson, 2007). In developing the model, the researcher used guidelines for model development, as outlined by Bush and Folger (1994), Shafique and Mahmood (2010), and Rahim et al. (2003). In the transformative model, first developed by Bush and Folger (1994), mediation is described by Bush and Pope (2002) as a process in which a third party works with parties to help them change the quality of their conflict interaction. Interaction can be changed from negative and destructive to positive and constructive, as the parties explore and discuss issues and possibilities for resolution. Model development is an

effective method of relating information more accurately and aids in describing, predicting, testing, and understanding complex dynamic interactions between factors. According to Shafique and Mahmood (2010), models have the following characteristics: relatedness between underlying factors; transparency and ease of interpretation; robustness; richness of deductive reasoning and the ability to be adapted, refined, and expanded. Following the process of model development applied by Rahim et al. (2003), the dynamic interaction of factors that facilitate conflict during divorce were investigated to develop the conflict management model.

In accordance with conflict theory and attachment theory, the types of conflict tactics applied by each partner in relation to their unique attachment style plays a role in the type of conflict interactions that couples engage in (Simpson & Rholes, 2017; Straus, 2005). Considering the enormity and importance of a psycho-legal family assessment, it is therefore of utmost importance that professionals in the field of divorce are adequately trained to direct divorcing families towards healing, redefinition, and new configurations of the family dynamic. Adding the topic of attachment styles to the model adds value to not only the assessment of couples but also provides insight into some of the dynamics of their relationship. This is in line with assisting couples toward “healing, redefinition, and reconfiguring the relationship irrespective of whether the final outcome leads to divorce or reconciliation (as the case studies have demonstrated). Attachment theory is the single largest predictor of success of an individual’s relationships. Much research has been done to support attachment theory, that attachment styles influence marital quality. Therefore, the Adult Attachment Style Mini Questionnaire was integrated in the conflict management model to stimulate personal exploration into a couple’s attachment style. The Adult Attachment Style Mini Questionnaire is designed to be an interactive learning tool with the focus on one significant relationship. The questionnaire is not a diagnostic tool but is a good starting point

to begin a personal exploration into a couple's attachment style. The connection between conflict style and attachment style adds value to the model's process and outcome. The Mini Questionnaire is widely available for personal use. The questionnaire will be used and discussed with necessary debriefing with a trained professional.

Therefore, equipping couples with knowledge about their conflict interactions pave the way toward more effective conflict management and ultimately may diffuse their conflict. By using these guidelines, the researcher developed a six-step conflict management model to identify and manage conflict tactics during divorce.

The six steps include: joint psychological interviews with divorcing partners; determining the pre-intervention profile through observation; identification of the different types of conflict tactics used; investigate the presentation of different attachment styles by partners; diffusion of the conflict between partners; a discussion of the way forward and possible ways to re-define co-parenting roles.

Phase 8: The Delphi method was conducted as a reliable means of determining consensus for the development of the proposed model (Eubank et al., 2016). A three-step modified Delphi method (Eubank et al., 2016) was used to establish the effectiveness of the proposed model. This process took place between April 2020 and July 2020. Ten experts representing family law practitioners, general practitioners, social services, family counsellors, and psychologists were invited to participate as the expert panel. In round one, the panel members were required to apply the conflict management model for conflict during divorce in their practices. The panel members were required to test the nine statements until consensus was reached. Initially, a comprehensive list of statements was identified, and consensus was built from the feedback provided by the expert panel from the preceding rounds (see Appendix A). In round one, nine original statements were distributed to the panel

and the panel members were asked to mark “true” or “false” next to each question. The panel members were asked to provide comments when they marked “false”. The same voting system applied in round two, only for those statements that were marked “false”. Face-to-face meetings were conducted in round three. Meetings in the final round three, allowed for expert interaction, and clarification of the different expert viewpoints.

Phase 9: The model was revised according to the comments provided by the ten panel experts and discussed in Article 3.

Table 1.

Research Methodology – Mixed Methods Design

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Approach and purpose	- First component of study - Analysis	- Second component of study - Thematic analysis
Sampling approach	- Non-probability	- Non-probability
Sampling method	- Purposive snowballing	- Purposive snowballing
Data-gathering method	- Questionnaires	- Open-ended question
Data-gathering instrument	- Biographical questionnaire - CTS2	- Open-ended question

6.2.4. Data Collection

The following measuring instruments were utilized in this study:

- **Biographical Questionnaire**

A biographical questionnaire was compiled by the researcher to obtain information from the participants regarding their age, gender, level of education, duration of marriage,

number of children from the marriage, onset of the divorce process, legal status of divorce proceedings, reason for the divorce, occupation, and socio-economic status. The participants were also required to rate their own perceptions of their level of anger and conflict on a scale ranging between 1 and 10. No additional questions were added to the biographical questionnaire after completion of the literature study.

- **Measuring Instrument for Conflict Tactics: Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2)**

The CTS2 was selected as the quantitative measuring tool. Although this measuring tool is not standardised within a South African context, it was decided that this tool would be the best to utilise for the purpose of this study. The CTS2 measures both the extent to which partners in a dating, cohabiting, or marital relationship engage in psychological and/or physical attacks on each other, and also their use of reasoning or negotiation to deal with conflict (Straus, 1990). The Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS), but more specifically, the CTS2 (Straus, 1979), have been used for decades to evaluate violence within families and intimate relationships. Two updated versions of the instrument evolved and serve as standard forms.

The CTS2 updated the psychometric properties of the CTS, and offers practical guidance regarding administration and scoring. It must be noted that the focus on specific acts or events is a strength of the instrument. Conflict theory forms the core of another important characteristic of the measuring instrument and enables the investigation of measurement symmetry, by measuring both the participant and participant's partner's responses. The CTS and the CTS2 measure the behaviour of both the participant and partner. According to Nelson and Berwick (1989) and Foxcroft and Roodt (2013), test construction is often faced with the challenge of assembling a test that is brief enough to be applied within a limited testing time, and long enough to achieve sufficient content validity and reliability.

The five CTS2 scales which include examples of a minor and a severe question in each scale are: physical assault, injury, psychological aggression, sexual coercion, and negotiation. The increase in items in the CTS2 from the original CTS enables more facets of each construct to be included, and the likelihood increases that the scale will be valid. Additional items normally tend to increase the reliability of the scale as well (Straus et al., 1996).

It is important to note that the CTS2 includes scales to measure an additional type of partner abuse, namely sexual coercion, and a consequence, meaning physical injuries from assault by a partner. According to Straus et al. (1996), the CTS2 provides better insight regarding the distinction between minor and severe acts. The distinction between minor and severe acts has been applied to the psychological aggression scale, and the new sexual coercion and injury scale. The CTS2 can be completed in just 10 minutes.

The CTS2 includes 78 items, half referring to the participant's behaviour ('self') and the other half to the partner's behaviour ('partner'). Each item consists of two parts, namely: actions executed by the participant, and actions executed by the partner. Using a 7-point scale, the participant simply indicates how often each behaviour has occurred. The 7-point Likert scale provides the following response options to the respondents: 1 = once in the past year; 2 = twice in the past year; 3 = 3-5 times in the past year; 4 = 6-10 times in the past year; 5 = 11-20 times in the past year; 6 = more than 20 times in the past year; 7 = not in referent period but happened before; 0 = never.

The self-report or interview format can be administered and easily added to standard intake procedures. The items target specific actions, and participants do not necessarily recognize their own behaviour as violent when answering questions about actions. The

questionnaire must be completed by both participants separately to ensure reliability of responses and to eliminate malicious false responses by one of the partners.

‘Self’ and ‘partner’ scores are obtained for the following dimensions: negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury (Straus, 1979; J. van Rooyen personal communication, November 30, 2015). Please note that the negotiation scale can be divided into cognitive and emotional sub-scales, and the other scales can be divided into minor and severe sub-scales.

Reliability. The CTS2 was found to have good internal consistency. The coefficients of the scales were between .79 (psychological aggression) and 0.95 (injury) (Chapman & Gillespie, 2018). The psychological aggression scale had the lowest internal consistency, due to the broad range of psychological aggression. According to Chapman & Gillespie (2018), the Cronbach’s alpha estimated for the various scales of the CTS2 was found to be high. The CTS2 shows good cross-cultural reliability, while only small gender differences exist with a slightly higher reliability for male participants (Chapman & Gillespie, 2018). Test-retest reliability can be described as the extent of the consistency of scores over time. According to Straus et al. (2003), limited research has been done on the test-retest reliability of the CTS2.

Validity. According to Junger-Tas and Marshall, the CTS2 is a self-report measure, which eases administration, but undermines validity due to the inherent biases of self-reporting, such as memory and response biases (cited in Chapman & Gillespie, 2018). Additionally, participants may be unwilling to respond truthfully to items regarding socially unacceptable behaviour or behaviour punishable by law (Chapman & Gillespie, 2018). These threats to validity can be combated by making use of anonymous reporting in a research setting. The face validity of an instrument is defined as the extent to which a test seems to measure what it is supposed to measure (Johnson, 2013). The CTS2 shows good face validity

due to interspersing items. The face validity of the CTS has been improved by rewording items to improve understanding (Chapman & Gillespie, 2018). According to Straus et al. (2003), the CTS2 was not intended to be used solely as a predictive measure but can be used as a predictive tool alongside clinical assessment. However, researchers argue that past behaviours, as measured by the CTS2, are often the best predictors of future behaviour. Based on this premise, the CTS2 shows good predictive validity, and increases in combination with clinical assessments. The instrument boasts good convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity (J. van Rooyen personal communication, November 30, 2015). However, the construct validity of the CTS2 needs improvement, because the CTS2 is unable to reliably distinguish between acts that reflect conflict, such as deliberate or self-defence acts, or acts without visible signs of conflict, such as controlling or playful behaviour (Chapman & Gillespie, 2018). According to Chapman and Gillespie (2018), the limited contextual information included in the CTS2 leads to a loss of valuable information concerning the nature of behaviour.

Trustworthiness. A thematic analysis is a flexible and trustworthy method of analysing qualitative data. The criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative research consist of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability (Elo et al., 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The trustworthiness of the research process was enhanced by accurately reporting the steps of the thematic analysis. The researcher's self-awareness also played a vital role in the credibility of the data collection. The transcribed text was, therefore, carefully examined to critically assess the researcher's own actions. An inductive approach to a thematic analysis searches for patterns from the raw data, allowing for unexpected themes to arise.

- **Open-ended question**

One open-ended question, derived from the concept that conflict is inevitable when couples divorce, was formulated by the researcher to give the participants the option to reflect on a conflict tactic of their choice — destructive, neutral, or constructive (Vallacher et al., 2013). This also allowed the participants the opportunity to focus on any conflict tactic that was not accounted for in the questionnaires used in the study. This question stems from attachment theory that individuals' attachment styles relate to their individual conflict interactions and applied conflict tactics (Mohammadi, 2016). The open-ended question was stated as follows: *"How do you handle conflict during your separation/divorce?"*. The responses to the open-ended question were analysed using a thematic analysis.

6.2.5. Data Analysis

The SPSS Version 24 software package for statistical analysis was used to analyse and process the data analyses (SPSS Inc., 2013). Cronbach's coefficient alpha estimates the reliability of this type of scale. This is achieved by determining the internal consistency of the test or the average correlation of items within the test (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The descriptive statistics were calculated, and the effect of biographical variables on CTS2 subscales was analysed by using t-tests. ANOVAs and Spearman's rank correlations for gender, age, duration of the marriage, level of education, number of children from the marriage, onset of divorce, stage of legal intervention, and the conflict tactics that were applied. Paired t-tests were used to determine the difference between the conflict tactics applied by the couples. No statistically significant differences were reported for age, gender, and onset of the divorce process.

Cohen's d was used to determine the practical significance of the scores (Price & Oswald, 2006). It was found that: (1) participants who obtained diplomas made less use of

‘emotional negotiation’ than the participants with high school certificate, degrees, and postgraduate degrees (Cohen’s $d = 0.50-0.67$); (2) the couples with no children showed lower perceptions of anger, conflict, and psychological aggression (Cohen’s $d = 0.88-1.40$); (3) it was found that the participants in the pre-legal stage showed lower perceptions of anger than in the stage of legal intervention (Cohen’s $d = 0.70-0.99$), lower perceptions of conflict (Cohen’s $d = 0.53-0.67$) and lower severe psychological aggression (Cohen’s $d = 0.46-0.75$); and (4) couples who were married for 16-20 years or more, showed more ‘severe psychological aggression’ than the couples who were married for 11-15 years or less (Cohen’s $d = 0.46-0.86$). The following Spearman’s rank correlations were significant:

A negative correlation was found between ‘emotional negotiation’ and ‘perception of anger’. The higher the ‘emotional negotiation’ the lower the ‘perception of anger’.

A positive correlation was found between ‘minor/severe psychological aggression’ and ‘perception of anger/conflict’. This means, the higher the ‘psychological aggression’ the higher the ‘perception of anger/conflict’. Positive correlations were also found between ‘Minor/severe physical assault’ and ‘perception of anger’.

A thematic analysis was applied to analyse the open-ended question, namely “*How do you handle conflict during your separation/divorce?*”. Patterns (themes) in data are identified, analysed, and reported, using thematic analysis. A thematic analysis is widely used, because it organizes and describes data sets in rich detail (Boyatzis, 1998; Nowell et al., 2017; Tuckett, 2005). The researcher became immersed in the data by conducting manual analysis. The searching for common patterns in the answers to the open-ended question, initially occurred by reading and re-reading through the data produced by the participants. The transcriptions were then organized into meaningful groups by making use of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Broad, preliminary codes were identified from

apparent, meaningful patterns. Interpretive analysis of the collated codes followed the initial broad-based coding. The researcher searched for themes, the themes were reviewed, and then defined and named. The identified themes were reviewed, and the researcher analysed the initial themes to consider the combination, refinement, separation, or discarding of any of these themes. Following the review of themes, the researcher analysed the themes to ensure that the themes are meaningful and clear, within the broader context of data and the theoretical framework. By making use of a thematic analysis, main themes (conflict tactics) were identified from the answers, and then compared with the results obtained from the CTS2. The CTS2 originated from conflict theory. Lastly, the two sets of data were integrated.

The quantitative results showed no significant gender differences in applied conflict strategies. However, the qualitative results provided an in-depth look into conflict strategies applied by different genders. Females predominantly made use of parental gatekeeping, a form of psychological aggression that is viewed as a powerful tool to manage conflict between spouses during divorce. From attachment theory, proximity-seeking behaviours, such as parental gatekeeping, creates a sense of comfort during challenging times (Bowlby, 1998). Males made use of avoidance of an unwanted option, emotional negotiation, minor psychological aggression, cognitive negotiation, and parental alienation. Furthermore, from attachment theory, disorganised attachment has been associated with avoidance behaviours and externalising as conflict tactics in adulthood (Duschinsky, 2018).

6.2.6. Ethical Considerations

Approval for this study was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences (HREC), North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). The study was undertaken in cooperation with individual professionals in private practice throughout Gauteng, as well as the Director of the Institute of Psychology and Well-being at

the North-West University in Potchefstroom. The promoter and co-promoter also acted as consultants for ethical decision making throughout the study.

- **Estimated ethical risk level of the study**

This study had an estimated medium ethical risk because divorcing couples were sampled, and had to answer sensitive questions (Roestenburg, 2015). The divorcing couples had to answer a biographical questionnaire, complete the CTS2, and answer one open-ended question — all done individually. According to Strydom and Delport (2011), the researcher had two basic responsibilities concerning ethics. Firstly, the researcher had a responsibility towards her participants within the research project. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained the principle of keeping the rights of the participants and their humanity at heart. Secondly, the researcher had a responsibility towards her discipline of study to present accurate information in her research. Ethics refer to certain principles that are formulated for the protection of participants in a research study, and these guidelines guided the researcher in her research study.

- **Probable experience of the participants**

Once the participants voluntarily agreed to participate and consented to all the relevant processes, the researcher distributed hard copies of the CTS2, the biographical questionnaire, and the self-designed open-ended question to the gatekeepers. The participants were then supplied with these hard copies by the gatekeepers, who completed the questionnaires in the office of the gatekeeper, or in any relevant venue where confidentiality was assured. The questionnaires were completed anonymously, by making use of a coding system to ensure the privacy and anonymity of all the participants. The researcher had access to the data of the participants after retrieving the questionnaires and responses from the gatekeepers.

- **Dangers/risks and precautions**

As stated previously, this study was deemed a medium ethical risk, because the participants completed questionnaires and an open-ended question in a research study that was conducted with divorcing couples who consented to voluntarily participate. Personal and/or sensitive topics were brought to the fore that could have caused minor psychological trauma.

Direct risks, such as participants who experienced emotional upheaval due to the assessments, occurred once and the participants were referred by the gatekeeper (a general practitioner) to an expert in the field of psychology. The gatekeepers consisted of five general practitioners, five lawyers who specialize in family law, and five psychologists specializing in couples' therapy. The gatekeepers were given a step-by-step guide that directed them through the referral process and paid special attention to symptoms or signs of trauma. A referral list was also supplied to each of the gatekeepers for this specific purpose.

Indirect risks, such as participants who attempted to benefit from the research process by using the results for psycho-legal purposes, were addressed by requiring all of the participants to sign a consent form that included a clause that clearly stipulated that the research findings cannot be used for psycho-legal purposes.

- **Benefits for the participants**

There were no direct benefits for the participants, but there were indirect benefits. The completion of the questionnaire(s) led to a rich experience within the participants' themselves — a new awareness and/or perspectives were created through reflective thought processes. The divorcing couples did not receive feedback on each other's participation, and a feedback loop of research information was added to the divorce process.

Lastly, the participants received computerized feedback of their results, which could then be discussed with a gatekeeper and/or by a referring professional to assist with the mediating process. The participants will also be informed of the research findings, and will receive copies of the published articles, as part of the requirements of the study.

- **If the risks outweigh the benefits, please justify**

No participant should be harmed during a research study. This ethical aspect is regarded as a fundamental rule in research. The researcher protected the participants from physical and emotional harm by providing them with accurate information about the aim of the study, and to discuss the potential impact of the study on them. This information provided the participants with the opportunity to withdraw from the study if that was their choice (Strydom & Delpont, 2011).

The ability to freely express oneself within a safe and contained environment outweighs potential medium level risks regarding unexpressed problematic issues that could arise during the answering of questionnaires. When the above-mentioned is considered, the researcher concluded that the benefits of the study outweighed the possible risks.

- **Expertise, skills, and legal competencies**

The researcher is a practicing educational and counselling psychologist, registered with the HPCSA for the past 18 years.

The following skills were required from the researcher to conduct this study:

- Completion of the three online ethics courses with proof of training.
- A Master's degree in Psychology.
- Registration at the Health Professions Council of South Africa.
- Good communication and writing skills.

- Knowledge about the assessment process of conflict tactics.
 - Knowledge of the process of thematic analysis.
 - Knowledge of quantitative research methods.
 - Knowledge of research designs: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods.
-
- **Facilities**

The assessments took place at the rooms or practices of the selected gatekeepers where the participants were assured of privacy and confidentiality.
-
- **Misleading of participants**

No misleading of the participants took place during this research study. The researcher informed the participants about the goal of the study, and the researcher was transparent about the research process (Strydom & Delpont, 2011).
-
- **Announcement of both the individual and study results to the participants**

The participants received individually computerized feedback on their results, which could then be discussed with the gatekeeper and/or by the referring professional to assist the participants with their mediating process. The participants will receive user-friendly feedback on the study results.
-
- **Privacy and Confidentiality**

The participants were required to sign informed consent forms for participating in this study, and for the research findings to be published anonymously, or to make use of pseudonyms. The researcher respected the privacy of her participants within her research study. The participants were given the opportunity to verify all of the information before it was included in the research findings.

Throughout the research process the anonymity of the participants was maintained, and the safety and confidentiality of the documentation were ensured. The participants were not required to fill in their names, and a number was allocated to each participant's questionnaires. Upon completion of the study and publication of the thesis, all the documents and confidential information will be safely stored for a period of five years. Computer-based data will be password protected.

- **Storage and archiving of data**

The data obtained from the CTS2, the biographical questionnaire, and answers to the open-ended question were safely stored in a safe. The researcher is the only one with access to the data. Furthermore, the researcher followed the following principles set out by Creswell (2013):

- Make use of electronic backups.
- Design a list of relevant information that was gathered.
- Protect the privacy of the participants.
- Design a data-gathering matrix whereby data can be identified for a study.

After completion of the study, all the data will be stored in the archives of the research entity, COMPRES, Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus). The data will be stored for five years after which everything will be destroyed.

7. Definition of Key Concepts

For this study, the following key concepts were defined:

7.1. Conflict during Divorce

Conflict during divorce is characterised by verbal and physical aggression, hostility, and distrust. It has been claimed that the adversarial legal process fosters conflict during divorce (Kelly, 2000; Pedro-Carroll, 2020).

Anger-based marital conflict is associated with filial aggression and behavioural problems, and therefore, parents and children involved have similar difficulty regulating negative affect (Jenkins, 2004; Katz & Gottman, 1993). Mediation, constructive interventions, and treatment of conflict during divorce can, therefore, assist parents and children to regulate negative affect, to minimize the adverse effects of divorce.

7.2. Divorce

Divorce is conceptualized as the dissolution of marriage (Kapelle & Baxter, 2020; Weintraub & Hillman, 2005). Robinson (2009:9) states: “Divorce is to dissolve the marriage by judgement or decree of divorce”. In the context of this study, divorce is viewed as the legal termination of marriage. Divorce is a complex process that unfolds over time, and requires extensive reorganization, and numerous adjustments for all parties involved.

7.3. Conflict Tactics

Conflict tactics can be defined as specific physical or psychological acts that partners engage in during conflict interactions (Straus et al., 1996).

Conflict tactics may influence the marriage and divorce proceedings of couples, regardless of the grouping terms used to categorize conflict tactics or behaviour, whether being defined as negative or positive affect expression, hostile or warm or disengaged (Birditt et al., 2010). Conflict tactics can be divided into two broad types of tactics: (1) engagement tactics, and (2) avoidance tactics (Ciuladiene & Kairiene, 2017; Hocker & Wilmot, 1985). Individuals that have secure attachments tend to engage in positive conflict interactions and

affect regulation, whereas individuals with insecure attachments tend to display negative or destructive conflict tactics or behaviour (Simpson & Rholes, 2017; Simpson et al., 1996).

7.4. Mediations

Duchen and Schutte (2008) and Goltsman et al. (2009) define mediation as an alternative dispute resolution process in which a couple meet with a neutral third party to reach an agreement regarding disputes. Mediation is a cooperative negotiation process in which a third party (mediator) assists a couple to negotiate over issues in dispute, to come to an agreement (Boniface, 2012). The main purpose of a mediation process is to aid and promote the effective resolution of disputes between couples in a cost-effective manner, and to assist litigants to promptly determine whether it is in the best interest of the couple to proceed with a trial.

7.5. Format of the Research Study

A series of three articles was submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology. The articles were prepared for the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, the *Journal of Divorce and Remarriage*, and the *Journal of Family Psychology*. The structure was set out as follows:

Section A: Introduction, Rationale, Goal, Objectives, and Research Methodology

The first section is a general introduction and background to the thesis. It includes the rationale for the study, gives the objectives, and a brief description of the research methodology.

Section B: Articles

Article 1 — An exploration of the nature and variety of conflict tactics applied by couples during divorce in a group of participants within a South African context.

Article 2 — An exploration of gender differences in the implementation of conflict tactics during the divorce process.

Article 3 — An integration of Article 1 and Article 2 culminating in the development of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce to be used by professionals to decrease the destructive effects on families during high conflict divorce processes, and to mobilize divorcing couples towards constructive communication.

Section C: Critical Reflections of the Study

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SECTION B**ARTICLE 1****Conflict Tactics during Divorce within a South African Context**

ABSTRACT

Objective: To examine conflict tactics applied by couples during divorce within a South African context. **Background:** Divorce involves termination of major affectional bonds formed by adults. The use of conflict tactics during divorce, particularly with children involved, is an understudied subject. The comparison of couples' responses to conflict revealed how divorce drives the experiences of parents, and how they make use of conflict tactics. **Method:** A quantitative analysis was performed, as part of a larger cross-sectional convergent mixed methods design, on 50 divorcing couples between the ages of 20-60 years in Gauteng, South Africa. Snowball sampling was used to generate the sample via purposive selection by professionals within the field of divorce. **Results:** Findings suggest five factors (indicators of conflict tactics) that contribute to conflict tactics during divorce, namely age, duration of marriage, number of children, level of education, and stage of divorce proceedings. **Conclusion:** Moral discourses shape the experiences of conflict and anger of couples during divorce, leading them to apply negotiation tactics to obtain a moral high ground. The many challenges and stressors associated with divorce intensify activation of the attachment system and create a desire for proximity to one's attachment figure (possibly one's spouse). Attachment styles might provide an explanation that divorce tactics attempt at reorganizing the attachment process. Attachment bonds might be unconscious and masked by feelings of dissatisfaction with the ex-partner, making it difficult to identify this relationship. Further research on the relationship between the dynamics of disrupted attachment styles, divorce tactics and conflict is needed.

Keywords: conflict tactics, couples, disrupted attachment bond, proximity-seeking behaviour

A Profile of the Scope of Divorce in South Africa

Conflict during divorce appears to be increasing along with the growing divorce rate in South Africa, and according to conflict theory, all families have a degree of conflict present, which is exacerbated during the divorce process (Carvalho Relva et al., 2013; Van Jaarsveld, 2018). South Africa's divorce statistics are ever increasing, and divorce rates have become a common occurrence in modern society – evident in the high number of marriages and divorces (Statistics South Africa, 2018). During 2018, 25 284 divorce forms were completed in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2018). It was reported that the total number of divorces consistently increased between 2012 and 2017 (Statistics South Africa, 2018). In 2018, 14 302 (56.6%) of divorce cases involved children younger than 18 years of age (Statistics South Africa, 2018).

Divorce, as described in the South African law, refers to the dissolution of a marital bond, and according to the South African Divorce Act (70 of 1979), it requires legal action. According to attachment theory, the dissolution of a marital bond will not occur without any form of discomfort due to proximity-seeking behaviours, which may result in conflict behaviour (Bosman et al., 2015). This means that all legal duties and responsibilities of marriage are no longer viewed as valid by the divorcing couple. Divorce is not a single event, but a complex process. Divorce unfolds over time and requires extensive reorganization and a series of adjustments for all involved. According to the Divorce Act (70 of 1979), parties can get divorced without providing a reason. The Mediation in Certain Divorce Matters Act (24 of 1987) safeguards all minor children who are extremely vulnerable when their parents get

divorced. Viljoen (2013) argues that the best-interest-of-the-child principle has seemingly escalated conflict between parents during divorce.

According to Robinson (2015), professionals and the courts are confronted with high-conflict divorce cases that are complex – cases, that cannot be finalised because of pending alleged child sexual abuse charges, and the lack of adequate dispute resolution. These complex cases lead to various assessments and interventions that can become costly and creates a situation of high-conflict divorces. The Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus et al., 1996) measures the extent to which partners – whom are either dating, cohabiting or in a marital relationship – engage in physical and/or psychological attacks during conflict, and their use of reasoning and/or negotiation when resolving conflict. Conflict tactics can, therefore, be defined as specific physical or psychological acts that partners engage in with respect to conflict.

According to Hocker and Wilmot (1985) and Simpson and Rholes (2017) partners strategize in advance of conflict, they revise their strategies during conflict, and may engage in retrospective strategizing. These strategies or tactics are based on the choice of either avoiding or engaging in conflict with their partner. As a result, conflict tactics can be divided into two broad categories: (1) engagement tactics, and (2) avoidance tactics. In line with attachment theory, proximity-seeking behaviours can otherwise be described as contact-making behaviours or engagement behaviours (Bosman et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1969). Conflict behaviours, which impair the expression of contact-making behaviour and causes disruption and/or avoidance behaviour, are known as disorganisation within the attachment system (Duschinsky, 2018). Simpson and Rholes (2017) state that engagement tactics make use of either collaborative (integrative) or competitive (distributive) approaches. Collaborative or problem-solving approaches aim at achieving outcomes that are mutually beneficial to both

partners (Thomas, 2013). Partners who apply collaborative approaches share information with their partner, which enables the couple to evaluate the priorities and needs of both parties (Thomas, 2013). In contrast, competitive approaches aim at achieving individual outcomes (Thomas, 2013). Ganesan (1993:186) defines competitive approaches as the “attempt to resolve conflict through the implicit and explicit use of threats, persuasive arguments, and punishment.” Partners who apply competitive approaches are merely concerned with their personal outcome, regardless of the needs of their partner.

According to attachment theory, all parties who present with high levels of anger as part of their conflict tactics, will produce the basic need to form new attachments to hinder attachment disorganisation due to divorce (Saini, 2012).

The Link between Anger and Conflict Tactics

Reisenzein (2012) endorses the assumption that emotions are subjective experiences and is linked to a distinct pattern of emotion components. Research suggests an interplay between appraisals or belief-desire combinations (namely, goal relevance; goal incongruence; and other-blame), and the experience of anger. These factors must be present for individuals to experience anger (Reisenzein, 2009). Carver and Harmon-Jones (2009) propose a minimal theory about the determinants of anger. Negative arousal is an essential component for the experience of anger. From literature, emotional experience (whether positive or negative) is presented as a response of a multitude of factors.

The emotional components and the context of an event shape an emotional experience that also differs between individuals (Ceulemans et al., 2012). This view is in line with theories that state that aversive events are crucial determinants of anger (Berkowitz & Harmon-Jones, 2004; Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009). For anger to occur, aversive events imply ego-involvement or personal significance (Frijda, 1993; Frijda, 2009; Smith &

Lazarus, 1991). As a result, individuals will generally experience anger when they experience a 'hostile threat' or a 'threat to self-esteem' (Ceulemans et al., 2012). According to Vallacher et al. (2013) conflict situations are evident during a divorce process; however, there is an absence in understanding the different conflict tactics applied by partners during divorce. According to conflict theory, the assumption is made that conflict is inherent in all humans. It is inherent, because group members may share many interests, but they also have different interests.

The version of conflict theory on which the measuring tool, the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS and CTS2) is based, assumes that any inequality in the family increases the probability of violent acts, because partners might use violence to maintain their position of power (Straus, 2005). A closer look into the application of conflict tactics would, therefore, add to a more complete understanding of conflict during divorce.

Improved methods to manage conflict between divorcing parents, will naturally protect the children during and post-divorce (Main et al., 2011). Conflict during divorce results in painful events which need to come to an end. Divorce has an impact on all the facets of family life, and the family might be traumatised by this final decision. The dissolution of a marriage might lead to attachment disorganisation. Attachment disorganisation can be prevented by promoting secure attachment-formation in both parents (Main et al., 2011). According to Fisher and Crandell (1997) and Feeney and Monin (2008), the primary objective of insecure divorcing couples is to protect themselves, and self-protection often overrides a partner's ability to respond empathically to his/her partner. In all insecure attachments between partners, the attachment relationship, which is ideally supportive and rewarding, will become painful, conflictual, and unsatisfying. The defensive processes (conflict tactics) that ensue are likely to result in marital dissolution. Therefore, the

application of conflict tactics by divorcing partners, such as negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury was explored in this study.

Divorcing couples share different strategic perspectives, which illuminate how couples use different conflict tactics in the process of divorce. The researcher aimed to investigate conflict strategies to reveal how various factors might impact the use of conflict tactics. Knowledge about this phenomenon will help professionals in the field of divorce to intervene more effectively. As a result, conflict in couples who are divorcing can be reduced, and their children will benefit from their parents' improved communication and constructive dissolution of the marital bond.

METHOD

Participants

The study focused on the conflict tactics applied by couples during divorce in a group of participants within a South African context. A target of 50 divorcing heterosexual couples from Gauteng, South Africa, were referred by professionals within the field of divorce. The participants were purposively selected by selected professionals in the field of divorce for the completion of the standardized quantitative measuring tool namely the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale, or better known as the CTS2 (Straus, 1979). During the selection process, no same-gender couples showed interest to participate in the study. The minimum number of 50 couples was determined by a statistician from the Statistical Services at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, who made use of a power analysis. The statistician considered the power to determine statistical significance on an alpha level .05 to obtain a power of 80% for medium effect sizes. The selection of participation was based on the participants' report of conflict during divorce. The participants were between the ages of 21 and 60 years. 58 % of the couples were younger than 40 years and only one couple was

between the ages of 50 and 60 years. The participants are all permanent South African citizens and their socio-economic status ranged between low to high and their occupations ranged from being unemployed to executive managers of businesses.

All of the participants had been legally married for at least 5 years at the time of the research study, where 62% of the participants had been married between 5 and 20 years. 40 out of the 100 participants had one child from the marriage. Most of the participants were college and university educated and many obtained more than one degree: 36 out of the 100 participants had completed a diploma course; 27 out of the 100 participants completed a degree; and 14 out of the 100 participants completed a post-graduate degree. The highest level of education was a PhD obtained by three participants. The participants spoke predominantly English. It is further noteworthy that 62% of the participants, initiated divorce between 0 and 5 years of married life and 38 participants indicated pre-legal status of divorce proceedings.

The study was conducted during 2018. The researcher utilized effect size, which is independent of sample size, and is a measure of practical significance as this is a non-probability sample and results cannot be generalised to a larger population (Ellis & Steyn, 2003; Sullivan & Feinn, 2012). The participants were selected from referrals of psychologists, social workers, general practitioners, psychiatrists, and legal representatives in the private sector. They gave permission to be contacted by the researcher for the purpose of the study. Goodwill permission letters were signed by the professionals who decided to act as gatekeepers.

Measures

It was decided to implement the CTS2 as the quantitative measuring tool. This tool measures both the extent to which partners engage in psychological and/or physical attacks

on each other and their use of conflict tactics (Straus 1990). The CTS2 (Straus, 1979) has been used for decades to evaluate violence within families and intimate relationships. The first version of the instrument, namely the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS), demonstrated good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, along with convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity (J. van Rooyen personal communication, November 30, 2015).

The CTS2 offers practical guidance regarding administration and scoring. Furthermore, conflict theory is the basis of another important characteristic of the measuring instrument, namely symmetry in measurement. Both the CTS and the CTS2 measure the behaviour of both the participant and the participant's partner. During psychological assessments and interventions, it is crucial to know the extent to which one of the partners or both partners have carried out acts of psychological and physical aggression (Feld & Straus, 1989; Gelles & Straus, 1979).

The CTS2 measures an additional type of partner abuse (sexual coercion) and a consequence (physical injury from assaults by a partner). Consequently, the questions are asked within the same framework by making use of the same response categories as used for the negotiation, psychological aggression, and physical assault scale items.

The CTS2 includes 78 items – 39 of the items refer to the one partner's behaviour ("Self") and 39 to the other partner's behaviour ("Partner"). Each partner completes a questionnaire and responds to the "Self" and "Partner" statements. The questionnaire must be completed by both participants separately to ensure reliability of responses and to eliminate malicious false responses by one of the partners.

Scores are produced for "Self" and "Partner", according to the following dimensions: negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury (Straus, 1979; J. van Rooyen, personal communication, November 30, 2015). Please note that the

negotiation scale can be divided into cognitive and emotional subscales, and the other scales can be divided into minor and severe subscales.

Procedure

The researcher analysed data from the biographical questionnaire and the CTS2. Hard copies of the instruments were made available to the different gatekeepers and the participants completed the questionnaires at the offices of the gatekeepers. Each gatekeeper provided a quiet and private space for the participant(s) to complete the questionnaires and the respective gatekeepers provided supervision when necessary. The professionals acted as gatekeepers who provided the participants with essential research information, and selected the participants for the study. The participants were under no obligation to participate in the study. If one of the partners decided *not* to participate in the study, both partners were excluded from the study – no participant were forced to participate. The participants did not receive any form of reimbursement for their participation.

The completion time of the questionnaires ranged from 45 minutes to 60 minutes. This investigation forms part of a larger study that will offer a conflict management intervention model to professionals that will assist them in dealing with divorce cases.

The intended sample of 50 couples had to consider practical implications, such as the availability of both partners to complete the questionnaires, language competency of both the partners to respond adequately, and transportation.

After the researcher obtained the consent and co-operation of the different participating organisations and private practices, the gatekeepers and/or private practitioners were requested to contact the clients who met the criteria and who gave their written consent that their e-mail addresses might be shared with the researcher.

Analysis

Firstly, the descriptive statistics were calculated, and the effect of the biographical variables were analysed by using ANOVA's, t-tests, and Spearman's correlations.

The analysis of data focused on the responses of 50 couples to 78 items. Each item required two responses from each of the participants. The first response required the one partner to describe what he/she did, and the second response required the same partner to describe what the other partner did. The responses were not calculated when one of the participants gave more than one response per item and, therefore, error responses were excluded (less than 2% of all of the responses). Missing responses were handled as missing. The averages for the sub-scales were then calculated, after reliability had been established, namely: negotiation; psychological aggression; physical assault; sexual coercion; injury; age; educational level; and level of court proceedings. A comparison was done on sub-scales of the same measuring instrument, which was measured on the original 7-point Likert scale. The Likert scale provided the following response categories: 0 (*never*); 1 (*once in the past years*); 2 (*twice in the past year*); 3 (*3-5 times in the past year*); 4 (*6-10 times in the past year*); 5 (*11-20 times in the past year*); 6 (*more than 20 times in the past year*); 7 (*not in the referred period, but it has happened before*). Although the sub-scales do not have the same number of indicators, the mean score of each of the subscales was calculated with the purpose of comparability and interpretation on the original 7-point Likert scale by the statistical consultation services of the North-West University.

The negotiation scale can be divided into cognitive and emotional subscales. The other scales can be divided into minor and severe subscales. 'Negotiation' is defined as actions taken to settle a disagreement through discussion. However, the quality of conflict interaction can be negative and destructive (negative conflict interaction). The items in the

cognitive sub-scale are examples of such discussions. The emotion sub-scale is meant to measure the extent to which positive or negative affect (emotional tone) is communicated by asking about expressions of feelings of care and respect for a partner (Bush & Folger, 1994; Folberg et al., 2004). 'Psychological aggression' describes verbal and nonverbal aggressive acts. The communicative act might be active or passive, and verbal or non-verbal. The 'psychological aggression' subscale asks about the frequency of conflict tactics that are used and that cause psychological distress to the partner. Minor psychological aggression includes acts such as shouting and yelling at one's partner. Severe psychological aggression includes acts such as threatening to hit or throw something at one's partner or destroying something that belongs to one's partner.

Examples of verbal (active) communicative acts include insulting or swearing at a partner. Non-verbal examples are slamming a door or smashing something (active); and a stony silence or sulking (passive). 'Physical assault' describes acts that fit the definition of physical violence. A distinction is made between acts of minor violence and major violence. 'Sexual coercion' is defined as behaviour that is intended to force a partner to engage in unwanted sexual activity. The sexual coercion scale is intended to cover a range of coercive acts ranging from verbal insistence to physical force. 'Injury' measures partner-inflicted physical injuries, as indicated by bone or tissue changes, a need for medical attention, or continuing pain for a day or more. The instrument allowed the researcher to examine, for example, the dominant conflict tactics used by couples during their divorce process, and during which stage of litigation couples exhibited a specific conflict tactic. Data of the questionnaires were statistically analysed and interpreted in correlation with the information obtained from the statistical consultation services of the North West University in Potchefstroom, South Africa. The data sets were analysed separately, compared, integrated, and interpreted, constantly referring to the theoretical frameworks.

RESULTS

The following results were obtained from the study:

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics*

Conflict tactic	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD
Emotional negotiation	0.75	7.00	3.75	1.56
Cognitive negotiation	1.00	7.00	3.64	1.23
Minor psychological aggression	0.36	6.43	2.54	1.13
Severe psychological aggression	0.00	7.00	2.13	2.18
Minor physical assault	0.00	6.50	0.95	1.25
Severe physical assault	0.00	4.30	0.34	0.70
Minor injury	0.00	6.25	0.68	1.18
Severe injury	0.00	6.00	0.59	1.19
Minor sexual coercion	0.00	3.50	0.49	0.78

According to the data reflected in Table 1, the couples obtained the highest mean score for ‘emotional negotiation’ (3.75), and the second highest score was obtained for ‘cognitive negotiation’ (3.64), followed by ‘minor psychological aggression’ (2.54) and ‘severe psychological aggression’ (2.13). The lowest mean score (0.34) was obtained for ‘severe physical assault’.

The results of the t-tests and ANOVAs were used to examine the effect of the biographical data on conflict tactics and are only reported when statistically significant differences occurred. Age, gender, and onset of the divorce process showed no statistically significant differences.

Table 2. *Level of Education*

Level of Education									
Conflict tactic	High School		Diploma		Degree		Postgraduate		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	P-value
Emotional negotiation	4.00	1.24	3.23	1.53	4.33	1.64	3.52	1.62	0.03
Cognitive negotiation	3.74	1.02	3.20	1.39	4.13	1.02	3.66	1.17	0.03
Severe physical assault	0.70	1.13	0.12	0.22	0.26	0.56	0.37	0.56	0.03

Note. Turkey's post hoc test for unequal N indicates that $p < .05$.

Table 2 illustrates that the participants who obtained a high school certificate (minimum of ten years of schooling), used more 'severe physical assault' than the participants who obtained diplomas and degrees (Cohen's $d = 0.38-0.51$).

Table 3. *Number of Years Married*

Number of Years Married									
Conflict tactic	0-5 years		6-10 years		11-15 years		16-20 years		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	P-value
Psychological aggression									
Severe	2.18	2.12	1.89	2.14	1.21	1.53	3.41	2.56	0.03
sexual coercion									
minor	0.73	0.89	0.2	0.45	0.42	0.7	0.46	0.9	0.05

Note. Turkey's post hoc test for unequal N indicates that $p < .05$.

Table 3 illustrates that the couples who were married for 16-20 years or more, showed more 'severe psychological aggression' than the couples who were married for 11-15 years or less (Cohen's $d = 0.46-0.86$). The couples who were married for 6-10 years presented with lower scores for 'minor sexual coercion' (Cohen's $d = 0.55-0.76$).

Table 4. *Number of Children*

Number of Children									
Conflict tactic	0		1		2		3		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	P-value
Perceptions of anger	5.33	2.35	7.7	2.7	7.93	1.94	8.64	1.43	<.001
Perceptions of conflict	5.43	2.64	7.83	2.57	8.07	2.28	8.45	1.86	<.001
Psychological aggression minor	1.59	0.88	2.64	1.15	2.87	1.00	3.21	1.78	<.001

Note. Turkey's post hoc test for unequal N indicates that $p < .05$.

Table 4 illustrates that the couples who have no children showed lower perceptions regarding anger, conflict, and psychological aggression than the rest of the couples (Cohen's $d = 0.88-1.40$). Perceptions of anger and conflict increased with the number of children. It was further found that the couples who had no children during their marriages presented with lower scores, not only for perceptions of anger and conflict (Cohen's $d = 0.91-1.15$), but also for psychological minor aggression (Cohen's $d = 0.50-1.83$).

Table 5. *Legal Status*

	Legal Status							
	Pre-legal		Legal Intervention		Degree of Settlement		Full Settlement	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Perception of anger	6.26	2.58	8.07	2.35	7.20	2.70	8.8	1.03
Perception of conflict	6.24	2.82	8.10	2.54	7.90	2.18	8.3	1.42
Minor psychological aggression	2.10	1.13	2.70	1.10	2.45	0.76	3.69	0.67
Severe psychological aggression	1.16	1.59	2.82	2.23	2.35	2.61	2.7	2.45
Minor physical assault	0.68	1.03	1.01	1.28	0.35	0.45	2.26	1.58
Severe physical assault	0.14	0.26	0.44	0.75	0.12	0.20	0.87	1.41

Note. Turkey's post hoc test for unequal N indicates that $p < .05$.

It was found that the participants in the pre-legal stage showed lower perceptions of anger than in the stage of legal intervention (Cohen's $d = 0.70-0.99$), lower perceptions of conflict (Cohen's $d = 0.53-0.67$) and lower severe psychological aggression (Cohen's $d = 0.46-0.75$). The stage of legal intervention seems to be a determining factor that could hypothetically have an impact on the couple's perception of level of anger, conflict, and conflict tactics. Participants that have reached full settlement used 'severe physical aggression' more than participants in the pre-legal, intervention and settlement stages

(Cohen's $d = 0.46-0.75$) as well as 'severe physical assault' (Cohen's $d = 0.39-0.53$). The couples who reached full settlement presented with higher levels of 'minor psychological aggression' than the couples who were in their pre-legal stage of settlement (Cohen's $d = 0.53-1.63$).

Table 6. *Spearman Rank Correlations*

Conflict tactic		Perceptions regarding Level of Anger 1-10	Perceptions regarding Level of Conflict 1-10
Emotional negotiation	Correlation Coefficient	-0.21*	-0.18
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.04	0.07
Cognitive negotiation	Correlation Coefficient	-0.07	-0.04
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.50	0.71
Minor psychological aggression	Correlation Coefficient	0.46**	0.45**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001
Severe psychological aggression	Correlation Coefficient	0.51**	0.46**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001
Minor physical assault	Correlation Coefficient	0.23*	0.15
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.02	0.13
Severe physical assault	Correlation Coefficient	0.21*	0.18
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.04	0.08
Minor injury	Correlation Coefficient	0.07	0.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.47	0.78
Severe injury	Correlation Coefficient	0.04	-0.05
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.70	0.61
Minor sexual coercion	Correlation Coefficient	0.03	0.03
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.78	0.80

The following negative correlations were significant:

A negative correlation was found between ‘emotional negotiation’ and ‘perception of anger’. The higher the ‘emotional negotiation’ the lower the ‘perception of anger’.

A positive correlation was found between ‘minor/severe psychological aggression’ and ‘perception of anger/conflict’. This means, the higher the ‘psychological aggression’ the higher the ‘perception of anger/conflict’. Positive correlations were also found between ‘Minor/severe physical assault’ and ‘perception of anger’.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to address gaps in knowledge about current South African divorcing couples and their application of conflict tactics in the process of divorce. According to Weintraub and Hillman (2005) and Kapelle and Baxter (2020) divorce is the conclusive act of dissolution of marriage. Robinson (2015) and Van Jaarsveld (2018) confirm that professionals and the courts are confronted with complex high-conflict divorce cases – divorce cases that cannot be finalised due to the use of immoral conflict tactics, such as false allegations of sexual abuse, or when fathers are prevented from rightfully fulfilling their role as parents. Parental alienation syndrome (Gardner, 1998; Kelly & Johnston, 2001; Van Jaarsveld, 2018) serves as another example of unethical conflict tactics when a parent brain washes or programmes children to denigrate against a parent.

In order to protect children during and after divorce proceedings, and to promote the formation of secure attachments with both parents by preventing attachment disorganisation (Main et al., 2011) a closer look into gender, and the prominence of conflict tactics is needed to obtain a more complete understanding and management of conflict during divorce. Although attachment theory does not specifically describe the factors that contribute to conflict during divorce, it provides an important foundation for understanding the

mechanisms underlying this prevalent form of social disruption during adulthood. The attachment theory states that love, grief, or other forms of strong emotion are only felt for individuals when attachment bonds are established (Bosmans et al., 2015; Bowlby, 1982). Attachment bonds are strong and persistent ties. Each member of a dyad wants to maintain proximity to the other through proximity-seeking behaviour when greater protection or support is needed. Once attachment bonds have formed, these bonds tend to endure, and disruption is strongly resisted. Dissolving marriages require the reorganization of attachment bonds. Anxiety, anger, and conflict stem from uncertainty about the availability of an attachment figure(s) during the dissolution and/or reorganization of attachment bonds during the divorce process (Bowlby, 1979; Duschinsky, 2018).

Bacon (2004) and Pedro-Carroll (2020) states that conflict during divorce has a major influence on how children adjust. Continued conflict might be more powerful than divorce itself. The improved management of the conflict behaviours of parents will, therefore, essentially protect the children during and after divorce, and will promote the formation of secure attachments with both parents by preventing attachment disorganisation (Main et al., 2011).

The responses of the divorcing couples to the quantitative measuring instrument (CTS2), and responses to the biographical questionnaire were analysed, and interpreted by using the theoretical frameworks of conflict theory and attachment theory.

The findings offer six key contributions with respect to the conflict behaviours of couples during divorce:

Firstly: Couples make predominantly use of emotional negotiation tactics and cognitive negotiation tactics. No statistically significant differences were reported for age, gender, and onset of the divorce process. Recent studies confirmed that mothers and fathers

present with multiple gatekeeping behaviours – parents can be restrictive, protective, and facilitative (Austin et al., 2013). The attachment theory confirms that in times of distress, individuals seek comfort and closer relationships. This proximity-seeking is characteristic of attachment behaviour that provides comfort, and reduces anxiety for those who need to re-organize their attachments with loved ones (Bowlby, 1998; Duschinsky, 2018). A research study by Van der Merwe (in press) produced results that indicated that protective gatekeeping is more prevalent in females. It is important to note that mothers with young children are more likely to have physical care of children and therefore have more opportunities to gatekeep than fathers (Berger et al., 2008; Yoshida, 2011).

Secondly: Age does not influence the level of anger nor the level of conflict in divorcing couples. According to conflict theory, conflict is unavoidable during divorce. The presentation of conflict will therefore not be affected by age during the divorce process, rather by the imbalances in the exchange of power (Straus, 2005; Vallacher et al., 2013). Ceulemans et al., (2012) confirm that emotional components and the context of an event; shape an emotional experience irrespective of age. This viewpoint is in line with theories that state that an aversive event is a crucial determinant of anger which might lead to conflict, and the resulting use of conflict tactics (Berkowitz & Harmon-Jones, 2004). For anger to occur during an event, it implies ego-involvement or personal significance, not age (Frijda, 1993, 2009; Smith & Lazarus, 1991). As a result, individuals will generally experience anger when they experience hostility or ‘threat to self-esteem’ (Ceulemans et al., 2012; Ward & King, 2018). These experiences can trigger the body’s fight or flight response, when the individual experiences alarm and disorganisation (Duschinsky, 2018). Without the skill of decision making and reasoning, our primal instincts do not stay in check. It must be noted that gender differences were found in perceptions of moral wrongness, which affect moral decision making, or the use of moral conflict tactics (Ward and King, 2018). Ward and King (2018)

found that women experience a heightened self-consciousness, moral emotions, and regret when recalling past regressions for personal gain, and will, therefore, act morally due to an emotional perspective.

Thirdly: Education showed an association with refined conflict tactics, such as the use of decision making and reasoning. This might indicate the integration of higher-order thinking. Participants whose highest education level was a high school certificate (minimum ten years of schooling), obtained higher scores for 'severe physical assault' than the participants with degrees. The conflict theory assumes that any inequality in the family increases the presence of violent acts, because partners may use destructive conflict tactics to maintain their position of power (Straus, 2005). According to Mainali (2012), the development of higher order thinking skills is considered necessary for quality of life. A higher level of education might contribute to a higher order of thinking resulting in more nuanced conflict interactions.

Fourthly: The couples with no children showed lower perceptions of anger, conflict, and psychological aggression. Perceptions of anger and conflict increase with the number of children (positive correlation). According to Danielsbacka et al., (2017), parents have more conflict with their in-laws than childless couples.

Fifthly: The stage of the divorce proceedings had an impact on the perceptions of the participants regarding anger and/or conflict during divorce. Three stages of the divorce proceedings delivered significant results, namely (1) the pre-legal stage, (2) the legal intervention stage, and (3) the full settlement stage. It was found that the participants in the pre-legal stage show lower perceptions of anger and conflict, and lower severe psychological aggression than the participants in the legal intervention stage. The full settlement stage indicated higher minor psychological aggression than the pre-legal stage, and higher minor

physical assault than during the pre-legal and/or full settlement stage. The full settlement stage showed higher minor psychological aggression than during the pre-legal and legal intervention stages on the 10% bench of significance. These findings correlate with research done by Weiten (2016), who found that parental conflict commonly precedes, emerges, or increases during divorce processes, and often continues for some time beyond the divorce. The common denominator in well-adjusted families post-divorce is the absence of malice (Ahrons, 2013). The relationship between ex-spouses dictates the emotional climate of the family. In this regard, the development of a conflict management model for professionals in the field of divorce, aim to have long-term value for the well-being of families.

Sixthly: The duration of marriage showed a significant impact on how the participants apply conflict tactics. The longer hostile-engaged couples (low happiness/high conflict) are married, the greater the imbalance and/or gap in joint decision making, shared values, support in the household, and beliefs about child rearing. These couples move away from an egalitarian stance in marriage. The couples who are married for 16-20 years or more, indicated more 'severe psychological aggression' than the couples that are married for 11-15 years or less. Furthermore, the couples who are married for 6-10 years presented with a lower incidence for minor sexual coercion. According to Katz and Woodin (2003), and in line with conflict theory, hostile-detached couples are more likely to use more power-assertive methods of discipline, and their family units are less cohesive, less playful, more conflictual, and their children exhibited more behaviour problems than hostile or conflict-engaging couples (Straus, 2005; Vallacher et al., 2013). According to attachment theory, the longer hostile-detached couples are married, the greater the imbalance (Duschinsky, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study will equip professionals in the field of divorce with sound knowledge of divorcing couples' conflict behaviours. The study deepens the knowledge of the conflict strategies used by divorcing couples. The quantitative results of 50 divorcing couples were analysed and compared. The findings illuminate how couples use different conflict tactics in the process of divorce. This investigation of conflict strategies used by divorcing couples revealed how the legal intervention status of the divorcing couples, might be accompanied by different tactics. Intervention by professionals in the field of divorce might exacerbate or buffer anger and/or conflict in divorcing couples. The study shows that the use of early intervention techniques (pre-legal intervention stage), will reduce couples' perceptions of conflict and anger and it will reduce severe psychological aggression.

The study contributes, therefore, to knowledge about conflict tactics by demonstrating how age, educational level, duration of marriage, children, and the stage of divorce proceedings drive couples on how they respond to anger and conflict.

High conflict during divorce prevents couples from maintaining mutual respect, and they apply conflict tactics by upholding a universally recognized standard of ethics. The results suggest that moral discourses shape couples' experiences of conflict and anger during divorce and lead them to apply negotiation tactics to obtain the moral higher ground. The findings further illuminate that a negative correlation between emotional negotiation tactics and couples' perceptions of anger exists. The stressors associated with divorce are likely to intensify activation of the attachment system and can create an imbalance in the desire for proximity to one's spouse. The process of detachment reorganisation is, therefore, likely to be much more difficult than either spouse anticipates. From this study, it became evident that

further research on the relationship between attachment styles and conflict tactics will contribute to a deeper insight about conflict tactics during divorce.

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ARTICLE 2

Gender Differences in Conflict Tactics during Divorce

Abstract

Males and females employ different conflict tactics during divorce. Fifty divorcing couples in Gauteng, South Africa, between the ages of 20 - 60 years participated in the study. Snowball sampling was used for a heterogeneous sample via purposive selection by professionals within the field of divorce. The researcher made use of a cross-sectional convergent mixed methods design, by utilizing quantitative and qualitative approaches concurrently. The quantitative results showed no significant gender differences in applied conflict strategies. However, the qualitative results provided an in-depth look into conflict strategies applied by different genders. Females predominantly made use of protective gatekeeping while males made use of avoidance of an unwanted option, minor psychological aggression, emotional negotiation, and parental alienation.

Keywords: conflict, divorce, conflict tactics, gender difference, heterosexual couples

Introduction

Divorce in South Africa is an ever-increasing dilemma, which is evident from the constantly growing divorce statistics. This phenomenon is highlighted in the *Marriages and Divorces 2016 Report*, released by Statistics South Africa (2018). While generational changes in parenting roles might unfold, and policymakers in the Western world struggle with the issue of shared parenting after divorce, children's courts need more sophisticated information, and expert recommendations to make effective decisions regarding related issues. The researcher strongly agrees with Mohi (2015) that although divorce had become prevalent in our daily lives, divorcing partners involved can use this potentially destructive situation to create a constructive experience for all concerned. The focus on the potentially constructive experience of divorce, should be the new focus. According to Mahrer et al. (2016), there is a growing debate in literature about whether shared parenting time should be formally/judicially assigned to increase and ensure quality time for children with both parents, despite the presence of conflict during divorce. The increase in care and contact battles and the ensuing conflict between parents, therefore, deserve in-depth research.

According to Mahrer et al. (2016), family evaluations often involve divorcing couples and families where high levels of legal conflict between the parents occur and where professional interventions, such as mediation, failed. Often divorcing couples are unable to reach an agreement on parenting time, and they, therefore, depend on a court decision. It must be noted that high levels of legal conflict are not necessarily indicative of high levels of inter-parental conflict. However, when inter-parental conflict occurs, evidence indicates that the exposure of their children to it is the most salient risk factor for child adjustment problems (Goodman et al., 2004; Harold & Sellers, 2018).

When parents decide to initiate a divorce process; their main concern is the best possible solution for the children regarding access, contact, and residential rights (Combrinck, 2014; Preller, 2013). High conflict divorce processes often complicate the question: “What is the best for their children?” South Africa provides a unique solution when addressing this question. In a South African context, the Children’s Act 38 of 2005 is appropriate and empowering legislation that has been long overdue (Bosman-Sadie & Corrie, 2010; Corrie et al., 2016). Anecdotal evidence from the researcher’s experience in practice, seems to indicate that parents are inclined to fight for primary residential rights of their children after separation. Research done by Corrie et al., (2016) suggests that a combination of the best interests of the child standard, as referred to in the Children’s Act 38 of 2005, the principle of gender conflict, and the joint parenting concept further escalates parental conflict. Robinson (2015) further argues that the change in legislation resulted in the application of the best-interest-of-child principle in care and contact disputes. This change could have caused an escalation in custody litigation and conflict between parents, as parents attempt to put themselves in a better position to gain primary custody of their child/children (Bickerdike & Littlefield, 2000; Gardner, 1998a; Gardner, 1998b; Van Jaarsveld, 2018). Whether it is detrimental and/or beneficial for young children to have a consistent home versus ensuring adequate contact at both parents’ house, this fierce debate continues daily in different courts and/or in the private practice of professionals within the field of divorce (Corrie et al., 2016).

According to conflict theory, conflict situations are bound to occur in divorce processes; however, limited research has been conducted with regards to the conflict tactics applied by different genders during divorce (Vallacher et al., 2013). According to conflict theory, the assumption is made that conflict is inherent to all human association. Violence is often viewed as a tactic to deal with conflict (Straus, 1979; Vallacher et al., 2013). A closer look into gender, and the prominence of conflict tactics is needed for a more complete

understanding and management of conflict during divorce, to protect the children during and after divorce, and to promote the formation of secure attachments with both parents by preventing attachment disorganisation (Main et al., 2011). Children are negatively impacted when parents argue frequently, when they undermine each other, and when they place their children in the middle of their disputes. Mahrer et al. (2016) pinpoint two competing theories (resource theory and balance theory) that focus on how conflict between parents may impact on the relation between parenting quality and child outcomes.

One or both parents might exercise facilitative and/or inhibitory conflict strategies that can determine who will have access to their children, and the nature of that access (Pruett et al., 2013). There are several conflict tactics that parents use during the divorce process, and the prevalence of gatekeeping as a strategy is increasing. This high conflict tactic is utilized to benefit the parents, rather than acting in the best interest of their children. Researchers have called attention to the fact that parents not only engage in restrictive gatekeeping, but they also facilitate each other's interactions with their children (Sano et al., 2008; Trinder, 2008). According to Pollett and Lombregalia (2008) and Kuehnle and Drozd, 2012, many parent education programmes focus on helping individuals to make the transition from being spouses or cohabiting participants to functional separated co-parents that allow children to maintain positive ties with both parents. Conflict theory confirms that co-parents will require to apply differing tactics to provide successful conflict management between the two new households (Speakman & Ryals, 2010).

The purpose of this study has been prompted by inter-parental conflict, the impact thereof on the quality of parenting, and the children who generally become caught up in the middle of their parents' divorce strategy to "win the case". The question was raised about the different conflict tactics implemented by mothers and fathers during their divorce. In order to

answer this question, it was important to know what these gender differences in the implementation of conflict tactics during divorce were.

Method

Participants

A target of 50 divorcing heterosexual couples, who were referred by professionals within the field of divorce, were purposively selected by these professionals. The socio-economic status of the couples ranged between low to high and their occupations ranged from being unemployed to executive managers of businesses. The selection of participation was based on the participants' report of conflict during divorce. During the selection process, no same-gender couples showed interest to participate in the study. The participants were between the ages of 21 and 60 years. 58 % of the couples were younger than 40 years and only one couple was between the ages of 50 and 60 years. All of the participants had at least ten years of education, and the highest level of education was a PhD obtained by three of the participants. All participants had been legally married, and only two couples were married for more than 26 years. 40 out of the 100 couples indicated that they only had one child. It is further noteworthy that 62 % of the participants indicated onset of divorce between 0 – 5 years of marriage and 21 % of the participants indicated that they initiated divorce between 6 – 10 years of marriage. Most of the participants indicated legal status of divorce proceedings (41 participants), while 38 participants indicated pre-legal status of divorce proceedings. The participants were predominantly English speaking. The minimum number of 50 couples was determined by a statistician (employed by the statistical consultations services of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus), by making use of a power analysis. The statistician considered the power to determine statistical significance on an alpha level .05 to obtain a power of 80% for medium effect sizes.

Although the p-values are reported for completeness, it is not relevant, because the sample was not randomly chosen. However, the researcher made use of effect size, which is independent of sample size, and a measure of practical significance (Ellis & Steyn, 2003). The participants were selected by referrals from psychologists, social workers, general practitioners, psychiatrists, and legal representatives in the private sector. These professionals acted as gatekeepers who provided the essential research information to the participants, and assisted with choosing the participants. The participants gave permission to be contacted by the researcher for the purpose of the study. The participants were under no pressure to participate in the study. If one of the participants decided not to participate in the study, both of the participants were excluded from the study. The participants had to be proficient in English due to the use of English in the applicable psychometric testing. A Grade 6 reading ability was also required.

The participants were encouraged to communicate freely and honestly. Furthermore, the participants who were included gave informed consent to take part in the study; with the assurance that the results would not be used for psycho-legal purposes by one or both of the participants. Finally, only the participants who agreed to participate voluntarily were selected to be included in the research project. These participants signed the consent form that was provided by the gatekeepers.

Research Design

The development and perceived legitimacy of both qualitative and quantitative mixed methods research in the social and human sciences are, now well established, while the, strengths and weaknesses have been articulated (Creswell, 2015; Fetters et al., 2013). For this study, a mixed method research framework was used, namely the cross-sectional convergent mixed methods design, which can be defined as interactive and recurrent. The research

applied both deductive and inductive logic (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2012). According to Creswell (2015), quantitative data and results yield common trends and relationships, while qualitative data and results provide rich personal perspectives of individuals. The merging of quantitative and qualitative results adds up to not only more data, but a more complete understanding of the phenomenon – rather than insight into an individual database. Mixed method researchers can, therefore, make use of multiple perspectives, or even validate one database with another. Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered concurrently, but separately, to test the consistency of both quantitative results and qualitative findings. The researcher used the results from the quantitative data to amplify and enhance the results from the qualitative data and vice versa. The results were also interpreted using deductive reasoning, integrating the theoretical frameworks of conflict theory and attachment theory.

The primary aim of this study was to investigate gender differences in conflict tactics applied by couples during divorce. Additionally, the results can be used to provide information on therapeutic efforts to empower mothers and fathers with knowledge about the conflict tactics they apply, to understand the dynamic dyadic interchange, and to improve communication between divorcing mothers and fathers.

Measures

The following measures were used to collect data:

Biographical Questionnaire

A biographical questionnaire was designed by the researcher to gather information from the participants regarding their age, gender, duration of marriage, number of children, onset of the divorce process, the status of the divorce proceedings, reason for the divorce, occupation, and their socio-economic status.

Measuring Instrument for Conflict Tactics

The Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) was used to investigate the application of conflict tactics by males and females during divorce. The CTS2 includes 78 items – half referring to the behaviour of the male participants, and the other half to the behaviour of the female participants. Each item consists of two parts: The first part measures the participant's behaviour (e.g., the male participant), and the second part measures the behaviour of the participant's spouse (e.g., the female participant), providing "Self" and "Partner" scores. Each of the participants completes a questionnaire on her/his own. The questionnaire must be completed by both participants separately to ensure reliability of responses and to eliminate malicious false responses by one of the partners. By making use of an 8-point scale, the participants simply indicate how often each behaviour has occurred. The self-report or interview format of the CTS2 can easily be administered. The items target specific actions, and it is not required of the participants to identify their own behaviour as violent in order for the instrument to measure violent actions (Straus, 1979; J. van Rooyen personal communication, November 30, 2015).

The responses to the questionnaire produce two scores ("Self" and "Partner") for the following scales: negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury. The negotiation scale can be divided into cognitive and emotional sub-scales. The other scales can be divided into minor and severe sub-scales. 'Negotiation' is defined as actions taken to settle a disagreement through discussion. However, the quality of their conflict interaction can be negative and destructive ('negative conflict interaction'). The items in the cognitive sub-scale are examples of possible conflict interactions that couples may have experienced. The emotion sub-scale is meant to measure the extent to which positive or negative affect (emotional tone) is communicated between participants by asking about their expression of feelings of care and respect (Bush & Pope, 2004; Folberg & Salem,

2004; Shafique & Mahmood, 2010). ‘Psychological aggression’ describes verbal and non-verbal aggressive acts. The communicative act might be active or passive, and verbal or non-verbal. Non-verbal psychological aggression is a form of symbolic hurt towards another individual through passive or active behaviour. Examples can include swearing or shouting at partner (active, verbal), slamming a wall, or breaking something (active, non-verbal), and stony silence or sulking (passive non-verbal). The ‘psychological aggression’ subscale asks about the frequency of conflict tactics that are used and that cause psychological distress to the partner. Minor psychological aggression includes acts such as shouting and yelling at one’s partner. Severe psychological aggression includes acts such as threatening to hit or throw something at one’s partner or destroying something that belongs to one’s partner. ‘Avoidance’ is characterized by behaviours that ignore or refuse engagement in conflict interactions. ‘Avoidance of emotional pain’ refers to any action designed to prevent the occurrence of an uncomfortable emotion, such as fear, sadness, and shame. The ‘avoidance of the unwanted option’ refers to any action that prevents the discomfort of facing the consequences of one’s actions.

‘Physical assault’ describes acts that fit the definition of physical violence. Physical assault can be categorized into acts of minor violence and major violence. ‘Sexual coercion’ is defined as behaviour that is intended to force a partner to engage in unwanted sexual activity. The ‘sexual coercion’ scale covers a range of coercive acts from verbal insistence to physical force. The ‘injury’ scale measures participant-inflicted physical injury, as indicated by bone or tissue change, a need for medical attention, or pain continuing for a day or more.

Although this measuring tool is not standardized within a South African context, it was decided that this tool could still be used meaningfully in this study. The CTS2 measures

both the extent to which partners engage in psychological and/or physical attacks on each other, and also their use of conflict tactics (Straus 1990).

The instrument demonstrates good internal consistency, test-retest reliability, as well as convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity (J. van Rooyen personal communication, November 30, 2015). It must be noted that the focus on specific acts or events is a strength of the measuring instrument. Furthermore, conflict theory is the foundation of another important characteristic of the measuring instrument, namely symmetry in measurement.

The CTS2 measures an additional type of participant abuse (sexual coercion) as a consequence (physical injury from assaults by a participant). Consequently, the questions are scored by making use of the same response categories used in the negotiation, psychological aggression, and physical assault scale items. The CTS2 can be completed in just ten minutes.

Open-Ended Question

One open-ended question was added to the instrument to give the participants the option to reflect on a conflict tactic of their choice. The question is in line with conflict theory's perspective that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources (Speakman & Ryals, 2010; Vallacher et al., 2013). The conflict tactic could be of a destructive, neutral, or constructive nature. This also allowed the participants with an opportunity to indicate any conflict tactic/s, which may not be accounted for in the questionnaires that was used in the study. The question was stated as follows: "*How do you handle conflict during your separation/divorce?*"

The gatekeepers received a preparation letter from the researcher to enhance the quality of the measurements. The letter contained specific information regarding:

- How to address potential candidates to protect the rights of both parties involved, and how to protect the gatekeepers to maintain their unbiased stance when potential participants made a choice to participate or not.
- Assistance to the participants in order to define “high conflict” divorce processes, and the purpose of the study.
- Information about the measuring instrument: The name of the questionnaire, responses to an open-ended question, and the biographical questionnaire that was completed in hard copy.

Procedure

The gatekeepers identified potential candidates who presented with high conflict during divorce. Fifty couples (84%) of the original sample (60 couples) participated in the study. The researcher did not make use of incentives to increase participation, because this might have resulted in distorted or inaccurate information. After the researcher obtained consent of and co-operation from the different participating organizations and private practices, the gatekeepers were requested to contact the clients who met the criteria and obtained written consent from their clients to share their e-mail addresses with the researcher. The participants completed the biographical questionnaire, and the standardized CTS2 (Straus, 1979). An open-ended question was also added to the biographical questionnaire. Hard copies of the instrument were made available to the different gatekeepers, and the participants completed the questionnaire and the CTS2 at the offices of the gatekeepers/professionals. It was required of the participants to complete the biographical questionnaire, and the open-ended question. Each gatekeeper provided a quiet and private space for the participant(s) to complete the two questionnaires, and the respective gatekeepers provided supervision when necessary.

The intended sample of 50 couples was selected on the basis of practical considerations, such as availability of both the participants to complete the questionnaires,

language competency of both the participants, and transportation. The sample could, therefore, not be random, and the researcher placed an emphasis on effect size rather than p-values. Paired samples statistics applied.

Analysis

The analysis of data focused on the participants' responses to the 78 items referring to their behaviour with regard to conflict tactics used during their divorce. Each item consists of two parts: The first part measures the participant's behaviour, and the second part measures the partner's behaviour. Each of the participants answered the complete questionnaire on their own, thereby responding to both parts. Responses were not calculated when the participants gave more than one response per item, and these error responses were excluded (less than 2% of all the responses). Missing responses were handled as missing. The average of differences between the scores of the participants in each couple (each partner) was calculated for each of the following conflict tactics: negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, and injury (see Table 3: Paired Sample Correlations).

These calculations allowed the researcher to examine, for example, the dominant conflict tactics used by males and females during their divorce process. The researcher was able to determine at which stage of litigation the participants exhibited the highest level of psychological aggression and/or any other conflict tactic. The data of the questionnaires were subsequently statistically analysed and interpreted in cooperation with the information obtained from the statistical consultation services of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa.

The qualitative and quantitative data were analysed, compared, integrated, and interpreted separately. The theoretical frameworks were also integrated to navigate the researcher during the interpretation process. The goal was to integrate the results from the

two sets of data (Maggs-Rapport, 2000; Guetterman et al., 2015). The integration of the two sets of data served to validate the results, or to generate insights when further research is conducted (if the data from the mixed methods disagree).

The open-ended question was used to search for common patterns, and initially occurred through reading through all of the answers and making transcriptions. The content of the transcripts was organized into meaningful groups, and collated through a coding system after which the identification of themes took place. The themes were reviewed, defined, and, named. The main themes were integrated with the results obtained from the CTS2.

The responses of the participants were categorized according to conflict tactic themes using axial coding and selective coding. In addition to the scales that were used in the CTS2 (see Measures), the following selective coding scales were developed: Avoidance of emotional pain; avoidance of an unwanted option; gatekeeping behaviours; and parental alienation behaviours. In summary, the responses of the participants were analysed in a thematic analysis. Their responses were coded in line with the various scales of the CTS2. In addition to these scales, selective coding scales were developed, and deductive reasoning applied.

Results

The researcher integrated the results by making use of the cross-sectional convergent design to test the consistency of both the quantitative and qualitative results provided by the sample (50 couples). The merging of both quantitative and qualitative data ensures a more complete understanding of the phenomenon, rather than insight into an individual database.

The researcher analyzed the responses to the qualitative open-ended question. The researcher's main interest was to examine the various conflict tactics applied by different

genders, and the researcher, therefore, added the following open-ended question to the biographical questionnaire: *“How do you handle conflict during your separation/divorce?”*. The open-ended question allowed the participants to focus on any conflict tactics that were not used in the questionnaires, or they could elaborate on conflict tactics used in the questionnaires. The researcher first categorized the responses that elaborated on conflict tactics that were included in the CTS2.

Table 1 provides a summary of the process of selective coding of the open-ended question responses, as carried out by the researcher.

Table 1. Qualitative Data Obtained from the Participants

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Couple 1		
Male: I tried to avoid any form of conflict but was easily provoked through verbal/physical attacks.	Male: Avoidance of conflict – fears response of partner will affect him.	Male: Avoidance of emotional pain (1)
Female: Legal intervention. Seek advice from others to change our process.	Female: Form of negotiation – cognitive.	Female: Cognitive negotiation (1)
Couple 2		
Male: I first withdraw. I fight verbal. Protect my daughter. Take my child abroad as far as possible away from her evil mother to protect my daughter.	Male: Withdraw to avoid. Verbal fighting – minor aggression.	Male: Avoidance of unwanted option (1) Minor psychological aggression (1) Parental alienation (1)
Female: I did not handle the conflict well. Hold in and then... fought back. I will yell and shout. Then stop.	Female: Aggression.	Female: Minor psychological aggression (1)
Couple 3		
Male: Wants to take the dominant stance. Attack physical – to break a bone. When I beat her in the first round, I know that I was right. Will listen; but will not tolerate it when she becomes aggressive and I will ensure that she will lose our child. I will win this round.	Male: Aggression – minor and severe due to injuries.	Male: Severe Assault (1) Parental alienation (2)
Female: Tried to work through conflict, though he was away in and out of rehab; thus, I had to deal with his family. Had to deal with the family conflict rather than our conflict. I need to protect our little one to all costs.	Female: Negotiation; cognitively protecting the minor	Female: Cognitive negotiation (2) Gatekeeping (1) – protective (1)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Couple 4		
Male: I moved to another province with child in my care. Controls her emotionally.	Male: Gate keep - restrict the child from mother.	Male: Restrictive gatekeeping (1) Emotional negotiation (1)
Female: They say I am overly controlling when it spirals down to my emotional needs.	Female: Negotiation – emotional.	Female: Emotional negotiation (1)
Couple 5		
Male: It is like an inflammatory condition. I fight back. Most importantly are the children; I must win them back, to get them on my side. I threaten her to take the kids away from her.	Male: Psychological aggression, but he wants to alienate the children.	Male: Parental alienation (3) Severe psychological aggression (1)
Female: I fight to win – verbal power of the tongue. I need to protect the children against him when he got violent when drunk.	Female: Verbal aggression. Protecting the children – fights to become the primary caretaker.	Female: Minor psychological aggression (2) Gatekeeping (2) – protective (2)
Couple 6		
Male: Completely laid off – to avoid the fights/pain inflicted on me. Moved out and I want to re-bond with the children who are siding with their mother.	Male: Avoidance – fears the associated emotional pain.	Male: Avoidance of emotional pain (2)
Female: Lived apart from him. Kept the children with me when he was on drugs, to protect their safety. They gradually felt safer with me.	Female: To protect the children, she shielded the children	Female: Gatekeeping (3) – protective (3)
Couple 7		
Male: I negotiated with my partner to get the best workable solution for the family.	Male: Negotiation but specifically intellectually/cognitive.	Male: Cognitive negotiation (1)
Female: I avoided conflict – it makes me deeply uncomfortable to interact with him. But if I needed to; I stood up for myself and fought for what I believe in.	Female: Avoidance – reactions.	Female: Avoidance of unwanted option (1) Minor psychological aggression (3)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Couple 8		
Male: I try to find a solution for the problem and to sway her thinking by setting emotional limits. Unfortunately, that is only after I became physical.	Male: Becomes physical while fighting. Negotiation – swaying the partner on an emotional level.	Male: Minor assault (1) Emotional negotiation (2)
Female: When his fights became physical; I started to withdraw instead to face our problems. I shout or scream and then withdraw to avoid further interaction.	Female: Avoidance of unwanted option - project and/or to confront.	Female: Avoidance of unwanted option (2) Minor psychological aggression (4)
Couple 9		
Male: Tried the spiritual way. But to negotiate works better. Be the better person, turn your cheek. Will rather return to the bush, best escape from hurt/pain.	Male: Negotiation – on an emotional/spiritual level. Escape to avoid pain.	Male: Emotional negotiation (3) Avoidance of emotional pain (3)
Female: Handles conflict in any possible way...confrontation, shouting/screaming, listening, put boundaries in place.	Female: Negotiating emotionally and intellectually. Aggressive stance but minor.	Female: Emotional negotiation (2) Cognitive negotiation (3) Minor psychological aggression (5)
Couple 10		
Male: No comment.	Male: Nil.	Male: Nil.
Female: Had to let go of many things to avoid resulting behaviour of my ex-partner. Communication became a white/black place in order to negotiate with him. I need to put the boy's interest first and therefore he needs my protection, and he needs to see who his father is.	Female: Avoidance – unwanted behaviour. White/black conversations to negotiate. Overprotection of the minor.	Female: Cognitive negotiation (4) Avoidance of unwanted option (3) gatekeeping (4) – restrictive (1)
Couple 11		
Male: Sexually, I tried to sway her back into the marriage.	Male: Sexual play.	Male: Sexual coercion (1)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Sensual dancing, but she stayed cold.		
Female: I escaped from the hurt he induced on me.	Female: Avoidance of looking honestly into his own process and to discover why they are so unhappy.	Female: Avoidance of emotional pain (1)
Couple 12		
Male: I approach conflict resolution from a viewpoint of what is best for the babies. I literally ask what the best for their well-being is and negotiate accordingly. My departure from the house was to lessen the negative interactions between us.	Male: Negotiate – emotional focus – to find a solution. Escape, to limit further conflict.	Male: Emotional negotiation (4) Cognitive negotiation (2) Minor psychological aggression (2)
Female: I speak in a lower tone when the children are around when we combat conflicting thoughts. I make sure (that when his abuse starts) to protect/gatekeep the children from further exposures.	Female: Negotiate while taking the children's emotions in consideration. Protect/gatekeeping.	Female: Emotional negotiation (3) Gatekeeping (5) - protective (4)
Couple 13		
Male: With fairness and civil boundaries, patience and emotional intelligence.	Male: Negotiation – applies emotional intelligence but thinks carefully about his strategy.	Male: Emotional negotiation (5) Cognitive negotiation (3)
Female: I avoided conflict and looked past many things which most probably led to a negative environment for our daughter. I started to protect her against any potential form of harm which gradually helped me to become united with my little one.	Female: Avoiding unwanted emotions. Shield the child – potential harm	Female: Avoidance of emotional pain (2) Gatekeeping (6) – protective (5)
Couple 14		
Male: I am very conflict averse. I try to avoid it at all costs and, in many cases, this is not healthy as I do not address issues that may be bothering me	Male: Avoid addressing issues. Anger – resentment.	Male: Avoidance of unwanted option (2) Minor psychological aggression (3)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
or agree with my wife to do something to avoid a fight. Internalize feelings and fosters resentment. Female: I like to discuss issues in depth with my partner. Before I do this, I try to think up solutions to propose which might address it. This means less time to talk is required. I have sleepless nights thinking of the problem/consequences/solution.	Female: Plan strategy cognitively – thinking to solve problems/consequences.	Female: Cognitive negotiation (5)
Couple 15		
Male: Smoking cannabis with my partner but make an effort to withdraw from my addiction. Fighting for the minor child – protecting her – the mother is wicked. Female: I go into panic-mode and then start to negotiate; due to increased anxiety levels.	Male: Denial of emotions. Gatekeeping – no substantial risks Female: Manipulation. Steering conflict through her negative experience of emotions. I never confronted the real issue and did not take ownership for the outcome of my emotions.	Male: Avoidance of emotional pain (4) Restrictive gatekeeping (2) Female: Emotional negotiation (4) Avoidance of unwanted option (4)
Couple 16		
Male: Things are black and white for me. When I disagree; nobody will sway me...emotionally. If I allow her to sway me; I will lose the battle. Female: I avoid conflict...cannot cause issues that will bring out the pain.	Male: Steering/negotiating to gain power on an emotional level. Redirecting conflict to avoid. Female: Avoidance.	Male: Emotional negotiation (6) Minor psychological aggression (4) Avoidance of unwanted option (3) Female: Avoidance of emotional pain (3)
Couple 17		
Male: Referral of my wife to a psychologist. She must sort out her issues from childhood. I calm down after a severe	Male: Psychological intervention. Negotiation via therapist -cognitive and emotional.	Male: Emotional negotiation (7) Cognitive negotiation (4)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
aggressive outburst. I will continue until she will change her mind/attitude.	Psychological aggression – severe, due to the threats to damage her car.	Severe psychological aggression (2)
Female: I use the strategy to show him that I can be nurturing – I make him soft.	Female: Negotiate through actions to reach him and to make him more susceptible.	Female: Emotional negotiation (5)
Couple 18		
Male: Professional intervention - emotional.	Male: Intervention and negotiation.	Male: Emotional negotiation (8)
Walk away from it when possible. She wants me to look at different options, but I know what I need to do.	Unavailable to explore alternatives. Avoiding change.	Avoidance of unwanted option (4)
Female: I mostly stay away from hubby and avoid the unwanted explosion.	Female: Avoidance.	Female: Avoidance of unwanted option (5)
Couple 19		
Male: I tried to manage the biggest stress, namely finances. That brought us in a bigger predicament. I was dishonest and nearly went to prison.	Male: Avoiding honesty as the best option.	Male: Avoidance of unwanted option (5)
Female: I try to avoid conflict as much as possible and not to get into arguments because it gets ugly and hurtful things get said.	Female: Avoidance of conflict to escape further hurt.	Female: Avoidance of emotional pain (4)
Couple 20		
Male: I became verbal abusive, name calling. I started to withdraw to avoid harm and gradually crawled into a deep depression.	Male: Aggression - verbal. Avoidance - emotional.	Male: Minor psychological aggression (5) Avoidance of emotional pain (5)
Female: I limit communication in order to change his thought processes. I am avoiding feeling pain. Protecting the child to protect her against the pain I have endured.	Female: Negotiation - cognitively steering the conversation to prevent conflict. Avoidance - pain.	Female: Cognitive negotiation (5) Avoidance of emotional pain (5) Gatekeeping (7) - restrictive (2)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
	Protection against harm; but impacts on the father's relationship with the child.	
Couple 21		
Male: Via mails and/or case manager to prevent further hurt/pain.	Male: Negotiation via mails/professional to communicate and to minimize further hurt.	Male: Cognitive negotiation (5) Avoidance of emotional pain (6)
Female: Deal with the facts and keep emotions out of it. Avoid emotions. Too great a risk what the options can be when I become emotionally involved.	Female: Avoidance. Cognitive – negotiate – denial of emotions.	Female: Avoidance of unwanted option (6) Cognitive negotiation (6)
Couple 22		
Male: Temper tantrums (shouting and screaming).	Male: Anger - psychological.	Male: Minor psychological aggression (6)
Female: I believe it is my role to protect my child and to act in her best interests and therefore I will gate keep her to protect her against his aggression. He will only have contact with her when his mood is stable.	Female: Gatekeeping.	Female: Gatekeeping (8) - protective (6)
Couple 23		
Male: I took a walk or swept the pool until calm; and then tried to have a talk. However, the alternatives that were provided to me were usually denied or I avoided these kinds of conversations.	Male: Minor psychological aggression.	Male: Minor psychological aggression (7) Avoidance of unwanted option (6)
Female: I keep to myself but simultaneously reinforce in my child those values that I believe he should nurture ...away from his father's values...stealing cars to put food on the table.	Female: Child protected with values, but gate keep the child. Impacting on the child's relationship with his father.	Female: Gatekeeping (9) – protective (7)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Couple 24		
Male: More recently, talking to her but she is distorting the reality and therefore I move her with emotionally loaded messages. Initial stance was “losing it”.	Male: Steering/negotiation – emotional 7 cognitively - using legal intervention. Temper tantrums – minor aggression.	Male: Emotional negotiation (9) Cognitive negotiation (6) Minor psychological aggression (8)
Female: No verbal communication. My daughter hates her father and therefore I stand with her; supporting protecting her.	Female: Does not steer the child in the direction to foster a better bond with her father.	Female: Parental alienation (1)
Couple 25		
Male: I withdraw totally.	Male: Avoiding pain	Male: Avoidance of emotional pain (7)
Female: I want to proof my innocence and my ex to be “guilty as charged”.	Female: Charged ex for abusing the child. Restricting access.	Female: Gatekeeping (10) – restrictive (3)
Couple 26		
Male: Assertiveness.	Male: Intellectual - negotiation.	Male: Cognitive negotiation (7)
Female: Protecting the child against exposure to physical abuse.	Female: Protective and shielding - gatekeeping.	Female: Gatekeeping (11) - protective (8)
Couple 27		
Male: I leave it to God so that he can help me to get through it. I do not know what to do with the pain of anger.	Male: Denial of reality and expectations in life. Does not have the coping skills to manage anger.	Male: Avoidance of unwanted option (7) Minor psychological aggression (9)
Female: I ignore it.	Female: Denial.	Female: Avoidance of unwanted option (7)
Couple 28		
Male: Psychological intervention.	Male: Negotiating intellectually. Negotiation – psychologically.	Male: Cognitive negotiation (8) Emotional negotiation ((10)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Female: Had an affair.	Female: Escape the relationship.	Female: Avoidance of unwanted option (8)
Couple 29		
Male: Avoiding any form of pain.	Male: Avoidance	Male: Avoidance of emotional pain (8)
Female: More of an avoidant style to avoid an aggressive reaction to maintain an amicable environment.	Female: Avoidance of response.	Female: Avoidance of emotional pain (6)
Couple 30		
Male: Open and direct communication. Stay with my perspective but stopped to confront.	Male: Negotiation - cognitive.	Male: Cognitive negotiation (9)
Female: Go back to my family values and role definition as the leader to bring quality/spirituality in the family unit.	Female: Negotiation – emotional.	Female: Emotional negotiation (6)
Couple 31		
Male: I do not handle it. Ex-partner's behaviour too much to handle.	Male: Avoidance of potential outcome.	Male: Avoidance of unwanted option (8)
Female: Attack. Words. I must walk out as the winner.	Female: Verbal aggression.	Female: Minor psychological aggression (6)
Couple 32		
Male: I drink it away until numbness of feelings is instilled.	Male: Avoidance - emotional	Male: Avoidance of emotional pain (9)
Female: I enhance my tactics to stay quiet; meaning I am in the emotional empowered seat.	Female: Negotiation – emotional	Female: Emotional negotiation (7)
Couple 33		
Male: I let her scream like an idiot and then, thereafter; I tell her fortune.	Male: Psychological aggression.	Male: Minor psychological aggression (10)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Female: Lose it; scream in my pillow.	Female: Psychological aggression.	Female: Minor psychological aggression (7)
Couple 34		
Male: I try to trigger the weakest trigger/spot to get the worst out of her. This enables me to define her incompetence and gives me the proof I need to get primary residency of the kids.	Male: Degrading the mother in order to alienate the children from her.	Male: Parental alienation (4)
Female: I ignore the ex; path the children and my way without him in order to restrict contact between father-and-children.	Female: Restrictive parenting.	Female: Gatekeeping (12)–restrictive (4)
Couple 35		
Male: The mother has been a drunk and that will never change. My daughter will see who her mother is – I’ll make sure. Therefore, intervention by social worker to take the child away from this bitch.	Male: Attempt to alienate the child.	Male: Parental alienation (5)
Female: I need to protect my child to ascertain that I don’t lose her, otherwise he will take her away from me. He is feeding her with lies to program her mind.	Female: Protecting the child – shielding the child against potential risks.	Female: Gatekeeping (13)–protective (9)
Couple 36		
Male: Medication to calm me down when I am upset and then I will talk/negotiate on an intellectual level.	Male: Negotiation - intellectual.	Male: Cognitive negotiation (10)
Female: Intervention to speed up the process of divorce to exclude as much extra emotional baggage as possible.	Female: Negotiation - emotional.	Female: Emotional negotiation (8)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Couple 37		
Male: Playing the same mind games as the spouse does – a psychological game on a mental level. The children are informed about her incompetence as a mother.	Male: Aggressive stance – intellectual. Negotiate – emotional Programming of the children.	Male: Minor psychological aggression (9) Emotional negotiation (9) Parental alienation (6)
Female: Tried to co-parent; but for the best interests of the children I am going to protect them and go for primary residential and responsibility rights.	Female: Protecting – fighting for custody/rights.	Female: Gatekeeping (14) - protective (10)
Couple 38		
Male: No response.	Male: No response.	Male: No response.
Female: No response.	Female: No response.	Female: No response.
Couple 39		
Male: It is a work in progress. The children must understand why their mother is a monster.	Male: Programming the children.	Male: Parental alienation (7)
Female: No response.	Female: No response.	Female: No response.
Couple 40		
Male: The mother of the children is incompetent, and they are at risk. They are fully aware of her weaknesses and are siding with me.	Male: Alienating the children. Coaching the minors.	Male: Parental alienation (8)
Female: Although I know he is a good father; he is not when he is abusing drugs. That is their protection against him and through gate keeping I will steer their relationships with him.	Female: Overprotection of children – impacting on bond.	Female: Gatekeeping (15) – protective (11)
Couple 41		
Male: God will give me the strength to act in the best interests of the child. He gave me the power to be the primary	Male: Alienating the child. Using God as the tool.	Male: Parental alienation (9)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
caretaker. The mother's contact with the children must be limited and God will help me to tell the children how dangerous she is. Female: I believe in God and therefore I know that He will give me the strength to protect the child against the father who wants to take him away from me.		
	Female: Overprotection of children – using God as tool to distance the child from the father.	Female: Gatekeeping (16) - protective (12)
Couple 42		
Male: Courses on parenting an autistic child – nevertheless; the mother does not have the ability to raise a special needs child. Therefore, intervention will be required to arrange that the child is placed in my care and her access will be limited. Female: Tried to protect my son against the conflict and stayed with my folks. I took our special needs son with us.	Male: Education implemented to strengthen his case against the partner. Female: Overprotection – limit contact with the father.	Male: Parental alienation (10) Female: Gatekeeping (17) - protective (13)
Couple 43		
Male: The children was removed from my ex's care after I informed the court that she was always drunk. The children are fully aware of how bad and shameless their mother is. Female: No response.	Male: Parental programming. Female: No response.	Male: Parental alienation (11) Female: No response.
Couple 44		
Male: No response. Female: No response.	Male: No response. Female: No response.	Male: No response. Female: No response.
Couple 45		
Male: I have done everything in my power to get the children in my care. That was my power	Male: Alienates the children.	Male: Parental alienation (12)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
and when they stopped to make contact with their mother, I knew I gained the control over our conflict.		
Female: I attempted to protect the children and to give them a sense of right and wrong. I 'gate kept' contact to protect the minors; but I did not succeed. He was too powerful.	Female: Protects the children.	Female: Gatekeeping (18) – protective (14)
Couple 46		
Male: The child will be removed from the mother, after I informed the court of her incompetence. The child, already, does not want to see his mother anymore.	Male:	Male: Parental alienation (13)
Female: At first, I try to talk to him. Then I get frustrated when he gives me the silent treatment or when he tells me what a bad mother I am.	Female: Negotiation. Aggression.	Female: Cognitive negotiation (11) Minor psychological aggression (12)
Couple 47		
Male: I take a step back and become quite compatible as to why the conflict has occurred and what led to the feelings being expressed by myself and of my ex. Once that is done, I figure out what the importance is of the conflict in relation to the relationship.	Male: Negotiation.	Male: Emotional negotiation (12) Cognitive negotiation 12)
Female: I express concern and tries to be as open as I can manage about the concern. If the concern is resolved, I do not like revisiting the topic. If I get frustrated about an unresolved problem, I do tend to become cold and lash out to make it clear where I stand.	Female: Negotiation – intellectual. Aggression – minor.	Female: Minor psychological aggression (13) Cognitive negotiation (9)

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Couple 48		
Male: Losing control- throw a can of diet Sprite to my wife. I choked my wife and she nearly passed out.	Male: Aggression - severe. Assault.	Male: Severe psychological aggression (3) Minor assault (2)
Female: I withdraw. "Go mental".	Female: Denial the feelings anger.	Female: Avoidance of emotional pain (7)
Couple 49		
Male: I tried to protect my own value. Defending my son.	Male: Denial of the option to be true to the child.	Male: Avoidance of unwanted option (9)
Female: Firstly, I wanted to destroy my husband. Then realized we need to co-parent – I decided to be the 'bigger' person and to protect my child; therefore...restricted contacts between father and son.	Female: Protecting the child; but at the child's price – namely restricted contact with the father.	Female: Gatekeeping (19) – protective (15)
Couple 50		
Male: I know my wife needs therapy. She must take ownership.	Male: Denial of own responsibility. Blame shifting.	Male: Avoidance of unwanted option (10)
Female: Try to manage his anger. Medication. Ask for professional intervention.	Female: Negotiation – emotional. Denial of emotions. Intervention – negotiation.	Female: Emotional negotiation (9) Avoidance of emotional pain (7) Cognitive negotiation (10)

The qualitative responses that focused on conflict tactics that were not used in the quantitative questionnaire were then categorized under new headings, such as avoidance of emotional pain; avoidance of unwanted option; protective (restrictive and facilitative) gatekeeping; and parental alienation. The new headings were defined, integrating the theoretical frameworks of conflict theory and attachment theory. According to conflict theory, avoidance and gatekeeping will occur when a partner experiences disempowerment

during the process of divorce (Straus, 1979; Vallacher et al., 2013). According to attachment theory, partners will select to apply gatekeeping behaviours, due to their search for proximity and safety (Bosman et al., 2015). According to the analysis of themes and the presentation in Table 1, statistics for the selective coding can be illustrated as follows:

Table 2. Analysis of Selective Coding

	Females	Males
Emotional negotiation	9	12
Cognitive negotiation	12	10
Minor psychological aggression	8	11
Severe psychological aggression	0	3
Minor assault	2	0
Severe assault	1	0
Minor sexual coercion	0	1
Avoidance of emotional pain	10	7
Avoidance of unwanted option	8	8
Gatekeeping	19	2
Protective gatekeeping	15	0
Restrictive gatekeeping	4	2
Parental alienation	1	13

Note. See Van der Merwe (in press).

The selective coding scales were developed for the qualitative leg of this study and can be defined as follows: ‘Avoidance of emotional pain’ and ‘Avoidance of an unwanted

option' are escape routes when individuals do not want to deal with painful or difficult emotions. 'Avoidance' refers to any action designed to prevent the experience of an uncomfortable emotion, such as fear, sadness, shame, or any action designed to prevent the experience of an uncomfortable option. 'Gatekeeping behaviour' can be defined as dysfunctional co-parenting that prevents children to maintain strong bonds with both of their parents, and can be divided into protective (monitor the other parent's contact to shield the child from harm); restrictive (limit the other parent's contact with the child); inhibitory (actions like withholding information about the child, refusing to let the other parent speak or see the child, denigrating the other parent to the child); and facilitative gatekeeping (on the opposite continuum of inhibitory gatekeeping) (Adamsons, 2010; Pruett et al., 2016). According to Saini et al. (2016), 'parental alienation' is a term that is used to refer to a child who has been programmed to reject a parent, by an embittered/malicious parent. This pattern of behaviour is often observed among children and their parents involved in high-conflict divorces (Moore & Ordway, 2013). Parental alienation is characterized by a child's rejection of a noncustodial parent (Meier, 2013). Parental alienation syndrome (PAS) describes the pathological alignment of the child with one parent against the other (Meier, 2013). Therefore, one parent 'brainwashes' the child to belittle the other parent. The child starts to actively contribute to the alienation of the other parent and build upon these denigrations. This becomes a spiraling pattern of behaviour characterized by a crusade of belittlement of the alienated parent (Bosch-Brits et al., 2018; Gardner, 2002).

The males reported that they have mainly minor psychological aggression, and they apply negotiation tactics during divorce. The females tended to lean stronger towards gatekeeping behaviours (mainly protective and restrictive) while experiencing conflict during divorce (Table 2). Table 2 demonstrates that females mainly apply gatekeeping behaviour (19) as a conflict tactic during divorce. Additionally, the females reported cognitive

negotiation (12), avoidance of emotional pain (10), emotional negotiation (9), minor psychological aggression (8), and avoidance of an unwanted option (8) as conflict strategies applied during divorce. Furthermore, Table 2 illustrates evidence that males are inclined to apply parental alienation behaviour (13), emotional negotiation (12), minor psychological aggression (11), cognitive negotiation (10), or avoidance of an unwanted option (8).

For the integration of the two sets of data, the quantitative results were concurrently analyzed with the quantitative results in order to integrate the two sets of data. For the quantitative set, male and female participants were compared using a paired t-test (See Table 3). The effect size ranged between $d=0.02$ and $d=0.19$. According to the t-tests, no significant difference was found between males and females and their application of conflict tactics. According to the t-tests, high level perceptions of anger and conflict were indicated by both the males and females with an average score of above $\frac{7}{10}$. The males and females indicated low levels of physical abuse with an average score of $\frac{1}{7}$. The results provided in Table 3 suggest that males and females do not use significantly different conflict tactics during divorce, but males tend to apply psychological aggression (minor and severe forms) slightly more than females when going through divorce.

Table 3. Paired Samples Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	p-value	Effect sizes
Pair 1	Number of children from marriage	1.28	50	0.93	0.569	0.02
	Number of children from marriage M	1.30	50	0.93	0.569	
Pair 2	Perceptions regarding level of anger 1-10	7.34	50	2.69	0.858	0.02
	Perceptions regarding level of anger M	7.40	50	2.39	0.858	
Pair 3	Perceptions regarding level of conflict 1-10	7.36	50	2.78	0.604	0.07
	Perceptions regarding level of conflict M	7.56	50	2.50	0.604	
Pair 4	Emotional negotiation	3.83	50	1.53	0.507	0.10
	Emotional negotiation M	3.67	50	1.60	0.507	
Pair 5	Cognitive negotiation	3.63	50	1.26	0.917	0.02
	Cognitive negotiation M	3.65	50	1.21	0.917	
Pair 6	Minor psychological aggression	2.46	50	1.12	0.279	0.14
	Minor psychological aggression M	2.63	50	1.16	0.279	
Pair 7	Severe psychological aggression	2.16	50	2.28	0.829	0.03
	Severe psychological aggression M	2.10	50	2.11	0.829	
Pair 8	Minor physical assault	0.91	50	1.14	0.683	0.06
	Minor physical assault M	0.99	50	1.35	0.683	
Pair 9	Severe physical assault	0.38	50	0.68	0.429	0.11
	Severe physical assault M	0.30	50	0.74	0.429	

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	p-value	Effect sizes
Pair 10	Minor injury	0.73	50	1.10	0.505	0.09
	Minor injury M	0.62	50	1.26	0.505	
Pair 11	Severe injury	0.70	50	1.22	0.157	0.19
	Severe injury M	0.47	50	1.16	0.157	
Pair 12	Minor sexual coercion	0.45	50	0.75	0.446	0.10
	Minor sexual coercion M	0.53	50	0.81	0.446	

Pierce and Thompson (2018) suggest that gender differences in the willingness to apply unethical negotiation tactics, can be explained by the competitiveness by males versus empathy by females. Conflict theory explains competitiveness by males, due to their strive for dominance and power (Speakman & Ryals, 2010; Vallacher et al., 2013). The quantitative results showed that couples predominantly engage in ‘negotiation’ as a conflict strategy, but the type of negotiation differs between genders. Females are inclined to apply ‘protective gatekeeping’, whereas males mostly apply ‘avoidance of unwanted option’, which may result in parental alienation.

Conflict theory and attachment theory consider differences in ethical standards between genders to explain the disparity to negotiate and why men often use unethical negotiation tactics (Bosman et al., 2015; Vallacher et al., 2013)

Recent studies confirmed that mothers and fathers present with multiple gatekeeping behaviour, such as restrictive, protective, and facilitative gatekeeping (Austin et al., 2013).

The results of this study are consistent with earlier studies (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Saini et al., 2017), and indicate restrictive gatekeeping as more prevalent in females.

The results of Abele and Wojciszke (2007), Kennedy et al. (2017), Kray et al. (2012), and Lee et al. (2017) suggested that two factors determine ethical differences between men and women: agency (i.e., concern for self), and communion (i.e., concern for others). Pierce and Thompson (2018) and Straus (1990) hypothesized that competitiveness/power/domination and empathy, simultaneously mediate gender differences in the use of unethical negotiation tactics (Lee et al., 2017; Ward & King, 2018).

Discussion

Divorce can be a traumatic experience for a family unit. The purpose of this study was to answer the following question: What are the gender differences when conflict tactics are applied during divorce?

In this study, gender differences were found when the results of various applications of conflict tactics were examined. Conflict theory explains the tendency to apply conflict tactics, such as negotiation tactics, from the perspective that social order is maintained by dominance and power, rather than by consensus and peace (Vallacher et al., 2013). Males mainly tend to handle conflict by means of negotiation (cognitive or emotional); psychological aggression (minor); the avoidance of an unwanted option; or parental alienation. 'Parental alienation' can be described as a collection of behaviours displayed by one parent aimed at alienating his/her child from the other parent (Lewis, 2013). According to Lewis (2013), parental alienation is a family dynamic that often arises during divorce. Although parental alienation can be viewed as a form of negotiation, it can also be described as an unethical negotiation tactic. Johnston (2003) and Bosch-Brits et al. (2018) confirms the devastating nature of parental pathology involved in parental alienation. The detrimental

effect of parental alienation is seen in childhood and may be carried into adulthood. These effects are observed in the presence of a low self-esteem, potential depression, drug or alcohol abuse in adulthood, a lack of trust, and the alienation of important figures which might be carried into adulthood (Baker, 2005; Harold & Sellers, 2018). It is extremely difficult for psychologists and other professionals to work with parents who have little insight into their conflict behaviour and the potential damage they are causing their children (Tong, 2002; Van Jaarsveld, 2018).

Females tend to use psychological aggression or negotiation tactics. However, the qualitative leg of the research revealed that females tend to apply gatekeeping behaviours, specifically protective gatekeeping (communion — the concern for others).

‘Parental gatekeeping’ is defined by attitudes and behaviour of parents that affect the quality of parent-child relationships and/or their level of involvement in their child’s life (Austin et al., 2013). According to Austin et al. (2013), ‘maternal gatekeeping’ involves the beliefs and behaviour of mothers that prevent a collaborative relationship between parents by limiting the opportunities available to fathers to care for their children. Gatekeeping behaviours, therefore, involve both parents with regard to co-parenting, and the sharing of responsibilities when raising children (Austin et al., 2013). As a result, a bidirectional process occurs that mediates the influence of and control over parent involvement (Austin et al., 2013). Co-parenting naturally involves negotiations about the other parent’s influence on the child; the type and degree of contact that each parent ought to have with the child; and the extent to which the child might need to be protected from the other parent’s harmful behaviour (Austin et al., 2013). Gatekeeping behaviour becomes a concerning factor during divorce once the parental relationship deteriorates, and inter-parental conflict escalates

(Austin et al., 2013; Burk, et al., 2009). The study is in agreement that males and females indicated high level perceptions of anger and conflict with an average score of above $\frac{7}{10}$.

Austin et al. (2013) found that males and females tend to use three types of gatekeeping: facilitative, protective, and restrictive gatekeeping. Drozd (in Austin et al., 2013) is of the opinion that 'protective gatekeeping' occurs when the gatekeeper believes there are valid reasons for limiting the other parent's contact when the possible risk of emotional or physical harm to the children cannot be excluded. 'Facilitative gatekeeping' is highlighted by proactive and constructive behaviour that underpins the support of the other parent-child relationship (Austin et al., 2013). Parents that engage in facilitative gatekeeping value the other parent's role in their child's life and may negotiate a co-parenting plan without the need of litigation (Austin et al., 2013). In contrast, 'restrictive gatekeeping' inhibits the other parent's relationship with their child and undermines the quality of their relationship with the child. Maternal gatekeeping is often identified by a mother's reluctance to renounce family responsibilities (Saini et al., 2017). According to Austin et al. (2013) and Saini et al. (2017), restrictive gatekeeping is often accompanied by a high degree of inter-parental conflict, and results in a highly conflicted co-parenting relationship. Divorce proceedings and care and contact disputes involving restrictive gatekeeping often result in numerous court appearances, restriction of access to the children from the other parent, and interruption of ongoing contact (Saini et al., 2017). This study confirmed that mothers predominantly make use of protective gatekeeping when conflict is experienced during divorce. Kennedy et al. (2017) and Ward and King (2018) explained in their research that women are more morally inclined than men, and due to their more empathic natures, they exhibit a lower tolerance of ethical breaches.

Prior research hypothesized that adherence to gender ideologies can affect gatekeeping behaviour in mothers and maternal identities (Gaunt, 2008; Markham et al., 2007; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). Although the pattern of results differs for genders – in the present study and in past research – females apply predominantly protective and restrictive gatekeeping (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2015). Maternal gatekeeping can be justified in many cases by the fact that mothers find non-residential fathers less competent or have possible concerns about their children's safety when in the care of their fathers (Saini et al., 2017). Justified restrictive gatekeeping – prevalent in the behaviour of the females who participated in this study – involves attitudes and behaviour that limit the other parent's access and contact with the child due to legitimate concerns about the risk, harm, emotional distress, or adjustment difficulties that contact with the other parent might pose to the child (Saini et al., 2017).

The formal concept of gatekeeping, parental alienation, and parental alienation syndrome has recently received growing attention in high conflict divorce cases.

Conclusion

The results demonstrate that females mainly apply protective gatekeeping during divorce conflict, believing that their children and the other parent will benefit from their protection. The behaviour of females tends to become more independent when going through a high conflict divorce. Mothers appear to apply more protective gatekeeping and, to a lesser extent, restrictive gatekeeping – especially during a high conflict divorce. What is important to note is that males mostly suppress their anger (they make mostly use of denial), and when they experience a saturation point, in an attempt to protect the self, they act out more often and apply psychological aggression in its various forms, which includes the presentation of parental alienation – an unethical negotiation tactic (Gardner, 1998b; 2001; Kelly &

Johnston, 2001). According to Gardner (2002) parental alienation were initiated more by women than men during the early 80's to mid-90's. However, since the mid 90's more fathers started to initiate parental alienation.

The impact of gatekeeping behaviour and other conflict tactics that are utilized during divorce on a co-parenting relationship precipitates in either constructive or destructive effects on the children. Conflict tactics applied by parents mediate the co-parenting system and the development of a co-parenting plan. These conflict tactics indirectly influence and facilitate the amount and type of contact each parent have with their children after divorce.

Consequently, the social capital of the children may be impacted on, either positively or negatively. The beneficial impact of available social and psychological resources on children are embedded within the children's relationship with their family – particularly their parents. As a result, children will benefit from quality relationships with their parents.

The identification of conflict tactics that parents apply during divorce is, therefore, important, because these tactics have a direct impact on the well-being of their children. Gatekeeping might restrict, in the case of restrictive gatekeeping, or facilitate, in the case of facilitative gatekeeping, the flow of resources from the other parent to the children. In order to reduce conflict, parents, therefore, act as gatekeepers (constructive or destructive) with regard to their children's resources, consequent adjustment, and development. In order to reduce conflict, parents need adequate divorce education programs to inform them of the risks of their conflict behaviour, and to gain insight in the other parent's conflict tactics. Professional development must, therefore, focus on the development of empathy in parents (the ability to understand feelings transmitted through messages); and to minimize elements of competition between genders. Parental insight and training with regard to the facilitation of a compassionate relationship between the parents will firstly, reduce the amount of anger and

competition between couples and secondly, lower the risk of the use of unethical conflict tactics and the use of power. Conflict theory supports the perspective that the community will thrive when individuals develop the strength to become more compassionate and less competitive (Speakman & Ryals, 2010).

Professionals involved and/or evaluators of care and contact cases must receive training in the management of conflict during divorce, due to the destructive and unethical nature of certain conflict behaviours, such as parental alienation and gatekeeping tactics, to limit the risks of becoming the new target person, after completion of the psycho-legal assessment.

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ARTICLE 3**A Conflict Management Model for Conflict during Divorce**

Abstract

A larger study done by the author broadened knowledge about the conflict tactics applied by divorcing couples. The quantitative and qualitative results of 50 divorcing couples in Gauteng, South Africa were used to research their conflict strategies. The researcher used a convergent mixed methods design. It was found that couples predominantly make use of negotiation as a conflict tactic (effect size: 0.02 – 0.19 and confidence interval: -0.09 – 0.05), but gender differences are noted in the type of negotiation tactic used. The study provides a valuable contribution to knowledge about divorce conflict tactics by demonstrating how age, educational level, duration of marriage, children, the stage of divorce proceedings, and gender influence on how they respond to and deal with conflict. The need for more effective intervention planning became evident. The results obtained in the larger study were used to develop a conflict management model for professionals in the field of divorce by using a three-step modified Delphi method to establish its effectiveness. Ten panel experts were selected to come to a consensus regarding the development of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce.

Keywords: complicated detachment, conflict management model, expert panel

The way couples use conflict tactics during divorce was investigated in the larger study, by integrating conflict theory and attachment theory as theoretical frameworks. The theoretical frameworks were used to steer the research study. A convergent mixed methods design was used. Quantitative and qualitative research were conducted concurrently. The quantitative data were gathered by means of an existing questionnaire, namely the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS2). Different conflict tactics applied by heterosexual couples (n=100) were investigated. The qualitative data were gathered by means of a biographical questionnaire and an open-ended question with divorcing South African couples (n=100). The data provided in-depth insight into contributing conflict factors that play a role during divorce, and the perspectives of divorcing couples on conflict tactics. Finally, the results of the two sets of data were integrated, and used to determine contributing factors that would have an impact on conflict between divorcing partners, namely: level of education, duration of marriage, number of children from the marriage, stage of divorce proceedings and the type of negotiation tactic applied by each partner. Conflict theory confirms that family systems will always have a degree of conflict present, which is triggered during the divorce process. Therefore, conflict is an unavoidable part of human interaction (Carvalho Relva et al., 2013; Straus, 1979). The level of education of participants played a role in their conflict interactions. Higher order thinking attributed to more refined conflict interactions amongst the participants that obtained degrees or post-graduate degrees. The duration of marriage is another important factor that moderates conflict tactics. Couples in high conflict marriages that have been married for many years, display the greatest imbalance between the values, beliefs, and decision-making processes of partners, and according to conflict theory, these couples start to compete to gain more power in the relationship (Speakman & Ryals, 2010; Vallacher et al., 2013). The number of children positively correlates with the perceptions of anger, conflict, and psychological aggression of parents. The couples with no children

reported the lowest perceptions of anger, conflict, and psychological aggression. The findings are in line with conflict theory and the argument is valid that couples with no children escape multiple conflict episodes due to a simpler exchange of power and/or control (Speakman & Ryals, 2010). Similarly, the stage of divorce proceedings positively correlates with the perceptions of anger, conflict, and psychological aggression of partners (Van der Merwe, in press a; Van der Merwe, in press b). The results served as a guideline for the development of a proposed conflict management model for conflict during divorce for professionals by using a three-step modified Delphi method to test its effectiveness.

Conflict Behaviour during Divorce Involving Minor Children

Divorce is a significant life event that, involves the termination of potentially one of the strongest affection bonds formed by adults (Bowlby, 1982; Robinson, 2015). The disruption of an attachment bond is strongly resisted. So much so that the reorganization of an attachment bond is required during divorce. According to attachment theory, poor care (in its many variations) is likely to simultaneously arouse anger toward one's attachment figure and inhibits its expression. Divorce is many times the result of all kinds of poor care, such as unresponsiveness to signals of need for care or inadequate spousal care (Bowlby, 1988; Scott et al., 2013).

Divorce is, therefore, rightfully defined as a legally sanctioned dissolution or termination of a marriage, often preceded by a period of separation that may also be legally ratified (Robinson, 2015). Research studies investigating divorce and the effect thereof (Hooper, 2005; Robinson, 2009, 2015; Weintraub & Hillman, 2005), suggest that it is not the actual divorce that determines the subsequent adjustment of children. Children's adjustment is linked to the trauma they are exposed to before, during, and after divorce. According to Laumann-Billings and Emery (2000) and Combrinck (2014), children might struggle to adapt

when parents divorce. Children adapt much better when conflict between parents is addressed (Combrinck, 2014; Kramer & Wasbo, 1998).

Birditt et al. (2010) confirm that the use of conflict tactics has important implications for divorcing couples and their families. When partners engage in conflict interactions, whereby they communicate with one another using a range of channels – some of these channels might be conscious and explicit while others may be unconscious and implicit (Hirschberger et al., 2013). Most often, the use of destructive conflict tactics (such as the inability to express oneself or avoidance of an unwanted option) is the cause of resentment and an escalation of conflict that contribute to dysfunctional relationships with a lack of pure care, love, and support (Van der Merwe, in press b).

In family evaluations of divorce, the evaluators (psychologists, social workers, social workers at the Office of the Family Advocate) are not only tasked to investigate the possibilities for children to be in a positive relationship with a parent or both parents, but also to investigate how the children will be affected due to parental conflict (Harkonen, 2013; Modecki et.al., 2015). The need for improved intervention models by professionals in the field of divorce, is emphasized by recent studies that indicate that the healthy adjustment of children during- and post-divorce is associated with both parents offering moderate contact and support, and lower levels of parental conflict present (Modecki et al., 2015).

According to Robinson (2015), professionals and the courts are confronted with high-conflict divorce cases filled with complexities – such cases can often not be finalized due to the unethical use of destructive conflict tactics that lead to pending alleged charges against the partners. These complex cases lead to various assessments and interventions that can become costly and escalate high-conflict divorces.

When assessing young adults six to eight years after divorce, the results show that the negative impact of inter-parental conflict far outweighs the benefit of paternal psychosocial support and more frequent father-adolescent contact. It has become clear that children are affected by dynamic family variables, such as the quality of parenting, parenting time, and inter-parental conflict. These variables do not exist independently from each other. According to Mahrer et al. (2016), children are affected by all three of these variables. In order to make informed decisions during care and contact evaluations, it is imperative to understand how children are affected by the various combinations of these aspects within a post-divorce family environment.

Progressively more research has been done to understand the relationship between the quality of parenting and the well-being of children. The studies of Mahrer et al. (2016) support the notion that quality parenting does not reverse the detrimental effects of inter-parental conflict on the well-being of children. Quality parenting by either parent can be a protective factor during divorce. Quality parenting is not possible when conflict ensues between the divorcing parents. Fagan and Churchill (2012) identified the biggest challenge to be the concept of families moving forward. Divorcing or separating families need to redefine their identities and worldview.

The research of Robinson (2015), Collardeau and Ehrenberg (2016), and Van Jaarsveld (2018) add confidence to the conclusion that high inter-parental conflict places the well-being of children at risk, and it highlights the importance of developing the protective factors provided by high quality parenting in both parents, as well as developing strategies to reduce the level of inter-parental conflict. According to Van Jaarsveld (2018), children from divorce are likely to recover once parental conflict reduces, and when parents view the needs of their children as a priority. The application of constructive conflict tactics within conflict

situations is a complex construct that requires further investigation, as there is a paucity in existing research. The provision of a conflict management model to reduce conflict between the divorcing parents will, therefore, be a valuable contribution.

Usakli (2013) concludes that a civil divorce is better than an embittered marriage, but a prolonged and destructive divorce is worst of all. The urgent demand for professionals to intervene more effectively, and to change the destructive dynamics between divorcing couples becomes a serious unmet need in South African children's courts.

The Need for Professional Intervention Planning for Divorcing Families

According to Sara (2011) and Mohi (2015), the family conditions before and after divorce determine the reaction of children to parental divorce. It is also known that several factors can influence the experience of children with regard to parental divorce. Collardeau and Ehrenberg (2016) identified three basic factors that was proved to exacerbate the impact of parental divorce: (1) transitions in alternative caretakers following the divorce of biological parents' divorce heighten the risk of poor adjustment; (2) exposure to continued conflict between parents; and (3) residential and contact rights by a single parent. Inter-parental conflict often positively correlates with the psychosocial maladjustment of children, just as marital harmony – its conceptual inverse – positively correlates with better adjustment (Cummings et al., 2010).

The major life task of divorcing families is to develop adequate and effective coping skills to complete the transition, and to enable healthy adjustment for the affected children. However, the healthy transition of children, might further be complicated by the system of psychological, social, and legal assessments. An essential need, therefore, exists for effective intervention and treatment by professionals, and to reduce the effect of those factors that might exacerbate the impact of parental divorce.

The Association of Family Conciliation Courts (AFCC) Task Force on Court-Involved Therapy (2011) confirms that there is a growing need for psychological literature on the risks of poorly informed treatment of divorcing families (Fidnick & Deutch, 2012). Considering the responsibility of experts, and the potential value of family assessments, it is, therefore, of the utmost importance that professionals in the field of divorce are adequately trained to guide divorcing families towards healing, redefinition, and new configurations of their family structure and dynamics. Expert guidance is essential to assist in the management of risks during divorce. Greenberg and Lebow (2016) confirmed that it is required of evaluators to grow mentally and emotionally for the development of dynamic intervention plans, and to develop realistic expectations regarding the therapeutic process and/or litigation process that will follow the evaluations.

A treatment plan or intervention model for professionals in the field of divorce aimed at promoting effective skills for parents and children is essential for better or healthy adjustment during and after divorce (Greenberg & Lebow, 2016). In developing the model, the researcher used guidelines, as outlined by Bush and Folger (1994), Shafique and Mahmood (2010), and Rahim et al. (2003). The guidelines are discussed in the larger study (Van der Merwe, 2020a; Van der Merwe 2020b). The availability of a conflict management model will allow health care professionals to become more competent in diffusing conflict between parents before they reach legal settlement that will result in beneficial outcomes for families. A six-step model towards the assessment of families during a conflict divorce provided new tools to answer the research question: How can the acquired knowledge regarding the different conflict tactics contribute to the implementation of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce?

Method

Data Extraction and Model Development

The 50 divorcing heterosexual couples from Gauteng, South Africa, who were referred by professionals within the field of divorce, were requested to complete a standardized quantitative measuring tool, the CTS2 (Straus, 1979), a biographical questionnaire, and an open-ended question. The open-ended question was: “How do you handle conflict during your separation/divorce?”. Stemming from conflict theory, this question was added to account for any possible methods of dealing with conflict during separation or divorce not addressed in the quantitative questionnaire. Two unpublished articles were written by the researcher, namely *Conflict Tactics during Divorce within a South African Context* (Van der Merwe, in press a), and *Gender Differences in Conflict Tactics during Divorce* (Van der Merwe, in press b). In these two unpublished articles, the method, procedure, the analysis of data, and the results were described. The current article focuses on how those results were used to provide the researcher with enough data for the development of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce (Figure 1).

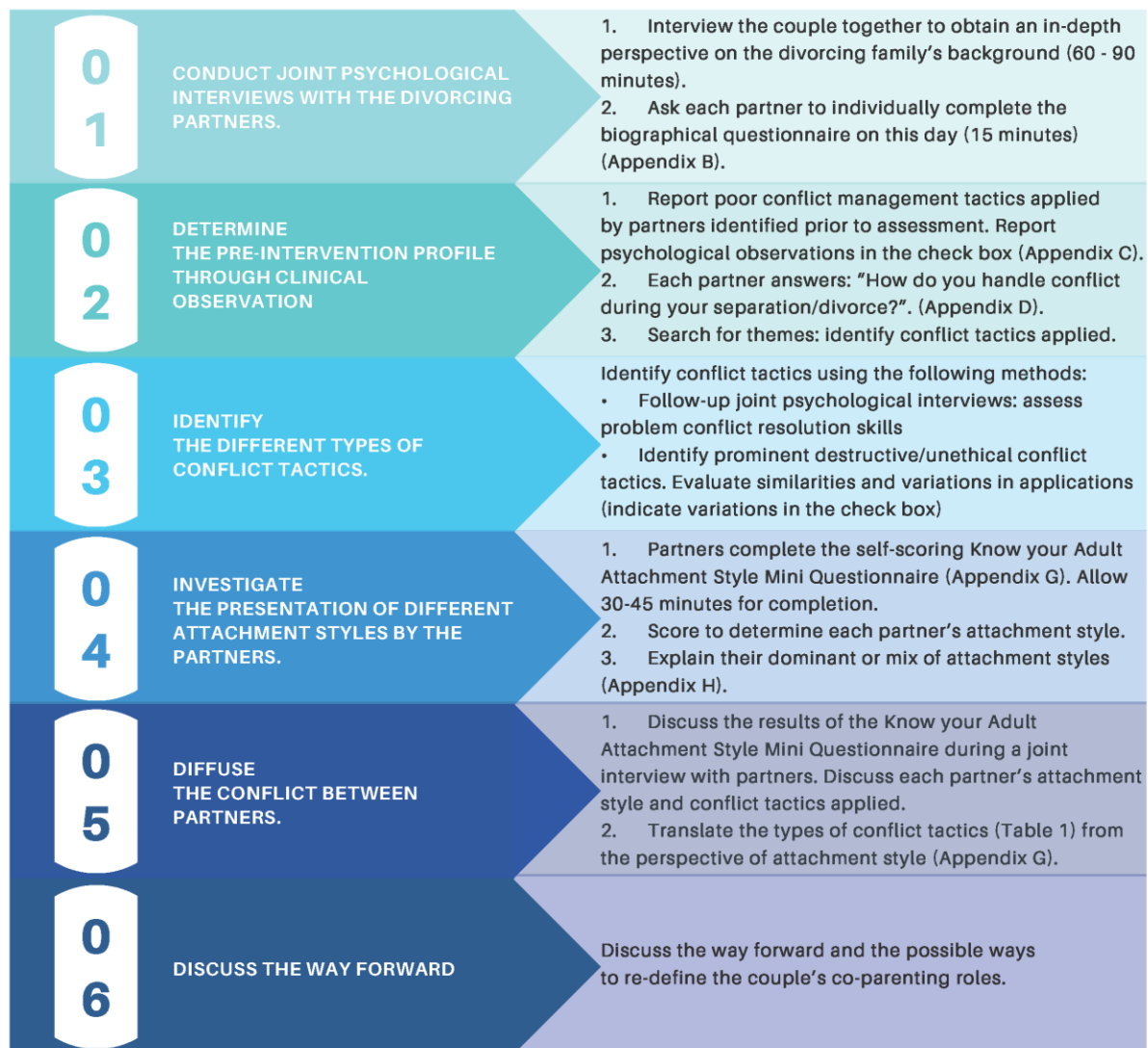


Figure 1. Conflict Management Model for Conflict during Divorce

Experts were then asked to apply the proposed model. They were provided with statements (used by means of the Delphi method) to reach consensus with regard to the development of a conflict management model for professionals in the field of divorce (Eubank et al., 2016). The Delphi method is a repetitive, but not a mechanical process, that uses an iterative progression of repeated rounds of voting. It is a constructive process for determining expert group consensus when there is little or no definitive evidence available, and where opinion is important. The Delphi method is a reflexive process and key to sparking insight and developing meaning.

A three-step modified Delphi method (Eubank et al., 2016) was used to establish the effectiveness of the proposed conflict management model and took place between April and July 2020. Ten experts representing family law practitioners, general practitioners, social services, family counsellors, and psychologists were invited to participate as expert panel. These experts were the same professionals who applied the proposed model in their practices. The panel members were required to test the nine statements until consensus was reached (Appendix A). Initially, an all-inclusive list of statements was identified, and consensus was built from the feedback provided by the expert panel in the preceding rounds. In round one, nine original statements were distributed to the panel and the panel members were asked to mark “true” or “false” next to each question. The panel members were asked to provide comments when they marked “false”. The same voting system applied in round two, only for those statements that were marked “false”. Lastly, face-to-face meetings were conducted in round three, which allowed for expert interaction and clarification of the different expert viewpoints provided.

Panel Selection

According to Lynn (1986) and Eubank et al. (2016) five to ten experts are considered adequate for content validation. For the purpose of the study, ten experts were contacted and asked to participate in the development of consensus towards a reliable model for healthcare professionals who deal with conflict during divorce. The experts were, therefore, chosen to represent professionals in the field of conflict and divorce. All ten experts provided consent and agreed to participate. Once the panel members were contacted, the goals and processes of the research study were explained.

Round One

The draft document containing the list of nine statements was sent by email to all ten panel members. The draft document was accompanied by a clear explanation of the objectives of the study, and specific instructions focusing on member participation. Each expert was asked to comment by marking “true” or “false” next to each of the statement. The experts used the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations that may not have been included in the model when developing the initial list of statements.

During round one, the intention was to clarify any issues regarding the application and insight into the proposed model. The comments led to improvements in the proposed model. All of the responses were entered anonymously into a database by the researcher. Statements required 80 % agreement from the panel (i.e., agreement of eight of the ten experts) to accept or to omit a statement during construction of the final model. In other words, if eight experts agreed on a statement, the statement was accepted and included in the final construction of the model. Lynn (1986) and Eubank et al. (2016) suggested that at least 80% of experts must agree on a statement to achieve content validity when there are at least ten experts participating in consensus development. The statements that did not reach an 80% portion were revised according to feedback provided by the expert panel and recirculated to the panel members during round two.

Round Two

The list of statements that did not reach consensus during round one was emailed to all ten members. In round two, the experts used the same voting system as described in round one, while considering the group scores and comments. This created room for each expert to reflect upon the group’s responses, and to make changes if needed. The anonymity of each expert’s responses was still preserved. The final responses were analysed as described in

round one. Statements that did not obtain consensus were reserved for discussion in round three.

Round Three

Round three comprised of a face-to-face meeting. The 80% agreement portion was still used to determine inclusion or exclusion of a statement. Round three voting occurred by making use of a show of hands and anonymity was not maintained. The panel members were encouraged to discuss the remaining statement (statement ten that was proposed to the panel in round two) until agreement was reached to retain, modify, or eliminate the statement from the final guideline document.

Results

Data Extraction and Statement Development

To develop the conflict management model for conflict during divorce, information was compiled from studies that provided key insights regarding the application of conflict tactics during divorce (Van der Merwe, in press a; Van der Merwe, in press b). Information was further gathered from studies that provided a better understanding of the link between conflict tactics and attachment styles. Lastly, for the development of the conflict management model, the Delphi method was used and the original nine statements that formed the basis of this method were retrieved from the results that were obtained in Van der Merwe's (in press) studies.

Round One

After the round one voting was completed and comments were summarized, the statements sharing similar constructs were grouped. Three additional statements were added. The panel eventually reached consensus about 12 statements, and these statements were accepted into the final guideline document.

The first statement “The biographical questionnaire is detailed enough and does not require any further inquiries” received consensus (eight of the panel members voted “agree” on this statement). One of the panel members commented that *biographical factors should include cultural and religious background, especially in a diverse country like South Africa*. Another panel member asked the question: *How could socio-economic status be measured in a more nuanced way rather than measuring it only on the ownership of property?* An additional statement was, therefore, added. The revised additional statement reads as follows: *South Africa is known to be a diverse country and therefore each partner’s cultural and religious backgrounds will be included in the biographical questionnaire. Additionally, socio-economic status will be measured according to annual income brackets.*

The third statement: The consideration of the seven factors (during the pre-intervention assessment) did not cause any confusion and was straight-forward, received consensus. All ten of the panel members voted “agree” and 10 % of the panel members commented that biographical factors, such as cultural and religious factors should be included especially in a diverse country like South Africa, while only one of the panel members (10%) commented the following: I was wondering why socio-economic status was not included as one of the factors vs for example, level of education that has been included. An additional statement was, therefore, added. The following revised additional statement was included: Due to South Africa’s diversity of people, three additional factors should be included while considering the contributing factors during the pre-intervention assessment, namely cultural background perspectives, religious perspectives and socio-economic status and therefore a total of ten factors should be considered during the pre-intervention phase.

The last statement (statement nine), *It is easy to identify the link between attachment style and/or mix of attachment styles with applied conflict tactics*, received consensus. Nine

of the panel members voted “agree”. One of the panel members (10%) indicated that the “go-to-person” is not necessarily the partner. An additional statement was, therefore, added: *If the “go-to-person” is not necessarily the partner, this factor should be included in the list of factors for consideration during the pre-intervention assessment.*

In total, six of the statements from round one were accepted. Content changes were made to statement one and statement three, according to the comments made by the panel members. Additional statements were provided for the expert panel to review in round two. After careful consideration, the tenth statement was added focusing on the question about the role of the partner and/or absence of the partner who does not fulfil the role of the “go-to-person”.

Round Two

In round two, statement one, three, statement nine’s panel comments, and the three additional statements were re-introduced to the panellists. After round two voting took place, the panel members reached consensus on the three additional statements (≥ 8 panel members voted “agree” on each of the new statements). The original statement one and statement three, therefore, replaced by new statements (≥ 9 panellists reached consensus). Statement nine was accepted, but only three of the panel members (30 %) voted that the additional statement (statement ten) must be included to cover for another potential factor during the pre-intervention assessment.

Round Three

Statement ten was reserved for discussion during the face-to-face Microsoft Teams meeting in round three. Round three was used to clarify the statement that did not reach consensus in the previous two rounds. In round three consensus concerning statement ten was

reached, after a discussion (>8 panel members voted “agree”), and the statement was accepted into the final guideline document.

Final Guideline Document: Conflict Management Model for Conflict during Divorce

For the development of this document, the researcher used the input of the ten panel members.

Step 1. Conduct a joint psychological interview with the divorcing partners.

- 1.1 Interview the couple together to obtain an in-depth perspective on the divorcing family’s background (60 - 90 minutes).
- 1.2 Ask each partner to individually complete the biographical questionnaire on the same day (15 minutes) (Appendix B).

Step 2. Determine the pre-intervention profile through clinical observation

The joint interview (step one) together with the clinical observation of the dynamic interchange between the couple will give the professional insight into the nature of the conflict. (It is important to determine the main reasons for the divorce. If there was for instance infidelity it clouds the offended parent’s willingness to support the child’s relationship with the other parent. It may also be difficult to cooperate and support a partner that was unfaithful). The psychological observations can be reported on in the check box provided.

- 2.1 Identification of poor conflict management tactics applied by partners even before the onset of the assessment must be reported. The psychological observations can be reported on in the check box provided (Appendix C).

The following factors must be taken into consideration during the pre-intervention assessment of the partners:

- Level of education.
- Cultural background.
- Religious background.
- Duration of marriage.
- Number of children from the marriage.
- Stage of the divorce proceedings.
- Negotiation tactic(s) used by the couple during the first interview, including gender-specific differences.
- Each partner's own deliberations during the divorce process.
- Each partner's understanding and/or insight into his/her own conflict tactic(s).
- The partner is not necessarily the "go-to-person" for the other partner.

2.2 Each partner completes the following open-ended question: "How do you handle conflict during your separation/divorce?". (15 minutes) (Appendix D).

2.3 Search for themes – identify the conflict tactic(s) applied and compare with your own observations (15 minutes).

[A maximum of one and a half hours to two hours must be allowed for Step 1 and 2.]

The divorcing partners schedule a follow-up appointment for the following week.

Step 3. Identify the different types of conflict tactics.

The different types of conflict tactics can be identified by the following methods:

- Follow-up on joint psychological interviews to assess each partner's ability to cope with problem situations and/or to provide constructive solutions.

- Identify prominent destructive and/or unethical conflict tactics used. Check whether the partners continue to use the same conflict tactics; or does the application of tactics vary – use the check box.
- Score the data on the provided data sheet (see Table 1).
- Indicate any variation and/or changes in the use of conflict tactics by the partners by making use of the check box.

Table 1.

Data sheet for the analysis of selective coding of the participants

Emotional negotiation	Cognitive negotiation	Minor psychological aggression	Severe psychological aggression	Minor assault	Minor sexual coercion	Avoidance of emotional pain	Avoidance of unwanted option	Protective gatekeeping	Parental alienation
Female									
Male									

Note. See Van der Merwe (in press b).

[A maximum of one hour must be allowed for Step 3.]

The divorcing partners must schedule an appointment within 14 days after the first consultation.

Step 4. Investigate the presentation of different attachment styles by the partners.

- 4.1 Each partner completes the self-scoring Know your Adult Attachment Style Mini Questionnaire © in the professional's office (Heller, 2015) (Appendix G). Allow 30 to 45 minutes for the completion of this questionnaire.

- 4.2 Score the four sections, namely secure, avoidant, anxious/ambivalent, and disorganized, individually and identify each partner's unique attachment style (15 minutes).
- 4.3 Report the scores obtained to the couple, and explain the dominant attachment style and/or mix of styles (30 minutes) (Appendix H).

[A maximum of one and a half hours must be allowed for Step 4.]

The divorcing partners must schedule a follow-up appointment for the following week.

Step 5. Diffuse the conflict between partners.

- 5.1 Discuss the results of the Know your Adult Attachment Style Mini Questionnaire © with the partners during a joint interview by:
- Defining the conflict tactics applied by each partner (30 minutes).
 - Defining each partner's attachment style (30 minutes).
- 5.2 The data obtained for the types of conflict tactic (Table 1) must be translated from the perspective of the applied attachment style (Appendix G) (30 minutes).

[A maximum of one and a half hours must be allowed for Step 5.]

The divorcing partners must schedule their closure consultation in two weeks' time.

Step 6.

Discuss the way forward and possible ways to re-define the couple's co-parenting roles.

The following case study will guide the professional in gaining a deeper understanding of the link between conflict tactics, attachment styles and the application of the model.

Case Study: An Example of the Application of the Proposed Model for Conflict during Divorce

Couple D was married for seven years when they initiate the divorce process. They had one daughter who was two years old. The couple consulted the researcher to gain insight into the different perspectives regarding contact, access, and visitation rights, primary residential issues between them due to the age of the minor, parenting responsibilities, and rights. It was clear that both parents wanted to co-parent, but Partner F (female) was concerned about her partner's psychological well-being.

Step 1 and 2

During the first consultation with the divorcing partners; the researcher implemented Step 1 and 2 of the conflict management model for conflict during divorce. The joint psychological intake interview that was conducted over 90 minutes, aimed at obtaining an in-depth perspective on the background history of the young family.

The researcher started the process by asking the partners to individually complete the biographical questionnaire (each partner took about 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire). In the meantime, the researcher placed the check box sheet on a clipboard in order to be filled in by the researcher as the consultation progressed, and more information was gathered by the researcher.

According to their narratives, Partner M (male) and Partner F (female) met each other in their early twenties, just after Partner F completed her studies as a physiotherapist at a university in Gauteng. She recently started her own physiotherapy practice, and indicated that

she earned an inconsistent income ranging from being a “stay-at-home-mom” to treating a maximum amount of nine to ten patients per week (monthly income > R 15 000). Although Partner M never completed his tertiary studies in IT, he managed to successfully climb the corporate ladder in this field, and completed a post-graduate diploma in information technology (monthly income > R 45 000). Partner M started to present with symptoms of general anxiety and co-morbid depression, five years after they married and at that stage their baby girl was two months old. Partner M further presented with suicidal ideation and the accompanied irrational thoughts of getting into his car and driving away from the family unit to be on his own. Partner F did not fulfil the function as “go-to-person” for Partner M since the birth of their baby girl. Partner F held a firm belief that she must support her husband unconditionally. Contradictory to her church’s views, she decided to support her husband to consult a psychologist who was not a member of their congregation. Partner M received the necessary psychological interventions and decided to move out of the matrimonial home until he was ready to move back in. However, Partner F discovered that Partner M had an emotional relationship with one of his colleagues and she, therefore, decided to initiate the divorce process. Partner M objected, and said that Partner F did not give him the necessary space in their marriage, due to her righteous stance and that she is controlled by her church.

The researcher indicated on the check box sheet that the couple was at the time of the psychological intake interview, at the pre-legal intervention phase of divorce.

During the consultation, the researcher noted that Partner F predominantly made use of emotional negotiation tactics (blaming her partner for being emotionally abusive), and Partner M made use of avoidance of the unwanted option (namely, to take responsibility and to own his role as a present father). These observations were reported on the check box sheet.

Psychological observations, such as that both partners showed the ability to gain insight into their own process if it was provided to them, were indicated on the check box sheet as well.

When the end of the consultation was neared, the researcher provided each partner with the open-ended question sheet and they responded as follows:

Partner F: I initially tried to play a supportive role even when we were fighting, but he did not gain insight and therefore, nor did he change his perspectives. Therefore, I will use cognitive negotiation every time with him when he abuses me emotionally to move him towards healthier behaviour in our relationship. Therefore, I can prevent/avoid further infliction of emotional pain onto me or him.

Partner M: Best way to handle her attacks is to get out of her sight and avoiding the conflict. Call her bluff. Alternatively, when I leave, she must be in a better place before we started to interact.

The divorcing couple returned within one week after their first consultation.

Step 3

During the joint follow-up consultation (60 minutes), it became clear that the partners were resistant to change. Their resistance to change could have been due to them not having any knowledge with regards to forms of intervention that could have been used to re-direct their process. The consultation produced new insight into each partner's use of conflict tactics. The researcher used the data sheet for selective coding to assist in the scoring of the conflict tactics applied by each partner while consulting with the clients.

Table 2.

Completed data sheet for the analysis of selective coding of the participants.

	Emotional negotiation	Cognitive negotiation	Minor psychological aggression	Severe psychological aggression	Minor assault	Minor sexual coercion	Avoidance of emotional pain	Avoidance of unwanted option	Protective gatekeeping	Parental alienation
Female		X	X					X		
Male	X	X	X					X	X	

Note. See Van der Merwe (in press b).

The divorcing couple returned after two weeks for a joint consultation.

Step 4

Two weeks later, the divorcing partners arrived for a joint consultation. The researcher asked the partners if they were willing to complete the attachment questionnaire, Know your Adult Attachment Style Mini Questionnaire © (Appendix G). Partner M and Partner F expressed their willingness to complete the questionnaire individually. They did not experience any difficulties while completing the questionnaire. After completion of the questionnaire, each partner scored his/her responses and reported the results to the researcher. Each partner did not take more than 45 minutes to complete and score their questionnaire. The scores were reported on the questionnaire (Appendix G) within five minutes. Each partner's dominant attachment style and/or mix of attachment styles were identified and the partners were encouraged to return to their homes and conduct research on the specific attachment styles. It was the researcher's observation that each partner gained insight into their own, as well as into each other's attachment style. The questionnaire served as an

interactive learning tool. The results obtained from each partner are illustrated in Table 3.

Partner M obtained the highest score for an avoidant attachment style and Partner F obtained the highest score for a secure attachment style.

Table 3.

Results for adult attachment style mini questionnaire ©

	Secure	Avoidant	Anxious/Ambivalent	Disorganized
Partner M	07	12	09	11
Partner F	20	03	07	03

Step 5

The following week each partner's dominant attachment style and/or mixture of styles were discussed comprehensively. The partners were also provided with a summary report that included descriptive explanations of their attachment style(s). During the consultation, they were prompted to find a link between their conflict tactic(s) and attachment style(s).

The following examples illustrate the interaction between attachment style(s) and the application of conflict tactics:

Example 1. Partner F was secure in her relationship with Partner M and leaned towards the use of healthy and more constructive conflict tactics (e.g., open communication, listening to the partner's perspective) when conflict was experienced.

Example 2. Partner M is insecure in his relationship with Partner F. He obtained a mixed picture of the avoidant attachment and disorganized attachment style. He mainly used a mixture of avoidance tactics, namely the avoidance of emotional pain and/or the avoidance

of unwanted option, and left the relationship in a disorganized state after they experienced conflict.

A feedback loop was maintained by keeping the couple interactively involved during the process. They were encouraged to discuss the different meanings of the attachment styles, and the link between conflict tactics and attachment styles. It became evident that Partner M and Partner F started to gain insight into their individual processes when their interaction styles started to change due to reduced anger.

[The divorcing partners scheduled the closure consultation in 2 weeks' time.]

Step 6

During the final discussion, the researcher provided a safe emotional space for the partners to find closure regarding the issues at hand. It was noted that the divorcing partners gained insight into the link between their attachments style(s) and use of conflict tactics that led them to gain new perspectives about each other and the issues at hand. The couple informed the researcher that they wanted to re-consider the way forward and, they did not want to proceed with the divorce process. They would rather reconcile.

Discussion

Literature acknowledges the general inadequacy of professionals when they are faced with the dilemma of high conflict divorce, especially, when children are involved. Sternberg (2002) suggests that intelligence is traditionally measured by analytical or academic aspects of intelligence (Ganuthula & Sinha, 2019). However, an adequate conceptualization of intelligence comprises other aspects as well, such as social intelligence, emotional intelligence, or practical intelligence (Gardner, 1999; Stagnor & Walinga, 2014). According to the AFCC Task Force on Court-Involved Therapy (2011) and Fidnick and Deutch (2012) emerging risks of poorly informed treatment of divorcing families were identified. Specific

guidance for assessing and managing these risks are of the utmost importance. As discussed earlier, the study aimed at overcoming the limitations in managing conflict behaviour between couples, and to provide practical intelligent alternatives to professionals in the field of divorce. In order not to limit participants by making use of only a structural questionnaire, an open-ended question was added. The responses to the two sets of questions were integrated, and used for the development of the model. To improve the validity and trustworthiness of the model, ten expert professionals in the field of divorce, to the development of the model by adding consensus. The expert panel contributed by adding two additional factors for professionals to consider during the pre-intervention.

After consensus was reached, the model was tested in a private practice setting by applying it to ten divorcing couples. The application yielded satisfactory progress that was observed by the researcher. There was improved communication between the couples and reduced levels of anger were reported. It was evident that professionals who make use of the intervention strategies, as proposed in the conflict management model, need important skills to apply the model successfully. Moreover, the model involves the application of emotional intelligence, namely self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Behbahani, 2011). The model further involves overcoming conflict theory's weakest point, namely the misattribution of social instability (Carvalho Relva et al., 2013).

Greenberg and Lebow (2016) emphasize the importance of a divorcing family's life task. Divorcing families need develop the necessary skills to complete their transition during divorce, and by mastering their life task, families are empowered to achieve a healthy adjustment. The primary goal of the model is to guide couples to gain an understanding of the link between conflict tactics and attachment styles. In the case study, it was evident from the male partner's behaviour and the female partner's renewed perspectives that they were re-

considering their decision to file for divorce. Anecdotal evidence obtained from reported case studies and the application of the model, showed that ten couples were treated according to the principles of the model. The process led to insight regarding the link between conflict tactics and attachment styles, changes in conflict behaviour, and re-organization within divorcing families. It must be noted that psychological interventions address the underlying issues and/or those factors that motivate individual family members, and effective intervention planning is, therefore, vital to bring about long-term sustainable solutions (Friedlander & Gans-Walters, 2010).

Conclusion

The conflict management model for conflict during divorce was developed for professionals within the field of divorce. This model will equip them with sound knowledge to mobilize the destructive communication patterns of divorcing couples into more constructive and moral communication and/or thinking (Greenberg & Lebow, 2016). The challenge of managing conflict lies in enhancing communication between divorcing partners. To improve strategies and skills of professionals while working with divorcing couples, involve education and specific job-related training. It is, therefore, important that all stakeholders understand the implicit value of such a model – not only to divorcing families, but also couples who experience high conflict. Professionals should be encouraged to continue with their own self-directed studies, and to increase their use of management models. Professionals should also be trained to gain a deeper insight into the structure and dynamics of the strategies of divorcing couples. The continued development of professionals should, amongst others, emphasize personal growth, a deeper understanding of empathy and emotional intelligence to enrich couples with sound knowledge about the use and function of conflict behaviour to prevent attachment disorganisation.

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SECTION C

Critical Reflections of the Study

1. Introduction

This section provides an overview of the study. The overview places the three articles that were composed for the study in context, and highlights the relationship between the three individual articles. As this is a critical reflection that includes a description of personal experiences, this section is written in the first person. The section commences with a description of the research process in general, after which specific aspects of the research process are highlighted. The study is then concluded, followed by a discussion on the contribution of the study, limitations, and recommendations.

2. Research Process

The research process started after a discussion with a former promoter and co-promoter on the possibility of conducting a PhD in psychology – focusing on psycho-legal work. At that stage, I knew that I wanted to do my research on the topic of divorce, due to my exposure and work in the children's court of South Africa. In the discussions that followed, the current gaps with regard to conflict tactics during divorce were highlighted, and from practical and academic experience my promoter confirmed that there was indeed a need to conduct research on the conflict tactics applied by divorcing couples. A literature review of the topic confirmed a paucity. I was motivated to conduct the research, due to the relevance of the topic, and my personal need to expand my knowledge that is required for the psycho-legal work that I do. This need accompanies my aspiration to improve the quality of mediating divorce processes, and psycho-legal assessments for the High Court of South Africa.

I completed my research proposal in the year that followed, and obtained approval from the scientific committee and the Health Research Ethics Committee at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. I contacted psychologists, social workers, general practitioners, psychiatrists, and legal representatives in the private sector who were willing to act as gatekeepers for the study. After contacting the gatekeepers, the data gathering process started. The participants were gathered from the referrals of the gatekeepers. I decided to apply a cross-sectional mixed methods design, as it was important for me to obtain a broad idea of how divorcing couples experienced and understood conflict behaviour. It was even more important to create and provide a framework and details of the process, assessments, and interventions in the field. One element of the research design included an open-ended question. In my view, the open-ended question contributed meaningfully to the research, as it gave all of the participants the opportunity to voice their perspectives without the constraints provided by a quantitative measuring tool.

It was important to provide a safe and open space that allowed the divorcing couples an opportunity to express their honest perspective. I employed the ethical principles of respect for participants, privacy and confidentiality, and informed consent. This provided the necessary security to the participants that their contribution to the study will not be used for psycho-legal purposes during their divorce cases.

Section A was written with the purpose of providing a comprehensive view of the study. The articles were written according to journal guidelines. When articles are used in a research study, a limited word count is normally available due to these guidelines. Lengthy discussions on methodology and ethics are, therefore, not possible. However, these aspects have been addressed comprehensively in Section A. Each article focuses on the literature and methodology relevant to the specific focus of that particular article. It was during this time of

my research that I trained extremely hard as preparation for my crossing of the English Channel in August 2018. I set this personal challenge for my fiftieth birthday celebrations. Instead of hosting a big party I imagined myself swimming from Dover to France. The training took an immense toll, and I almost gave up on my research. However, Prof. Herman Grobler intervened and encouraged me to follow my other dream – to complete my PhD. I will always be grateful to him.

As mentioned previously, the study was guided by a mixed method approach in the form of an article-format thesis. It was important that the articles in Section B reflected the objectives of the larger study, and that the convergent mixed methods design was supported.

The first article focused only on the quantitative part of the study by supporting the first objective, the local prevalence, and the application of conflict tactics.

The discussion of conflict theory, its links with the quantitative measuring tool that was used, and the crucial elements of conflict tactics that needed to be addressed, received attention. Following this, the reasoning behind attachment theory and its importance during conflict management by professionals, were highlighted. A thorough exploration, defining topics, and in-depth discussions led to the achievement of the first objective.

In the second article, the quantitative and qualitative data were integrated and presented. I used the data that were obtained from the biographical questionnaire, the open-ended question, and the Revised Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS2) to support the second objective – to determine gender differences in the application of conflict tactics during divorce. Once I gave the participants the assurance that the obtained information would not be used for litigation purposes, they gave informed consent.

Lastly, in the third article the development of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce was developed by utilizing both the integrated quantitative and qualitative data. Integration in this article was important, as it is a major characteristic of a convergent mixed methods design.

By following the above-mentioned process, the research questions were addressed.

3. Data Gathering

From the start, it was clear that it would be difficult to obtain sufficient data. The participants anticipated to be involved in high conflict litigation processes, were extremely vulnerable. Some of them were volatile, especially when children were involved, and they were uncertain about the direction of their lives. Additionally, the gatekeepers had busy schedules and they had to fit the participants in during already their busy days at work. I scheduled appointments with the targeted gatekeepers, and explained the aims and nature of my research. They were requested to identify possible couples who met the relevant criteria.

Ultimately, with support from professionals in the field of divorce, a sufficient sample of 100 participants (50 heterosexual couples) who were willing to participate in the study were obtained. The minimum number of 100 participants was determined by a statistician from the statistics department at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) by making use of power analysis. The power to determine statistical significance on an alpha level of .05 to obtain the power of 80% for medium effect was considered. The statistician provided a letter to provide proof of the statistical significance of my research study.

The gatekeepers obtained permission from the potential participants, and provided me with their email addresses. I contacted them individually, explained the purpose of the study, and requested the participants who volunteered to take part in the study to complete the consent form. The gatekeepers received a preparation letter from me, and they signed the

goodwill permission letter. The participants were in no way coerced to give consent to participate in the study. Once voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all of the participants, I distributed hardcopies of the CTS2, the biographical questionnaire, and the open-ended question to the gatekeepers who distributed the documents to the participants. I added the open-ended question to account for any possible methods of handling conflict during divorce that were not be addressed in the quantitative questionnaire.

I personally gathered all of the completed documents. The quantitative data of the questionnaire were subsequently statistically analysed and interpreted in cooperation with the statistical consultation services of the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. For the open-ended question, common patterns were initially searched for by reading the data produced by the participants. The transcriptions were then organized into meaningful groups by making use of a coding system and collated. Themes were created, named, and defined. The contributions made by the participants with regards to the open-ended question were valuable, because it provided an in-depth understanding of their views concerning conflict during divorce. While integrating the two sets of data, I began observing gender differences in the application of conflict tactics.

4. Data Analysis

A statistician from the statistics department at the North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) assisted with the data analysis of the quantitative data. We held regular meetings to discuss the data. After the meetings, I discussed the outcomes with my promoter and co-promoter after which I started to write the first article. Descriptive statistics were firstly calculated, and the effect of biographical variables was analysed by using ANOVAs, t-tests, and Spearman's rank order correlations. After reliability was established, the averages of the subscales were calculated. The sub-scales were negotiation, psychological

aggression, physical assault, sexual coercion, injury, age, educational level, level of court proceedings and couples' perceptions of anger and conflict.

I continued the meetings with the statistician to discuss the data that I obtained for the second article. The integration of the two sets of data was done by making use of a quantitative and qualitative approach. The qualitative part of the article necessitated a thematic analysis. At this stage, Prof. Herman Grobler was appointed as promoter and Prof. Rex van Vuuren as the co-promoter. I immersed myself in the data and performed a manual analysis. The following themes emerged from the data:

- Emotional and cognitive negotiation.
- Minor and severe psychological aggression.
- Minor assault.
- Minor sexual coercion.
- Avoidance of emotional pain.
- Avoidance of unwanted option.
- Protective gatekeeping.
- Parental alienation.

The results obtained from the data were then integrated. For the third article, ten couples who experienced high conflict during their pre-legal intervention phase of divorce received counselling from the researcher according to the principles of the model. One couple's therapeutic process was reported and documented in a case study to provide anecdotal evidence.

5. Findings

The results from the t-tests and ANOVAs were used to examine the effect of the biographical data on conflict tactics and were only reported on when statistically significant

differences occurred. Age, gender, and onset of the divorce process showed no statistically significant differences. Results from the quantitative data showed there was no significant difference between males and females and their application of conflict tactics. However, according to the t-tests, both males and females indicated high level perceptions of anger and conflict with an average score of above $\frac{7}{10}$. Males and females indicated low levels of physical abuse with an average score of $\frac{1}{7}$.

The highest mean score was obtained for 'emotional negotiation' (3.75), and the second highest score was obtained for 'cognitive negotiation' (3.64), followed by 'minor psychological aggression' (2.54), and 'severe psychological aggression' (2.13). The lowest mean score (0.34) was obtained for 'severe physical assault'.

A negative correlation was found between 'emotional negotiation' and 'perception of anger' ($r(99) = -0.21$). The higher the 'emotional negotiation', the lower the 'perception of anger'.

Positive correlations were found between 'minor psychological aggression' and 'perception of anger' ($r(99) = 0.46$), 'severe psychological aggression' and 'perception of anger' ($r(99) = 0.51$). Positive correlations were also found between 'minor psychological aggression' and 'perception of conflict' ($r(99) = 0.46$), 'severe psychological aggression' and 'perception of conflict' ($r(99) = 0.23$). A positive correlation was found between 'minor physical assault' and 'perception of anger' ($r(99) = 0.23$). Additionally, a positive correlation between 'severe physical assault' and 'perception of anger' was found ($r(99) = 0.21$).

To test the validity of the results further, I analysed the responses concurrently with the data from the qualitative question. Thereafter, I integrated the results of the two sets (qualitative and quantitative) of data. My main interest was to examine the various conflict

tactics applied by different genders, and I, therefore, added the following open-ended question: “*How do you handle conflict during your separation/divorce?*”. This question allowed the participants to indicate any conflict tactics that were not addressed in the questionnaire, and these tactics were then included in the study. After using selective coding and a further analysis of the responses of the participants, I constructed Table 1.

Table 1. *Analysis of Selective Coding*

	Females	Males
Emotional negotiation	9	12
Cognitive negotiation	12	10
Minor psychological aggression	8	11
Severe psychological aggression	0	3
Minor assault	2	0
Severe assault	1	0
Minor sexual coercion	0	1
Avoidance of emotional pain	10	7
Avoidance of unwanted option	8	8
Gatekeeping	19	2
Protective gatekeeping	15	0
Restrictive gatekeeping	4	2
Parental alienation	1	13

Table 1 demonstrates that females mainly apply ‘gatekeeping’ behaviour (19) as a conflict tactic during divorce. Females reported ‘avoidance of emotional pain’ (10),

‘emotional negotiation’ (9), ‘minor psychological aggression’ (8), and ‘avoidance of unwanted option’ (8) as conflict tactics applied during divorce. Table 1 further illustrates evidence that males might lean stronger towards ‘parental alienation’ behaviour (13), ‘emotional negotiation’ (12), ‘minor psychological aggression’ (11), or ‘avoidance of unwanted option’ (8).

Quantitative results supported the finding that males and females use predominantly ‘emotional negotiation’ ($\text{Mean}_{\text{males}} = 3.67$; $\text{Mean}_{\text{females}} = 3.83$) and ‘minor psychological aggression’ ($\text{Mean}_{\text{males}} = 2.46$; $\text{Mean}_{\text{females}} = 2.46$). The quantitative results supported the finding that couples predominantly make use of ‘negotiation’ as a conflict tactic (effect size: $0.02 - 0.19$ and confidence interval: $-0.09 - 0.05$), but gender differences were paradoxically noted in the type of negotiation tactic. The qualitative results added an in-depth understanding of conflict strategies applied by different genders. Females make use of protective gatekeeping (and to a lesser extent, restrictive gatekeeping) and males made use of ‘emotional negotiation’, which might lead to parental alienation. Parental alienation is a concept that should not be used casually. It can indicate much more than alienation behaviours by a parent but can also involve a parent’s own negative behaviour such as being too harsh, neglect, or counter rejection as described by Kelly and Johnston (2001). The problem of parental alienation is increasingly found in care and contact litigation cases during the past decade, most probably due to growing professional and public awareness, and/or overuse of this terminology to describe conflict behaviours (Bala et al., 2010).

The difference observed between males and females with regard to protective gatekeeping conflict behaviour versus parental alienation conflict behaviour, can be explained from research that have begun increasingly to consider differences in ethical standards between different genders (Pierce & Thompson, 2018). The results highlighted the

disparity between conflict negotiation tactics used by males and females, and males made predominantly use of unethical negotiation tactics. The results further suggested that conflict tactics are, paradoxically, applied to maintain affectional ties by exhibiting proximity-seeking behaviour.

The overall findings of the research indicated a more pronounced need for effective planning and intervention techniques applied by professionals who are assisting divorcing couples.

Lastly, the findings led to the development of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce in which all the information from the data and the feedback from professionals were integrated.

6. Conclusion

The combination of the qualitative and quantitative findings supports the importance of the development of a conflict management model for South African professionals in the field of divorce. Although the initial data gathering process started slowly due to the busy schedules of the gatekeepers and the participants' initial hesitation to take part in the study, valuable data were gathered. The qualitative data enhanced the quantitative data to support my original choice of utilizing a convergent mixed methods design. The data highlighted that age, gender, and onset of the divorce process showed no statistically significant differences. The data further confirmed that females and males present with multiple conflict behaviour, such as emotional and cognitive negotiation, psychological aggression, physical assault, gatekeeping behaviour, parental alienation, and the avoidance of an unwanted option. However, the results indicated gatekeeping as more prevalent in females. It should be noted, however, that a few scholars have pointed out that gatekeeping might be applied to shield children from potential harm during divorce. The research study's results indicated that

parental alienation is more prevalent in males. Baker and Verrocchio (2013) report that in the absence of randomly drawn samples, and the lack of a proper definition for alienation, there are, to date, no defensible estimates of the prevalence of alienation. It must be noted that López, et al. (2014) reported that there is general agreement that parental alienation occurs regardless of gender of parent. The results suggested two ethical differences between males and females, which might explain the unethical negotiation tactics employed by males. Males mainly display a concern for themselves and a sense of competitiveness, whereas females display concern for others, empathy, and a preference for communion.

Education showed an association with refined conflict tactics. This was due to the integration of higher order thinking. The participants whose highest education level was a high school certificate (minimum ten years of schooling) obtained higher scores for severe physical assault than those who obtained degrees.

The data confirmed that the duration of a marriage significantly impacts the application of conflict tactics by couples. The longer hostile-engaged couples (low happiness/high conflict) are married, the greater the gap in joint decision making, shared values, support in the household, and beliefs about child rearing. The couples who were married for 16 to 20 years or more, indicated more severe psychological aggression than couples that were married for 11 to 15 years or less. The couples who were married for 6 to 10 years presented with a lower incidence of minor sexual coercion.

Furthermore, the couples who had no children showed lower perceptions of anger, conflict, and psychological aggression. Perceptions of anger and conflict increased with the number of children and the stage of the divorce proceedings. Three stages of the divorce proceedings delivered significant results, namely (1) pre-legal, (2) legal intervention and (3) full settlement. It was found that the participants in the pre-legal stage (emotional phase of

divorce), showed lower perceptions of anger and conflict, and lower severe psychological aggression than the participants in the stage of legal intervention (stage of formal dissolution of marriage).

The destructive effect of legal intervention was noted. The stage of full settlement showed higher minor psychological aggression than the pre-legal stage, and higher minor physical assault than the pre-legal and/or degree of settlement stages.

The availability of a conflict management model for conflict during divorce will benefit professionals in the field of divorce in ways that will not only contribute to the effective management of conflict through mediation and thorough psycho-legal assessments, but also to the general mental health of divorcing families. In addition, parents may benefit from understanding and developing more secure attachment bonds with their children. The model will benefit both parents and children who go through divorce. Most importantly, the model will add value to people who are affected by separation and divorce in the regional and High courts in South Africa.

7. Limitations and Recommendations

The results of the study might improve when a larger sample size is applied. However, the sample size and data obtained from the participants were regarded as sufficient to determine the different conflict tactics used by divorcing couples, and to come to certain conclusions. I acknowledge that the sample is not representative and, therefore, no generalizations can be made to a larger population. P-values were only reported on for completeness but were not interpreted. Effect sizes were used to describe the magnitude of the effects in the sample. I acknowledge that it might be a biased sample, and only the effects in the sample were described. It would be impossible to obtain a random sample of couples going through divorce. I suggest that the observed effects should also be studied by other

researchers to see how their results compare with this study. A body of knowledge can then be accumulated and combined in a meta study at a later stage. The conflict management model for conflict during divorce professionals, proposed by this study, was implemented to provide anecdotal evidence.

The research can be enhanced by implementing it within a more ethnically and racially more diverse sample. Professionals must be trained to focus on the development of empathy between divorcing couples to minimize unethical negotiation during the divorce process.

Follow-up studies can focus on specific aspects highlighted by this study: How divorcing couples can apply higher-order thinking skills during divorce to prevent the use of the following conflict tactic, namely the avoidance of an unwanted option to face the consequences and/or the avoidance of an unwanted emotion. Another study can be conducted with professionals to investigate and test the efficacy of the proposed model.

Additionally, the professional development in South Africa of professionals working in the field of divorce should shift its focus to the development in the following aspects: personal growth, empathy, and emotional intelligence. The development of these aspects will enable professionals to enrich couples with knowledge about their conflict behaviour and the prevention of disorganized attachments.

8. Contributions

The contribution of the study centres around the combination of qualitative and quantitative research. This is a unique scientific study where the data could be practically used to address the use of conflict tactics during divorce by South African couples. If utilized effectively, a conflict management model for professionals could make a positive

contribution to limit the devastating effects of divorce and could support complicated legal proceedings of families.

Professionals should be aware of the implicit value of such a model and its application, not only to divorcing couples, but also to couples experiencing high conflict. The model could contribute to the education of professionals with regard to the dynamic interaction that takes place when couples apply conflict strategies, and to minimize complications in communication between parents during divorce. Professionals are in need of the necessary skills to change the quality of couples' conflict interactions. By incorporating this model in formal settings, the stigma associated with seeking mental assistance can finally be broken down. As a result, divorcing parents may become more comfortable with acknowledging stressors that complicate the process of divorce, and the destructive impact of conflict on their children. In conclusion, this is a unique South African study that will hopefully contribute to the mental health, well-being, and strengthening of bonds of divorcing South African families in the medium to long term.

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SECTION D
APPENDICES

Appendix A

**Example sheet of the original nine statements that were distributed to the panel
of experts (Round 1)**

Statement 1:

The biographical questionnaire is detailed enough and does not require any further inquiries/investigation.

T F

Comment -

Statement 2:

The identification of significant poor conflict tactics between the partners were a simple task to complete.

T F

Comment-

Statement 3:

The consideration of the seven factors (during the pre-intervention assessment) did not cause any confusion and was straight-forward.

T F

Comment-.....

Statement 4:

During the psychological interviews, the open-ended question gave rise to new themes regarding conflict tactics during divorce.

T F

Comment-.....

Statement 5:

The identification of different conflict tactics was made less complicated with the assistance of the conflict tactics data sheet.

T F

Comment-.....

Statement 6:

It was a simple task to conduct the self-scoring Know your Adult Attachment Style Mini Questionnaire ©.

T F

Comment-.....

Statement 7:

The Know your Adult Attachment Style Mini Questionnaire © was easy to score and to help with the definition of each partner's attachment style and/or mix of attachment styles.

T F

Comment-.....

Statement 8:

Appendix G describes the different attachment styles coherently and sufficiently.

T F

Comment-.....

Statement 9:

It is easy to identify the link between attachment style and/or mix of attachment styles with applied conflict tactic(s).

T F

Comment-.....

Example sheet of the three additional statements that were distributed to the panel of experts (Round 2).

Additional statement to Statement 1:

South Africa is known to be a diverse country and therefore each partner's cultural and religious backgrounds will be included in the biographical questionnaire additionally, socio-economic status will be measured according to annual income brackets

T F

Comment-

Additional statement to Statement 3:

Due to South Africa's diversity of people, three additional factors should be included while considering the contributing factors during the pre-intervention assessment, namely cultural background perspectives, religious perspectives and socio-economic status and therefore a total of 10 factors should be considered during the pre-intervention phase.

T F

Comment-

Additional Statement 10:

If the "go-to-person" is not necessarily the partner, this factor should be included in the list of factors for consideration during the pre-intervention assessment.

T F

Comment-

Appendix B

Example sheet of the biographical questionnaire

Biographical Questionnaire

Please complete the following biographical details by circling either a Yes or No that is provided on the right side of the paper.

1. Age

21 - 30	Yes / No
31 – 40	Yes / No
41 – 50	Yes / No
51 – 60	Yes / No
61 – 70	Yes / No

2. Gender

Male	Yes / No
Female	Yes / No

3. Highest level of Qualification

Grade 10	Yes / No
Grade 11	Yes / No
Grade 12	Yes / No
Diploma	Yes / No

Degree	Yes / No
Post-graduate degree	Yes / No
PhD	Yes / No

4. Socio-economic status (according to monthly income brackets)

Dependant of partner's income	
$\leq$ R 5 000	Yes / No
R 5 001 – R 15 000	Yes / No
R 15 001 – R 25 000	Yes / No
R 25 001 – R 35 000	Yes / No
R 35 001 – R 55 000	Yes / No
R 55 001 – R 65 000	Yes / No
R 65 001 – R 75 000	Yes / No
R 75 001 – R 100 00	Yes / No
R 100 001 – R 125 000	Yes / No
R 125 001 – R 165 000	Yes / No
R 165 001 – R 175 000	Yes / No
R 175 001 – R 200 000	Yes / No
R 200 001 – R 250 000	Yes / No
$\geq$ R 250 001	Yes / No

5. Duration of marriage

0 - 5	Yes / No
6 – 10	Yes / No
11 – 15	Yes / No
16 – 20	Yes / No
21 – 25	Yes / No
25+	Yes / No

6. Number of children from the marriage

0	Yes / No
1	Yes / No
2	Yes / No
3	Yes / No
4	Yes / No
5	Yes / No

7. Onset of the separation/divorce process

1 – 5 years after onset of the marriage	Yes / No
6 – 10 years after onset of the marriage	Yes / No
11 – 15 years after onset of the marriage	Yes / No
16 – 20+ years after onset of the marriage	Yes / No

8. Legal status of the divorce proceedings

Pre-legal	Yes / No
Legal Intervention	Yes / No
Reached a degree of settlement	Yes / No
Reached full settlement	Yes / No

9. Perceptions regarding the level of anger and conflict

No anger.....High levels of anger

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

No conflict.....High levels of conflict

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Appendix C

Check Box towards meaningful evaluation

	Partner (Male)	Partner (Female)
Level of education		
Cultural background		
Religious background		
Duration of marriage		
Number of children from the marriage		
Stage of the divorce proceedings		
Conflict tactic(s) used by the partners during the interviews. Indicate any changes as well		
Each partner's understanding and/or insight into his/her own conflict tactic(s)		
The partner is not necessarily the 'go-to-person' for the other partner		

“How do you handle conflict during your separation/divorce?”

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Appendix E

Conflict Tactics Descriptors

‘Negotiation’ is defined as actions taken to settle a disagreement through discussion. However, the quality of conflict interaction can be negative and destructive (negative conflict interaction). The items in the cognitive sub-scale are examples of possible conflict interactions that couples may have experienced. The emotion subscale is meant to measure the extent to which positive or negative affect (emotional tone) is communicated by asking about the expression of feelings of care and respect for the partner (Bush & Folger, 1994; Folberg et al., 2004).

‘Psychological aggression’ describes verbal and non-verbal aggressive acts. The communicative act might be active or passive, and verbal or non-verbal and can include shouting or swearing at partner (active, verbal), slamming a wall or breaking something (active, non-verbal), and stony silence or sulking (passive non-verbal).

‘Physical assault’ describes the acts that fit the definition of physical violence. A discrimination between acts of minor violence and major violence are made.

‘Sexual coercion’ is defined as behaviour that is intended to force the partner to engage in unwanted sexual activity. The ‘sexual coercion’ scale is intended to cover a range of coercive acts, from verbal insistence to physical force.

‘Injury’ measures partner-inflicted physical injury, as indicated by bone or tissue change, a need for medical attention, or pain continuing for a day or more.

‘Avoidance of emotional pain’ and ‘avoidance of an unwanted option’ can be described as a way for people to escape painful or difficult emotions. ‘Avoidance’ refers to any action designed to prevent the occurrence of an uncomfortable emotion such as fear,

sadness, or shame and/or any action designed to prevent the occurrence of an uncomfortable option.

‘Gatekeeping behaviours’ can be defined as dysfunctional co-parenting that prevents children to maintain strong bonds with both of their parents, and can be divided into protective (monitor the other parent’s contact to shield the child from harm); restrictive (limit the other parent’s contact with the child); inhibitory (actions like withholding information about the child, refusing to let the other parent speak or see the child, denigrating the other parent to the child); and facilitative gatekeeping (on the opposite continuum of inhibitory gatekeeping) (Adamsons, 2010; Pruett et al., 2016). According to Saini et al. (2016), ‘parental alienation’ is a term that is used to refer to a child who has been programmed to reject a parent, by an embittered/malicious parent.

Appendix F

Data sheet – Analysis of selective coding for participants

Emotional negotiation	Cognitive negotiation	Minor psychological aggression	Severe psychological aggression	Minor assault	Minor aexual coercion	Avoidance of emotional pain	pvoidance of unwanted option	Protective gatekeeping	Parental alienation
Female									
Male									

Note. See Van der Merwe (2018).

Appendix G

Self-scoring Know your Adult Attachment Style Mini Questionnaire ©.

By Dr Diane Poole Heller, 2015.

Instructions:

When completing this questionnaire, please focus on ONE significant relationship – ideally a current or past partner as the focus here is on adult relationships. This does not necessarily need to be a romantic relationship but must be the individual with whom you feel the most connection. Who is your primary “go to” person if you are sick, in trouble, want to celebrate, call with news, etc.?

This questionnaire is designed to be an interactive learning tool.

When responding, consider how strongly you identify with each statement – disagree, mostly agree, strongly agree. Using the scale below, respond in the space provided.

Disagree	Sometimes Agree	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4
Secure			
	1. I feel relaxed with my partner most of the time.		
	2. I find it easy to flow between being close and connected with my partner to being on my own.		
	3. If my partner and I hit a glitch it is relatively easy for me to apologize, brainstorm a win-win solution or repair the misattunement or disharmony.		
	4. People are essentially good at heart.		

-
5. It is a priority to keep agreements with my partner.
 6. I attempt to discover and meet the needs of my partner whenever possible and I feel comfortable expressing my own needs.
 7. I actively protect my partner from others and from harm and attempt to maintain safety in relationship.
 8. I look at my partner with kindness and caring and look forward to our time together.
 9. I am comfortable being affectionate with my partner
 10. I can keep secrets, protect my partner's privacy, and respect boundaries.

Section Total

Avoidant

1. When my partner arrives home or approaches me, I feel inexplicably stressed – especially when s/he wants to connect.
 2. I find myself minimizing the importance of close relationships in my life.
 3. I insist on self-reliance, have difficulty reaching out when I need help and do many of life's tasks or my hobbies, alone.
 4. I sometimes feel superior in not needing others and wish others were more self-sufficient.
 5. I feel like my partner is always there but would often prefer to have my own space unless I invite the connection.
 6. Sometimes I prefer casual sex instead of a committed relationship.
 7. I prefer relationships with things or animals instead of people.
-

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
8. I often find eye contact uncomfortable and particularly difficult to maintain.
 9. It is easier for me to think things through than to express myself emotionally.
 10. I act like I do not need reassurance or encouragement when sometimes I, in fact, do.
 11. When I lose a relationship at first, I might experience separation elation and then become depressed.

Section Total

Anxious/Ambivalent

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
1. I am always yearning for something or someone that I feel I cannot have and rarely feeling satisfied.
 2. I am more prone to feeling sorry for myself when I have a problem than to act and solve it.
 3. Sometimes, I over-function, over-adapt, over-accommodate others, or over-apologize for things I did not do.
 4. I feel like I over-focus on others in general and tend to lose myself in relationships.
 5. It is difficult for me to say NO or to set realistic boundaries.
 6. I chronically second-guess myself and sometimes wish I had said something differently.
 7. When I give more than I get I often resent this and harbour a grudge. It is difficult to receive love from my partner when they express it.
 8. It is difficult for me to be alone. If alone, I feel abandoned, hurt, and angry.

9. I feel a deep wish to be close along with a paralyzing fear of losing love of the relationship.

10. I want to be close with my partner but feel angry at my partner at the same time. Sometimes I pick fights when my partner shows up when we go on a “long waited for” vacation.

11. I want to be close with my partner but feel angry at my partner at the same time.

Section Total

Disorganized

1. When I reach a certain level of intimacy with my partner, I sometimes experience inexplicable fear.

2. When presented with problems, I often feel stumped and feel they are irresolvable.

3. I have an exaggerated startle response when others approach me unexpectedly.

4. My partner often comments or complains that I am controlling.

5. I often expect the worst to happen in my relationship.

6. I struggle to feel safe with my partner. Protection often feels out of reach.

7. I have a hard time remembering and discussing the feelings related to my past attachment situations. I disconnect or dissociate and get confused.

8. Stuck in approach-avoidance patterns with my partner, I want closeness but am also afraid of the one I desire to be close with.

9. I override my instinctive self-protective responses when possible danger is present – sometimes feeling immobilized, disconnected, or “gone”.

10. I am easily confused or disoriented, especially when stressed. It is important for my partner to keep arrangements simple and clear.

Section Total

Scoring:

The section with the highest number will likely correspond to your unique attachment style.

You may discover a dominant style or a mix of styles.

This questionnaire is not meant to be a label or diagnosis. It is only intended to indicate tendencies and prompt more useful, precise personal exploration.

Appendix H

Types of attachment styles

The definitions provided below explain the four adult attachment styles; the behavioural, cognitive and social aspects of each style; and the way in which they differ regarding closeness, dependency, avoidance and anxiety. It is common for adults to have a combination of traits rather than fit into just one style.

Secure/Autonomous Attachment

- Comfortable in a warm, loving and emotionally close relationship.
- Depends on partner, and allows partner to depend on him/her; is available in times of need.
- Accepts partner's need for separateness without feeling rejected or threatened; can be close and independent (dependent–independent).
- Trusting; empathic; tolerant of differences; and forgiving.
- Communicates emotions and needs honestly and openly; attuned to partner's needs and responds appropriately; does not avoid conflict.
- Manages emotions well; not overly upset about relationship issues.
- Insightful, resolute, and forgiving about past relationship issues and hurts.
- Sensitive, warm and caring parent; attuned to his/her children's cues and needs; children are securely attached.

Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment

- Emotionally distant and rejecting in an intimate relationship; keeps partner at arm's length; partner always wanting more closeness; 'deactivates' attachment needs, feelings and behaviours.

- Equates intimacy with loss of independence; prefers autonomy to togetherness.
- Not able to depend on partner or allow partner to 'lean on' him/her; independence is a priority.
- Communication is intellectual; not comfortable talking about emotions; avoids conflict, then explodes.
- Cool, controlled, and stoic; compulsively self-sufficient; narrow emotional range; prefers to be alone.
- Good in a crisis; non-emotional; takes charge.
- Emotionally unavailable as a parent; disengaged and detached; children are likely to have avoidant attachments.

Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment

- Insecure in intimate relationships; constantly worried about rejection and abandonment; preoccupied with relationship; 'hyperactivates' attachment needs and behaviour.
- Needy; requires ongoing reassurance; want to 'merge' with partner, which scares partner away.
- Ruminates about unresolved past issues from family-of-origin, which intrudes into present perceptions and relationships (fear, hurt, anger, rejection).
- Overly sensitive to partner's actions and moods; takes partner's behaviour too personally.
- Highly emotional; can be argumentative, combative, angry and controlling; poor personal boundaries.
- Communication is not collaborative; unaware of own responsibility in relationship issues; blames others.

- Unpredictable and moody; connects through conflict, ‘stirs the pot’.
- Inconsistently attuned with own children, who are likely to be anxiously attached.
- Unresolved/Disorganized Attachment
- Unresolved mindset and emotions; frightened by memories of prior traumas; losses from the past have not been mourned or resolved.
- Cannot tolerate emotional closeness in a relationship; argumentative, rages, unable to regulate emotions; abusive and dysfunctional relationships recreate past patterns.
- Intrusive and frightening traumatic memories and triggers; dissociates to avoid pain; severe depression, PTSD.
- Antisocial; lack of empathy and remorse; aggressive and punitive; narcissistic; no regard for rules; substance abuse; and criminality.
- Likely to maltreat own children; scripts children into past unresolved attachments; triggered into anger and fear by parent-child interaction; own children often develop disorganized attachment.
- Attachment patterns are passed down from one generation to the next; children learn how to connect from parents and caregivers, and they in turn teach the next generation. Your attachment history plays a crucial role in determining how you relate in adult romantic relationships, and how you relate to your children.

However, it is not what happened to you as a child that matters most — it is how you deal with it. Many people transition from victim to overcomer.

Appendix I

Journal Guidelines for Submission

Article 1: Journal of Marriage and Family

The Journal of Marriage and Family (JMF) follows the American Psychological Association (APA) style, with some exceptions noted

below. The journal's standard spelling reference is *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (11th edition).

Manuscript Preparation

- Manuscripts should be double-spaced, ragged right 12-point Times New Roman, with 1-inch margins. Pages should be numbered, beginning with "1" for the title page. Do not use different numbering for different sections, such as tables. Manuscripts should be no longer than 35 pages total.
- A structured abstract of roughly 200–225 words should precede the body of the paper, in the following format:
 - **Objective** (1 sentence): Describe the objective of your study in one clear and succinct sentence.
 - **Background** (2-3 sentences): Briefly describe key background context that situates the importance of the study.
 - **Method** (2–3 sentences): Briefly overview of the sample (size, population, type [e.g., convenience sample, random probability sample]), design, measures, procedures, and analytical approach.
 - **Results** (2–3 sentences): Briefly summarize key results of the study.

- **Conclusion** (1–2 sentences): State the conclusion of your study in one or two unambiguous and succinct sentences.
- **Implications** (Optional): Succinctly summarize any implications of your findings for research, policy, or practice.
- Use of the first-person point of view should be avoided in the abstract. The third-person point of view or alternate constructions are preferred.
- If possible, provide a URL or pertinent citation at the first mention of a large-scale study, for example, “Data were taken from Wave X of the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (<http://www.fragilefamilies.princeton.edu>).”
- Except for author acknowledgments, JMF publishes neither footnotes nor endnotes so essential material should be incorporated into the text.
- Neither the Journal Editor, Deputy Editors, nor anonymous reviewers, are permitted to be thanked in acknowledgment notes; the former could be construed as a potential conflict of interest and the latter is considered superfluous.

Empirical and Theoretical Contributions

- Manuscripts should have strong potential to make substantial contributions to Family Science, both empirically and theoretically. **The editor notes:** “Such work may address unresolved theoretical or empirical puzzles, explore novel or changing phenomena, or revisit seemingly resolved questions using innovative data or methods. It may integrate previously distinct literatures to understand family life through a new lens. Or it may empirically answer questions of high salience to contemporary family life and policy. Although these examples are not exhaustive, success at JMF requires authors to clearly demonstrate how and why their research matters.”

- Motivating the study solely by pointing to an empirical gap in knowledge is rarely sufficient to warrant consideration of a manuscript by JMF.
- It is not required that empirical contributions lead to an elaboration or refinement of an established theoretical perspective nor is it required that a specific established theoretical perspective be used to justify or frame the research questions. Rather, the manuscript should highlight the ways in which the empirical contributions advance theoretical knowledge by clarifying, extending or correcting current understandings from broader relevant bodies of research.

Research Design, Sampling, and Methodology

- Sufficient detail about the research design and procedures should be provided so as to facilitate replication. Authors should err on the side of providing more rather than less information. Where necessary due to page limits, online supplements may be used for providing additional details of sampling strategies (for original data collection), questionnaire wording, coding decisions, interview schedules, experimental protocols etc.
- Authors of quantitative analyses are encouraged but not required to provide their analysis code in an online supplement.
- In quantitative analyses, a precise accounting of the number of observations omitted for each exclusion criterion to arrive at the analytic sample should be included in the main text of the manuscript.
- JMF does not require the use of probability samples that are representative of the population of interest. Regardless of the sampling strategy, a compelling justification for the data used should be provided, taking into consideration the research questions addressed, other sources of data available, and potential trade-offs between internal and

external validity imposed by the sampling strategy. Attention should be given to the ways in which limitations of the data may influence the central conclusions of the study.

- Manuscripts in which the central conclusions are based on null findings should demonstrate that the analysis has sufficient power to detect a significant effect.
- Discussions of statistical significance should be accompanied by consideration of the relative magnitude and substantive importance of observed associations.

Article Headings

- The heading structure for *JMF* articles is as follows:

LEVEL 1 HEADING {CENTERED, SMALLCAPS, TITLE CASE}

Level 2 Heading (Centered, Italic, Title Case)

Level 3 Heading (Flush Right, Italic, Title Case)

Level 4 heading (indented, italic, sentence case, ends with a period).

- As you'll observe in the image above, Level 1 headings are centered, smallcaps, and title case. Level 2 headings are centered, italic, and title case. Level 3 headings are flush right, italic, and title case. Level 4 headings are indented, italic, sentence case, and end with a period.
- Articles typically have the following headings: "Method," "Results" or "Findings," "Discussion," and "References." They may have additional major headings, such as "Background."
- If only three levels of heading are used, they would be Level 1, Level 2, and Level 4.
- There should be at least two subheadings in each section, although a section is not required to have subheadings.

Online Supporting Materials

- Analyses (or other information, including data and/or code) that are not essential to the printed article, but that may be of interest to readers, can be submitted as appendixes and published in the online version of the article. The online availability of supporting material should be stated in the manuscript. **Author guidelines for preparing supporting material**, including acceptable formats and file sizes, are available online at Wiley Author Services.

Numbers and Statistics

- Scale endpoints should be italicized; for example, “Responses were made on a scale that ranged from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*four or more times daily*).” When all items of a scale are listed, or if the responses were simply in yes/no form, please use quotation marks.
- Nouns that modify numbers are generally capitalized—for example, Model 1, Table 2, Hypothesis 3, Wave 1, Figure 1, Column 2, Level 1.
- Greek characters should not be italicized.
- In tables and text, use a zero before a decimal point in a number less than 1 if a statistic could exceed 1. Do not use a zero before a decimal point where a statistic could not exceed 1.
 - o Examples of statistics that cannot exceed 1 are α , β , p , correlation coefficients, CFI, and SRMR. Examples of statistics that can exceed 1 are b , B , CI , df , $e\beta$, effect sizes, %, OR, SD , SE , and R^2 MSEA.
- Use two decimal places (and no more) for reporting statistics in tables.

General and APA-Specific Guidelines

- Words such as *while* and *since* should be used only in reference to time (alternatives: *although*, *whereas*, *but*, *because*).
- Do not use italics for emphasis; this type of formatting is reserved for the first occurrence of a key term or label and for words used as linguistic examples (e.g., “Often *nevertheless* or *but* is a good substitute for *however*”).
 - o Use quotation marks for in-text quotations of fewer than 40 words and—sparingly—to indicate ironic comments or invented expressions. Quotation marks around ironic expressions are dropped after the first occurrence. Quoted material of 40 or more words should be indented as a block quote.
- Results should be described in the past tense.
- The tense used in the literature review varies depending on content. The present tense is used to describe general theoretical understandings or conclusions but past tense when referencing specific results of past studies. See examples below:

Past tense: Specific results of past studies

Williams (2010) found that...

Present perfect tense: General theoretical conclusions or understandings

Many scholars (Smith, 2005; Smith & Jones, 2010; Wilson, 2004) have shown that a focus on average consequences of family transitions obscures important heterogeneity.

Tables and Figures

- To facilitate the review process, Tables and Figures should be embedded in the text for review, rather than placed at the end as will be required after acceptance. In preparing an

accepted manuscript for copyediting, we ask each table and figure be moved to the end of the manuscript on its own page, with callouts in the manuscript text indicating, for example, (Table 1 about here).

- Tables and figures should be described in the text in numerical order. They should stand alone, without the need to refer to the text for interpretation; thus, all abbreviations in each separate table and figure should be spelled out in the table note or figure caption. Explain the meaning of scales, numbers, and variables in the table note or figure caption (e.g., “All bolded terms are weighted to U.S. norms”).
- Reference categories for categorical/dichotomous variables should be clearly indicated in the table.
- Analytic sample sizes should be provided in each table and/or for each model if they vary across models.
- Use two decimal places (and no more) for reporting statistics in tables.

Tables

- The following example shows how table numbers and titles should be formatted:

Table 1. Fit Statistics for Mixture Modeling Identifying the Number of Family System Trajectories

- Construct tables in Microsoft Word; use the decimal tab in the ruler to align decimals.
- Consult JMF’s table webpage for sample tables.

Figures

- The following example shows how figure numbers, titles, and legends should be formatted (in smallcaps and title case, with a period after the figure number):

FIGURE 1. FAMILY SYSTEM TRAJECTORIES FROM PREGNANCY (TIME 1) TO CHILD'S AGES OF 2 MONTHS (TIME 2) AND 12 MONTHS (TIME 3).

- Do not embed figure numbers, titles, or captions in the figure artwork. The artwork should remain separate.
- All artwork throughout the article must be in grayscale. The journal publishes no color elements, although online materials can be in color.

References

- List in-text parenthetical citations in alphabetical, not temporal, order, for example, (Benton & Mays, 1999; Chan, 1998; Farmer, 1999a, 1999b; Jones, 1992, 1999; Jones, Armstrong, & Hayes, 2001; Zindel et al., 2001).
- The reference list should be double spaced, with hanging indents, in APA style, and alphabetized. Include only references that are cited in the text. Please supply a Digital Object Identifier for all pertinent entries in the following format: doi:xxxxxxx.
- Please note that page numbers are required for all book chapters.
- Entries with eight or more authors should include the names of the first six authors, an ellipsis, and the name of the final author.
- If a source is available most readily online, provide a URL.
- The following is an exception to APA style: Include the state's postal code (e.g., IL, CO) or the country to avoid confusion or if the city is not well known for publishing. There is no need to include the state postal code if the

name of the state is part of

the publisher's name (e.g., "Columbia: University of Missouri Press"). The

following cities can stand alone: Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Amsterdam, Jerusalem, London, Milan, Moscow, Paris, Rome, Stockholm, Tokyo, and Vienna.

- Give publishers in as brief a form as possible; remove *The*, *Publishers*, *Co.*, and *Inc.*, but retain terms such as *Books* and *Press* (e.g., Basic Books, Blackwell, Erlbaum, Macmillan, Sage, Wiley).
- The title of the journal prior to 2001 was *Journal of Marriage and the Family*; from 2001 onward, it has been *Journal of Marriage and Family*.

Article 2: Journal of Divorce and Remarriage

Preparing Your Paper

Structure

Your paper should be compiled in the following order: title page; abstract; keywords; main text introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion; acknowledgments; declaration of interest statement; references; appendices (as appropriate); table(s) with caption(s) (on individual pages); figures; figure captions (as a list).

Word Limits

Please include a word count for your paper. There are no word limits for papers in this journal.

Style Guidelines

Please refer to these quick style guidelines when preparing your paper, rather than any published articles or a sample copy.

Please use American spelling style consistently throughout your manuscript.

Please use double quotation marks, except where “a quotation is ‘within’ a quotation”. Please note that long quotations should be indented without quotation marks.

Headings

Please follow this guide to show the level of the section headings in your article:

First-level headings (e.g. Introduction, Conclusion) should be in bold, with an initial capital letter for any proper nouns.

Second-level headings should be in bold italics, with an initial capital letter for any proper nouns.

Third-level headings should be in italics, with an initial capital letter for any proper nouns.

Fourth-level headings should be in bold italics, at the beginning of a paragraph. The text follows immediately after a full stop (full point) or other punctuation mark.

Fifth-level headings should be in italics, at the beginning of a paragraph. The text follows immediately after a full stop (full point) or other punctuation mark.

Formatting and Templates

Papers may be submitted in Word format. Figures should be saved separately from the text.

To assist you in preparing your paper, we provide formatting template(s).

Word templates are available for this journal. Please save the template to your hard drive, ready for use.

Do not indent the first line of the first line of the paragraph. Use a first line indent from the second paragraph in a section and onwards.

If you are not able to use the template via the links (or if you have any other template queries) please contact us [here](#).

All manuscripts must be typed, double-spaced, with a one-inch margin on all sides, and follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th ed. Each manuscript should be accompanied by a title page including complete author name(s), affiliations, mailing address, phone, fax, and e-mail information (for multiple author papers, provide complete information for each author and indicate the corresponding author). Manuscripts should be 20 pages in length (excluding tables and figures). (Lengthier manuscripts may be considered, but only at the discretion of the editor.) The use of footnotes within the text is discouraged. Set all notes as endnotes (following the text and preceding the references). Manuscripts should include an abstract of approximately 100 words on a separate sheet of paper. Below the abstract, provide 3–10 keywords for indexing purposes.

References

Please use this reference guide when preparing your paper.

Taylor & Francis Editing Services

To help you improve your manuscript and prepare it for submission, Taylor & Francis provides a range of editing services. Choose from options such as English Language Editing,

which will ensure that your article is free of spelling and grammar errors, Translation, and Artwork Preparation. For more information, including pricing, visit this website.

Checklist: What to Include

Author details. All authors of a manuscript should include their full name and affiliation on the cover page of the manuscript. Where available, please also include ORCiDs and social media handles (Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn). One author will need to be identified as the corresponding author, with their email address normally displayed in the article PDF (depending on the journal) and the online article. Authors' affiliations are the affiliations where the research was conducted. If any of the named co-authors moves affiliation during the peer-review process, the new affiliation can be given as a footnote. Please note that no changes to affiliation can be made after your paper is accepted. Read more on authorship.

Should contain an unstructured abstract of 100 words.

You can opt to include a **video abstract** with your article. Find out how these can help your work reach a wider audience, and what to think about when filming.

Between 3 and 10 **keywords**. Read making your article more discoverable, including information on choosing a title and search engine optimization.

Supplemental online material. Supplemental material can be a video, dataset, fileset, sound file or anything which supports (and is pertinent to) your paper. We publish supplemental material online via Figshare. Find out more about supplemental material and how to submit it with your article.

Figures. Figures should be high quality (1200 dpi for line art, 600 dpi for grayscale and 300 dpi for colour, at the correct size). Figures should be supplied in one of our preferred file

formats: EPS, PS, JPEG, TIFF, or Microsoft Word (DOC or DOCX) files are acceptable for figures that have been drawn in Word. For information relating to other file types, please consult our Submission of electronic artwork document.

Tables. Tables should present new information rather than duplicating what is in the text. Readers should be able to interpret the table without reference to the text. Please supply editable files.

Equations. If you are submitting your manuscript as a Word document, please ensure that equations are editable. More information about mathematical symbols and equations.

Units. Please use SI units (non-italicized).

Article 3: Journal of Family Psychology

Starting June 15, 2020, all new manuscripts submitted should be prepared according to the 7th edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. [APA Style and Grammar Guidelines](#) for the 7th edition are available.

Article Requirements

For general guidelines to style, authors should study articles previously published in the journal.

All manuscripts must include an abstract containing a maximum of 250 words typed on a separate page. After the abstract, please supply up to five keywords or brief phrases.

The manuscript title should be accurate, fully explanatory, and preferably no longer than 12 words. The title should reflect the content and population studied (e.g., "family therapy for

depression in children"). If the paper reports a randomized clinical trial, this should be indicated in the title, and the CONSORT criteria must be used for reporting purposes.

Research manuscripts and review and theoretical manuscripts that provide creative and integrative summaries of an area of work relevant to family psychology should not exceed 30–35 pages, all inclusive (including cover page, abstract, text, references, tables, figures), with margins of at least 1 inch on all sides and a standard font (e.g., Times New Roman) of 12 points (no smaller). The entire paper (text, references, tables, figures, etc.) must be double spaced. References should not exceed 8 pages.

Brief reports are encouraged for innovative work that may be premature for publication as a full research report because of small sample size, novel methodologies, etc. Brief reports also are an appropriate format for replications and for clinical case studies. Authors of brief reports should indicate in the cover letter that the full report is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. Brief reports should be designated as such and should not exceed a total of 20 pages, all inclusive. References should not exceed 8 pages.

Manuscripts exceeding the space requirement will be returned to the author for shortening prior to peer review.

All research involving human participants must describe oversight of the research process by the relevant Institutional Review Boards and should describe consent and assent procedures briefly in the Method section.

It is important to highlight the significance and novel contribution of the work. The translation of research into practice must be evidenced in all manuscripts. Authors should incorporate a meaningful discussion of the clinical and/or policy implications of their work throughout the manuscript, rather than simply providing a separate section for this material.

Abstract and Keywords

All manuscripts must include an abstract containing a maximum of 250 words typed on a separate page. After the abstract, please supply up to five keywords or brief phrases.

References

List references in alphabetical order. Each listed reference should be cited in text, and each text citation should be listed in the References section.

Examples of basic reference formats:

Journal Article:

Hughes, G., Desantis, A., & Waszak, F. (2013). Mechanisms of intentional binding and sensory attenuation: The role of temporal prediction, temporal control, identity prediction, and motor prediction. *Psychological Bulletin*, 139, 133–151.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0028566> Authored Book:

Rogers, T. T., & McClelland, J. L. (2004). Semantic cognition: A parallel distributed processing approach. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Chapter in an Edited Book:

Gill, M. J., & Sypher, B. D. (2009). Workplace incivility and organizational trust. In P. Lutgen-Sandvik & B. D. Sypher (Eds.), *Destructive organizational communication: Processes, consequences, and constructive ways of organizing* (pp. 53–73). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Figures

Graphics files are welcome if supplied as Tiff or EPS files. Multipanel figures (i.e., figures with parts labeled a, b, c, d, etc.) should be assembled into one file.

The minimum line weight for line art is 0.5 point for optimal printing.

For more information about acceptable resolutions, fonts, sizing, and other figure issues, please see the general guidelines.

When possible, please place symbol legends below the figure instead of to the side.

APA offers authors the option to publish their figures online in color without the costs associated with print publication of color figures.

The same caption will appear on both the online (color) and print (black and white) versions. To ensure that the figure can be understood in both formats, authors should add alternative wording (e.g., "the red (dark gray) bars represent") as needed.

Appendix J

Letter to the professionals providing background information to the study

Dear Colleague

Conflict Tactics during Divorce

As you already may know I am currently involved in a research project for the purposes of completing a PhD degree in Psychology at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. We have developed a research project with the main aim of determining which modes of conflict tactics are applied by couples undergoing divorce in a group of participants within the South African context. It is foreseen that these findings will possibly be used in future to help develop more effective intervention techniques during high conflict divorce processes. Ethical approval has already been obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the North West University for the study (NWU-00025-16-A1).

As part of this study I am requesting you to act as gatekeeper by approaching possible participants for the study and should they agree to participate, to oversee their completion of a biographical questionnaire, a psychometric instrument known as the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (RCTS) and an additional single open-ended question in written format on your premises. More details of the entire study will be provided to you in addition to this letter, which will include the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The purpose of this goodwill permission letter is to obtain your consent and agreement, should you choose to participate in this study to act as gatekeeper and to undertake to perform this role in accordance to the scientific and ethical standards set out in the information and guidelines provided in addition to this letter.

The risks in this study are medium and no physical risks are evident. The aspects discussed in the questionnaires are however of a sensitive psychological nature. If at any point during the assessment process or afterwards the participant exhibits or expresses emotional discomfort in response to any questions; as gatekeeper you will be requested to contain the situation by referring the participant for psychological support which will be available to them free of charge. A referral list will be provided for this purpose as part of the additional information which will be provided to you.

Anonymity of participants will further be maintained as far as possible by allocating numbers to participants (as opposed to using their names) and by coding the data during the transcription according to these numbers. This will ensure that no link can be made to any specific participant. Confidentiality will further be ensured by the way the data will be captured as reporting of findings will be anonymous. Only the study leader {Dr Kobus du Plooy} and I will have access to the data. Data will be kept safe and secure in a lock-up safe in the researcher's office and the electronic data will be password protected. Data will be stored for 6 years in the safe at the offices of HREC on the North-West University's Potchefstroom campus following the completion of the study. The HREC will also be monitoring the research process throughout to ensure that all aspects regarding the research procedures are always strictly adhered to.

Agreement:

I hereby give my permission for the couples I meet who are undergoing divorce to complete the assessment, as outlined above, on my premises. I understand that the couples will be provided with a sufficient orientation by the researchers and that they will only be expected to complete 3 questionnaires as part of their participation in the study. I further understand that the selected couples will not receive any monetary compensation for their participation in

the study and acknowledge that the participant's participation in the research study is totally voluntary. I knowingly and voluntarily enter into this agreement to act as gatekeeper after having had the opportunity to fully discuss it with Santie van der Merwe. I understand that Goodwill reserves the right to terminate the participant's participation in the voluntarily participation in the research study at any time and that the participants may also choose to withdraw at any time.

Should you agree to the aforementioned, kindly sign and return this letter to Santie van der Merwe at your earliest convenience.

Signature:.....

Place:.....

Professional's Name:.....

Date:.....

Appendix K
Goodwill Permission Letter by Professor Kruger – Head of the Institute of
Psychology and Wellbeing

Dear Prof Kruger

Conflict Tactics during Divorce

As you already may know I am currently involved in a research project for the purposes of completing a PhD degree in Psychology at the North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus. We have developed a research project with the main aim of determining which modes of conflict tactics are applied by couples undergoing divorce in a group of participants within the South African context. It is foreseen that these findings will possibly be used in future to help develop more effective intervention techniques during high conflict divorce processes. Ethical approval has already been obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the North West University for this study (NWU-00025 16-S1).

As part of this study I am requesting you/ the staff from the IPW to act as gatekeeper by approaching possible participants for the study and should they agree to participate, to oversee their completion of a biographical questionnaire, a psychometric instrument known as the Revised Conflict Tactics Scales (RCTS) and an additional single open-ended question in written format on your premises. More details of the entire study will be provided to you in addition to this letter, which will include the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The purpose of this goodwill permission letter is to obtain your consent and agreement, should you allow the IPW to participate in this study to act as gatekeeper and to undertake to perform this role in accordance to the scientific and ethical standards set out in the information and guidelines provided in addition to this letter.

The risks in this study are medium and no physical risks are evident. The aspects discussed in the questionnaires are however of a sensitive psychological nature. If at any point during the assessment process or afterwards the participant exhibits or expresses emotional discomfort in response to any questions; as gatekeeper you will be requested to contain the situation by referring the participant for psychological support which will be made available free of charge. A referral list will be provided for this purpose as part of the additional information which will be provided to you.

Anonymity of participants will further be maintained as far as possible by allocating numbers to participants (as opposed to using their names) and by coding the data during the transcription according to these numbers. This will ensure that no link can be made to any specific participant. Confidentiality will further be ensured by the way in which the data will be captured as reporting of findings will be anonymous. Only the study leader (Dr Kobus du Plooy) and I will have access to the data. Data will be kept safe and secure in a lock-up safe in the researcher's office and the electronic data will be password protected. Data will be stored for 6 years in the safe at the offices of HREC on the North-West University's Potchefstroom campus following the completion of the study. The HREC will also be monitoring the research process throughout to ensure that all aspects regarding the research procedures are strictly adhered to at all times.

Agreement:

I hereby give my permission for the couples which staff from the IPW come into contact with who are undergoing divorce to complete the assessment as outlined above at the IPW. I understand that the couples will be provided with a sufficient orientation by the researchers and that they will only be expected to complete 3 questionnaires as part of their participation in the study. I further understand that the selected couples will not receive a monetary

compensation for their participation in the study and acknowledge that the participant's participation in the research study is totally voluntary. I confirm that the IPW hereby enters into this agreement to act as gatekeeper after having had the opportunity to fully discuss it with Santie van der Merwe. I understand that Goodwill reserves the right to terminate the IPW's participation in the voluntarily participation in the research study at any time and that the participants may also choose to withdraw at any time.


Prof Pieter Kruger

15/10/2016

Head: Institute of Psychology & Wellbeing

Date

(IPW)

Appendix L

Background information provided to participants

Dear Participants

You are invited to participate in the research project as described. It is important that you also read and understand the following general principles, which are applicable to all participants in our research projects:

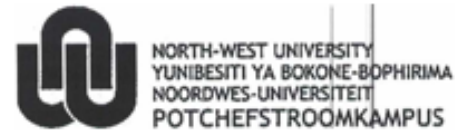
1. Participation in our research projects is completely voluntary and no pressure, however subtle, may be placed on you to take part.
2. It is possible that you may not derive any personal benefit from your participation in this project, although the knowledge that may be gained by means of this project may benefit other persons or communities. You may not be bribed to participate.
3. You are free to withdraw from the project at any point in time, without stating reasons, and you will in no way be harmed or penalized by doing so. You may also request that your data no longer be used in the project. However, you are kindly requested not to withdraw from the project without careful consideration, since it may have a negative effect on the reliability of the project.
4. By agreeing to participate in this project, you are also giving consent for the data that will be gathered to be used by the researchers for scientific purposes as they see fit, with the understanding that it will be confidential, and that your name will not be linked to the any data without your consent.
5. The NWU Ethics committee Medicines Control Council, Department of Health and/or a Court of Law may request access to information to ensure or inspect the ethical responsibility of practices, in the interest of participants and the public.

6. You will be given access to your own personal data upon request.
7. You are encouraged to ask the Project Head (Santie van der Merwe) any questions you may have regarding the project and the related procedures at any stage. She will gladly answer your queries and will discuss the project with you in detail.
8. The project objectives are always secondary to your well-being and actions taken will always place your interests above those of the project.
9. No project may be commenced before it is approved by the Ethics committee.

Furthermore, the Project Head must report any detrimental effects experienced during the implementation of the chairman of the Ethics Committee. If any unforeseen negative effect is observed during the project, it may be necessary to terminate the project immediately.

Appendix M

Goodwill permission letter



SANTIE VAN DER MERWE

D. Diaconiology (Huguenot College affiliated with UNISA),

M.Ed. Counselling (UNISA), B.Ed. Counselling (UNISA),

B. Ed. Special Educational Needs,

B. Prim. Ed. (Stellenbosch)

**EDUCATIONAL AND COUNSELLING PSYCHOLOGIST* OPVOEDKUNDE EN VOORLIGTING
SIELKUNDIGE**

Bromhof Medical Centre, Parkside Centre, Corner of Hawken and Ostrich Roads, Bromhof

Tel: (011) 793-4444

*GOODWILL PERMISSION LETTER –
Institute of Psychology & Wellbeing (IPW)*

Appendix M

Proof of Turnitin Submission



Digital Receipt

This receipt acknowledges that **Turnitin** received your paper. Below you will find the receipt information regarding your submission.

The first page of your submissions is displayed below.

Submission author:	Herman GROBLER
Assignment title:	Santie van der Merwe Turnitin
Submission title:	23376600:PhD_Turnitin_Submissio...
File name:	cb33d3b-05b4-4eb8-8a79-2b336b3...
File size:	113.18K
Page count:	105
Word count:	29,981
Character count:	172,297
Submission date:	18-Nov-2020 08:01PM (UTC+0200)
Submission ID:	1450194736

Appendix N

Proof of submission to journals

[Read More](#) [View](#) 

June 19, 2020 2:55 PM



Journal of Marriage and Family - Manuscript ID JMF-2020-7502-

From: JMF Editorial Office

To: santiepsych@mweb.co.za bmctrust@mweb.co.za

Cc: jmarfam@umd.edu

Reply To: jmf@osu.edu

19-Jun-2020

Dear Ms. van der Merwe:

Your manuscript titled "CONFLICT TACTICS DURING DIVORCE WITHIN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT" has been successfully submitted online and is currently being considered for publication in the Journal of Marriage and Family.

Your manuscript ID is JMF-2020-7502-.

Please mention the above manuscript ID in all future correspondence or when calling the office for questions. If there are any changes in your mailing address or e-mail address, please log in to ScholarOne Manuscripts at <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jmf> and edit your user information as appropriate.

You can also view the status of your manuscript at any time by checking your Author Center after logging in to <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jmf>.

Thank you for submitting your manuscript to the Journal of Marriage and Family.

Cordially,
Editorial Office
jmf@osu.edu

Dear Susanna J. van der Merwe,

Thank you for your submission. Please see the details below.

Submission ID	205247009
Manuscript Title	Gender Differences in Conflict Tactics during Divorce
Journal	Journal of Divorce & Remarriage

You can always check the progress of your submission [here](#) (we now offer multiple options to sign in to your account. To log in with your ORCID please click on the 'with ORCID' box on the bottom right of the log in area).

If you have any queries, please get in touch with WJDR-peerreview@journals.tandf.co.uk.

Thank you for submitting your work to our journal.

Kind Regards,
Journal of Divorce & Remarriage Editorial Office

Appendix O

Conflict Tactics Scales – 2 (CTS2)

Conflict Tactics Scale (2)

No matter how well a couple gets along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, want different things from each other, or just have spats or fights because they are in a bad mood, are tired, or for some other reason. Couples also have many different ways of trying to settle their differences. This is a list of things that might happen when you have differences. Please circle how many times you did each of these things in the past year, and how many times your partner did them in the past year. If you or your partner did not do one of these things in the past year, but it happened before that, circle "7".

How often did this happen?

1 = Once in the past year

2 = Twice in the past year

3 = 3-5 times in the past year

4 = 6-10 times in the past year

5 = 11-20 times in the past year

6 = More than 20 times in the past

7 = Not in the past year, but it did happen before

0 = This has never happened

1	I showed my partner I cared even though we disagreed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
2	My partner showed care for me even though we disagreed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
3	I explained my side of a disagreement to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
4	My partner explained his or her side of the disagreement to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
5	I insulted or swore at my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
6	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
7	I threw something at my partner that could hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
8	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
9	I twisted my partner's arm or hair.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
10	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
11	I had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
12	My partner had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
13	I showed respect for my partner's feelings about an issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
14	My partner showed respect for my feelings about an issue.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
15	I made my partner have sex without a condom.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
16	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
17	I pushed or shoved my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

18	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
19	I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
20	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
21	I used a knife or gun on my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
22	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
23	I passed out from being hit on the head by my partner in a fight.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
24	My partner passed out from being hit on the head in a fight with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
25	I called my partner fat or ugly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
26	My partner called me fat or ugly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
27	I punched or hit my partner with something that could hurt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
28	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
29	I destroyed something belonging to my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
30	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
31	I went to a doctor because of a fight with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
32	My partner went to a doctor because of a fight with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
33	I choked my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
34	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
35	I shouted or yelled at my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
36	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
37	I slammed my partner against a wall.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
38	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
39	I said I was sure we could work out a problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
40	My partner was sure we could work it out.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
41	I needed to see a doctor because of a fight with my partner, but I didn't.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
42	My partner needed to see a doctor because of a fight with me but didn't.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
43	I beat up my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
44	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
45	I grabbed my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
46	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
47	I used force (like hitting, holding down, or using a weapon) to make my partner have sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
48	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
49	I stomped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
50	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
51	I insisted on sex when my partner did not want to (but did not use physical force).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
52	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
53	I slapped my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
54	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
55	I had a broken bone from a fight with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0

56	My partner had a broken bone from a fight with me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
57	I used threats to make my partner have oral or anal sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
58	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
59	I suggested a compromise to a disagreement.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
60	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
61	I burned or scalded my partner on purpose.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
62	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
63	I insisted my partner have oral or anal sex (but did not use physical force).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
64	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
65	I accused my partner of being a lousy lover.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
66	My partner accused me of this.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
67	I did something to spite my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
68	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
69	I threatened to hit or throw something at my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
70	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
71	I felt physical pain that still hurt the next day because of a fight with my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
72	My partner still felt pain the next day because of a fight we had.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
73	I kicked my partner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
74	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
75	I used threats to make my partner have sex.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
76	My partner did this to me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
77	I agreed to try a solution to a disagreement my partner suggested.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0
78	My partner agreed to try a solution I suggested.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	0