



# Effects of Infidelity on the Post-Divorce Adjustment of Emerging Adults

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# Stress Process Framework (Pearlin et al., 1981)

- Stressors do not occur in isolation
- When a stressor occurs (primary) it often introduces new stressors (secondary) through a process called stress proliferation (Pearlin, 1989)

Primary Discrete Event = Infidelity

Secondary Discrete Event = Divorce

Chronic Stress/Life Strain = Co-Parenting Conflict

Manifestations of Stress = Depressive Symptomology  
& Life Satisfaction

# Background

- 30-50% of emerging adults (EAs) report infidelity (Allen & Baucom, 2004; Hall & Fincham, 2009)
  - Linked with depression symptoms and life satisfaction (Hall & Fincham, 2009)
- Infidelity is a common reason for divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003; Hawkins et al., 2012)
- Co-parental conflict is related to ineffective emotional regulation, greater depression, and decreased life satisfaction (Cameron & Overall, 2018; Willen, 2015)

## Research Question

How does infidelity, as a discrete event and reason for divorce, impact the relationship between life strains (co-parenting conflict) and the manifestations of stress (depression and life satisfaction) among those who were emerging adults when their first child was born?

# Sample

$n = 335$  divorced or divorcing parents that participated in an online divorce education program (Successful Co-Parenting After Divorce; Sep 2015 - Jan 2018) and experienced the birth of their first child during emerging adulthood (18-29)

- 78% female
- Nearly 72% White
- 66% at least some college education
- Over 65% worked at least part-time
- 46% cited infidelity as a cause of divorce

# Measures

Eventful experience = Infidelity (primary) leading to divorce (secondary)

- Cleveland Compliant Code (Kitson & Holmes, 1992)

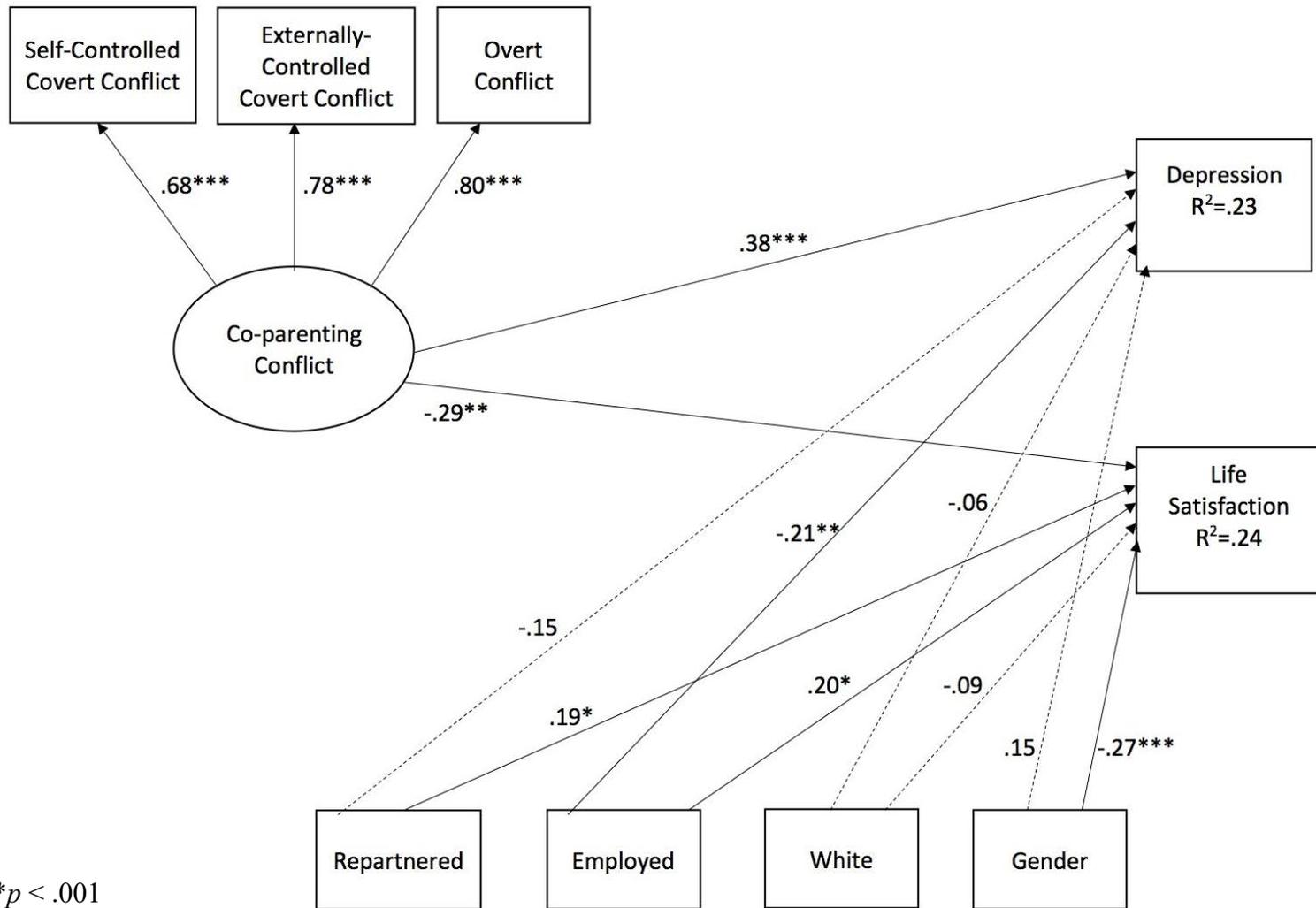
Chronic stress = Co-parenting conflict

- Multidimensional Co-Parenting Scale for Dissolved Relationships (MCS-DR) conflict subscales (Ferraro et al., 2018)

Manifestation of stress = Depression and life satisfaction

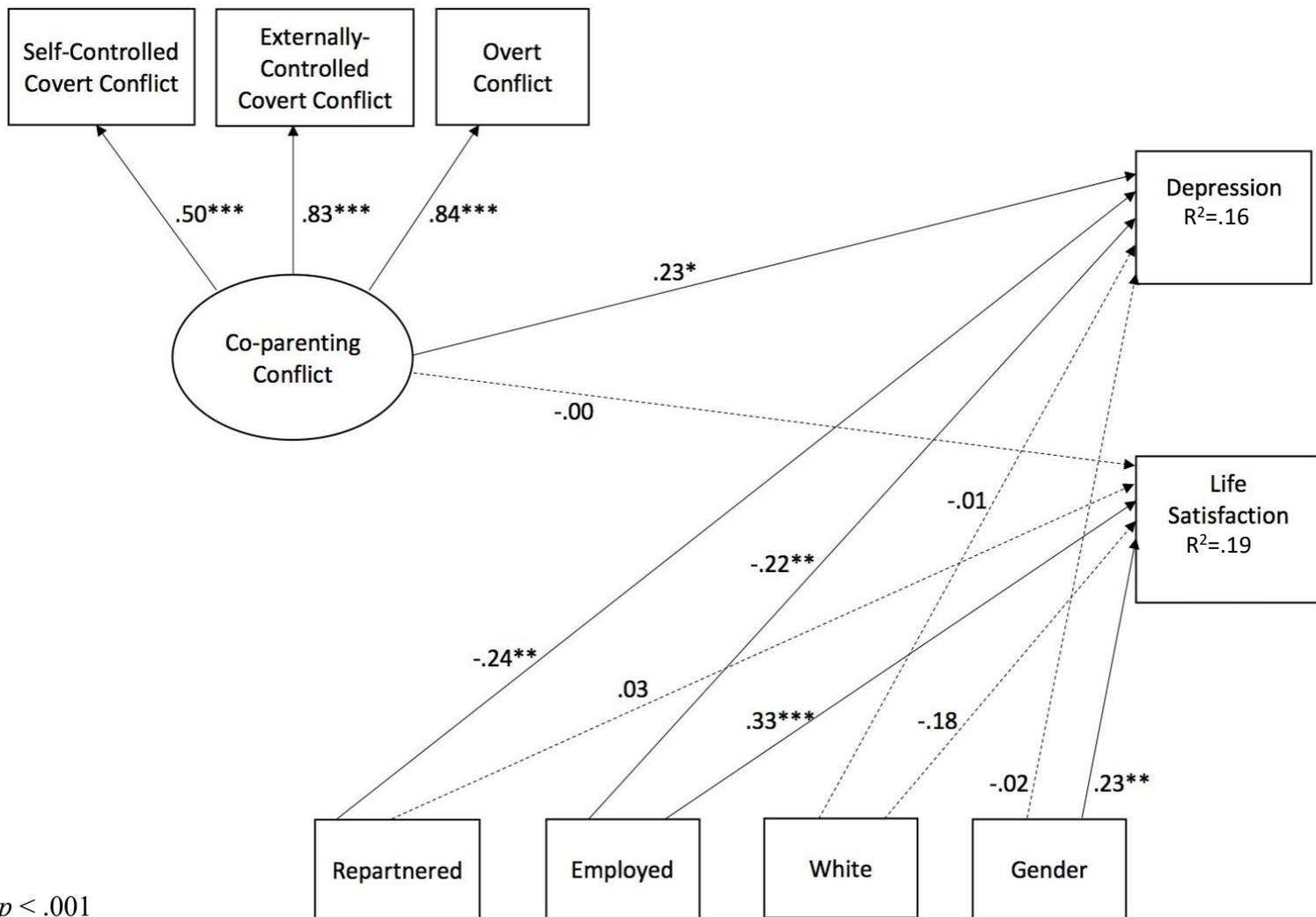
- Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CESD; Irwin et al., 1999; Radloff, 1977)
- Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)

# Model With Infidelity



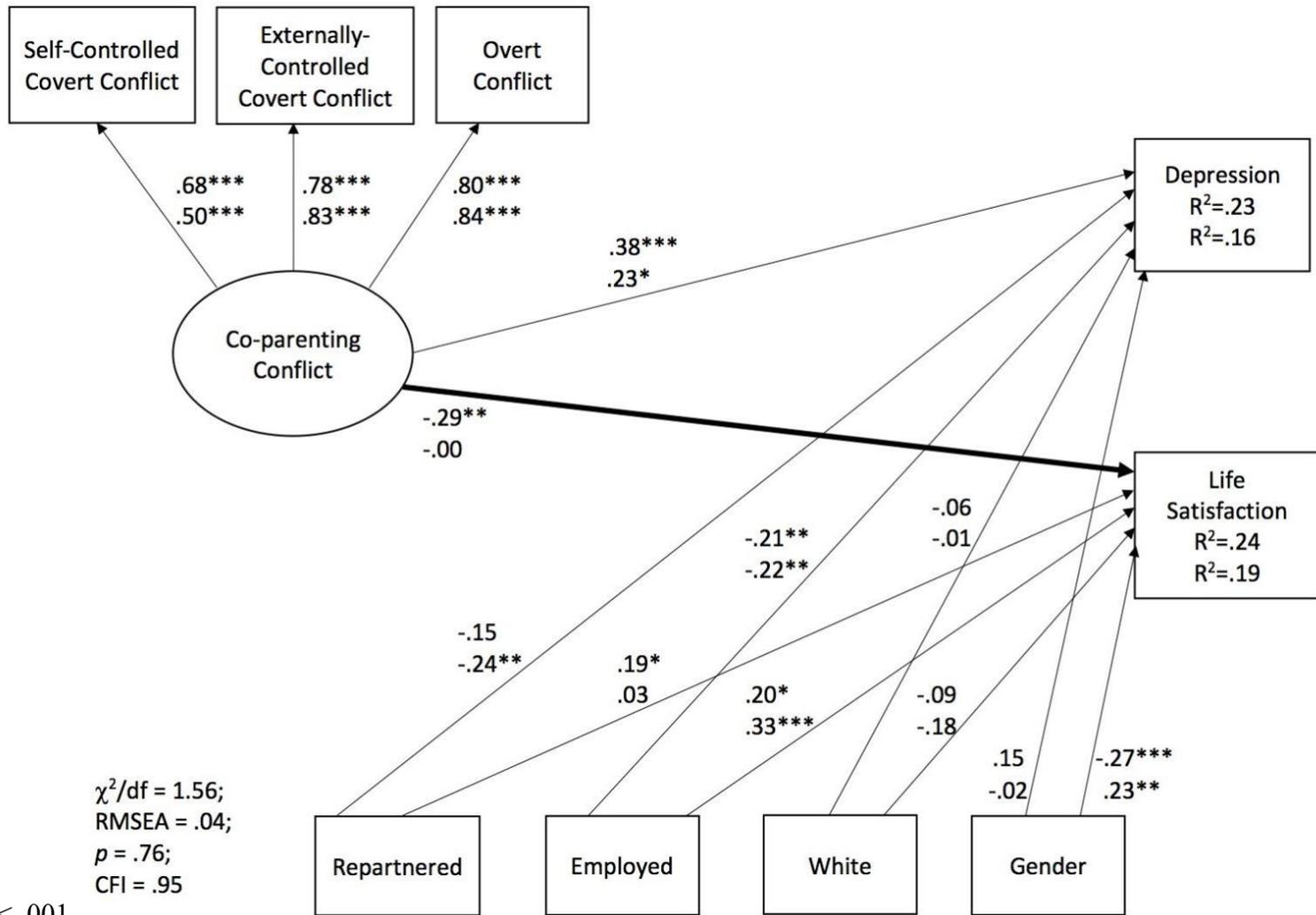
Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

# Model Without Infidelity



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

# Combined Model



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

# Discussion

Coping process influences manifestation of stress through account- and meaning-making (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Sorenson et al., 1993)

- Trusting the child's other parent
- Engaging in repartnering patterns
- Role salience of being a spouse and a parent
- Narratives given to the self and other parent

# Implications

## Families

- Build healthy relationship skills through trust and meaning of divorce
- Repartnering can be a plausible possibility

## Educators

- Adapt current evidence-based education programs to be EA developmentally appropriate

## Practitioners

- Situate discussions of normative divorce-related role changes in the context of the uncertainty and ambiguity of EA

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Thank you!

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