



## Forgiveness, gratitude, and the flourishing of emerging adults with divorced parents

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**Abstract:** Parental divorce affects the ability of individuals to flourish. This study aims to determine the relationship between forgiveness and gratitude and the flourishing of emerging adults whose parents have divorced. Voluntary convenience sampling was used to identify respondents (N = 429 emerging adults whose parents had been divorced for at least two years). Data were collected using the Emotional Forgiveness Scale, the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form, and the PERMA Profiler. Data analysis was performed using multiple regression analysis. The results show that forgiveness and gratitude were significantly associated with flourishing in emerging adults whose parents divorced ( $R^2 = .382$ ,  $F = 131.634$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The contribution of gratitude ( $\beta = 1.299$ ) to flourishing was greater than that of forgiveness ( $\beta = .722$ ). Forgiveness and gratitude can predict flourishing in emerging adults whose parents are divorced, in this case, the role of gratitude is greater than forgiveness. Interventions that combine the basis of forgiveness and gratitude can be used to optimize the flourishing of such emerging adults whose parents are divorced.

**Keywords:** divorced parents; emerging adults; flourishing; forgiveness; gratitude

**Abstrak:** Perceraian orang tua berpengaruh pada kemampuan *flourish* individu. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui hubungan memaafkan dan bersyukur dengan *flourishing* pada *emerging adults* yang orang tuanya bercerai. *Voluntary convenience sampling* digunakan untuk mendapatkan responden (N = 429 *emerging adults* dengan orang tua bercerai minimal dua tahun). Pengambilan data menggunakan *Emotional Forgiveness Scale*, *the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form*, dan *the PERMA Profiler*. Analisis data menggunakan analisis regresi ganda. Hasil analisis menunjukkan memaafkan dan bersyukur berkorelasi secara signifikan dengan *flourishing* pada *emerging adults* yang orang tuanya bercerai ( $R^2 = 0,382$ ,  $F = 131,634$ ,  $p < 0,05$ ). Kontribusi bersyukur ( $\beta = 1,299$ ) terhadap *flourishing* lebih besar dibandingkan memaafkan ( $\beta = 0,722$ ). Memaafkan dan bersyukur dapat memprediksi *flourishing* pada *emerging adults* yang orang tuanya bercerai, dalam hal ini peran bersyukur lebih besar dibandingkan memaafkan. Intervensi yang menggabungkan basis memaafkan dan bersyukur dapat digunakan untuk mengoptimalkan *flourishing emerging adults* yang orang tuanya bercerai.

**Kata Kunci:** orang tua yang bercerai; *emerging adults*; *flourishing*; memaafkan; bersyukur

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## Introduction

In August 2020, the Ministry of Religion Agency (*Badan Kementarian Agama*) stated that the divorce rate in Indonesia had reached 306,688 couples (Kemenag.go.id, 2020). This high divorce rate has become a concern because of the impact on children growing up in a divorced household environment. Unfavorable domestic conditions due to divorce can have an impact on children developing teenagers and then emerging adults. A child's ability to grow or flourish can be influenced by the situation in both parents' households.

Hartini (2019) explains that parental divorce results in various changes in family dynamics, separating them emotionally, legally, financially, and physically, and even separating them from society. If the stress caused by these changes is not managed properly, problems will arise with the well-being of children growing up in such households. Perales et al. (2017) state that children who grow up in intact households are only half times more likely to experience mental health problems than those growing up in single-parent households or ones with a mixture of two different families.

Seligman (2011) states that flourishing is one of the most important and promising topics in positive psychology, as it holds the key to improving everyone's quality of life. The concept is often used to describe a person's state of well-being. For this study, flourishing was chosen as it can determine the ability of emerging adults cope with difficult times caused by changes following parental divorce. This is clearly different from subjective well-being which only measures happiness and psychological well-being and only focuses on self-actualization. Flourishing is a concept that combines both subjective and psychological concepts. However, to date there have been no studies which consider the flourishing of emerging adults whose parents have divorced.

Previous research has demonstrated that forgiveness can improve a person's well-being (Azra, 2017; Brann et al., 2007; Hill et al., 2015; McCullough, 2000; Toussaint & Webb, 2005). Studies by Brann et al. (2007) and Azra (2017), for example, explain that emerging adults can forgive their parents for divorcing because of the meaning found in divorce, thereby resulting in high relational satisfaction, the letting go of feelings of cheating, and feeling that life is changing for the better.

Sood and Gupta (2012) state that gratitude is the basis for mental well-being and health, while Emmons and Crumpler (2011) explain that people who are often grateful also regularly experience more positive events and feelings which can help deal with difficulties in their lives. This is because when a person is accustomed to being grateful, they will have the power to improve their personal and relational well-being.

The similarities between forgiveness and gratitude are found in interpersonal relationships containing help and loss. This means that they are both positive and prosocial responses to events involving others that harm or help individuals (Toussaint & Friedman, 2009). Forgiveness and gratitude are also sometimes described as being related (Aricioğlu, 2016; Narula, 2015).

Emerging adulthood (18–25-years-old) is the period between adolescence and young adulthood (Arnett, 2000). The development of intimate relationships is one of the tasks that needs to be fulfilled by individuals at this time, who will seek to cultivate and develop close connection with their environment. Such development can be hampered if they come from divorced families. This is because emerging adults tend to take their parental relationship as a role model, so if this is disharmonious it will hinder them from meeting their intimacy needs (Lee, 2019).

Many studies have demonstrated that gratitude contributes to one's well-being

(Emmons et al., 2003; Satici et al., 2014; P. C. Watkins, 2014; Wood et al., 2010). As an affective trait it refers to a person's stable habit of feeling gratitude as an emotion (Emmons et al., 2003).

Based on the find, remind, and bind theory of gratitude of Algoe (2012), positive emotions such as gratitude can help the changes that arise in relationships to strengthen the bonds with responsive interaction partners. The theory posits that gratitude is important in forming and maintaining the most important relationships in an individual's life, namely those with people they interact with daily.

According to Grimaldy and Haryanto (2020), gratitude involves two aspects: 1) appreciation of the constant experience of life, and 2) appreciation of individuals who take part in one's life. The first aspect appreciation of the constant experience of life, refers to feeling grateful for all the events that influenced and shaped the individual. The second aspect, appreciation of individuals who take part in one's life, refers to a sense of gratefulness towards the people, world, and God involved in the individual's life.

The definition of forgiveness that is used as a reference for this research is based on a concept by McCullough (2008) who defines forgiveness as a series of changes in motivation. For example, an individual's motivation to pay back an offender who has wronged them may be reduced; which drives them away from the perpetrator. Thus, increasing their prosocial motivation and even making peace with wrongdoer, even if their actions are considered to have been detrimental.

According to Worthington, et al. (2007) forgiveness can be divided into two types: decisional and emotional forgiveness. Both types affect different cognitive processes. The emotional forgiveness referred to in this study is often described as a process in which the negative emotions felt by an individual (anger, revenge, or

hate) are replaced with positive emotions, such as empathy, love, or compassion for the perpetrator. Emotional forgiveness consists of two aspects: 1) a reduction of negative feelings toward the wrongdoer, and 2) the presence of positive and prosocial feelings toward the transgressor (D. A. Watkins et al., 2011).

This study considers the ability of forgiveness and gratitude to predict flourishing. According to positive psychology, flourishing is a condition in which individuals have high levels of both hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Huppert & So, 2013; Schotanus-Dijkstra et al., 2016). Hedonic is often used to describe subjective well-being while eudaimonic is used to describe psychological well-being (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2015). Flourishing is defined as one's ability to grow as a human being through the good times and struggles in life (Seligman, 2018).

For an individual to flourish optimally, Seligman (2011) advises that attention should be paid to building and maintaining the five aspects of PERMA needs. Those that constitute the PERMA acronym are, 1) Positive emotions; associated with good feelings and emotions as the fastest way to happiness. 2) Engagement; referring to something that attracts or entices an individual. 3) Relationships; that is the tendency to want love, attention, and bonding with other people. 4) Meaning; the value or meaning that an individual finds in his life makes them want to live. 5) Accomplishment; achievements that encourage people to continuously do more than they are doing now.

The relationship between flourishing and forgiveness and gratitude within the context of parental divorce can be explained by the cognitive appraisal model theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984). According to this stress can occur when there is an imbalance between the demands made on an individual and their resources to overcome them (coping strategies). For emerging adults

faced with the divorce of their parents, the demands made by the changes following the divorce can be stressful if they do not have good coping strategies, which will affect the optimality of flourishing. Emotion-focused coping is a technique for regulating feelings and emotional responses to problems rather than being directly involved in solving them (Zeigler-Hill & Shackelford, 2020).

The position of emerging adults means that they are unable to be directly involved in the divorce between their parents. Consequently, for them to reach the stage of being willing to let go of the stress they feel due to the divorce, they need to learn to forgive their parents (Brann et al., 2007) and be grateful for everything that happens to them (Hlava & Elfers, 2014). Forgiveness and gratitude can work as emotion-focused coping that helps optimize the flourishing of emerging adults.

Based on the moral affect theory, gratitude can develop social bonds with others that help increase resources for coping strategies (McCullough et al., 2001). Moreover, gratitude can also increase the positive emotions that individuals feel, come from looking for things to be grateful and can help emerging adults to strengthen the relationships they have with individuals which bring positive emotions into their lives. For them to be grateful, they often must change their perspective or outlook on an issue, so that they can find meaning in the problem and their position. This explains how gratitude can affect positive emotions, meaning, and relationships which are part of flourishing.

Forgiveness works in various ways to optimize an individual's well-being (Mayerson, 2020). When emerging adults choose to forgive, this gives them the opportunity to let go of the negative emotions felt towards the abuser and allow themselves to feel positive ones. These give

them opportunities to repair relationships that were initially strained because of a mistake that was made. Moreover, to reach the stage where an individual chooses to forgive, they must usually go through the process of trying to find meaning behind the mistakes made by the perpetrator. If through this search for meaning, emerging adults can understand the reason the perpetrator did something wrong, forgiveness can help them let go of ruminative thoughts that affect their flourishing (Wu et al., 2019). This shows that forgiveness also works by influencing positive emotions, relationships, and meaning (Breen et al., 2010).

Research on the relationship between forgiveness and well-being amongst early adults whose parents have divorced (Azra, 2017) and on that between gratitude and such well-being (Permana, 2017; Prameswarawati, 2020) has been conducted, but no studies have combined these two factors and considered the flourishing of emerging adults measured using the PERMA model. Optimize the flourishing of emerging adults whose parents have divorced is important because as a young people they have to prepared their future for having a family. Aim of this study is to determine the relationship between forgiveness and gratitude and the flourishing of emerging adults whose parents have divorced. Hypothesis of this study is that forgiveness and gratitude can predict flourishing in emerging adults whose parents are divorced.

## Method

### *Research Design*

This is a cross-sectional survey study using a predictive design. There are two predicting variables; forgiveness and gratitude, as well as one dependent variable, flourishing. The voluntary convenience sampling technique was used to obtain respondents. The absence of definite figures regarding the number of emerging adults

whose parents are divorced has resulted in an approximation in the excess of 20,000, referring to the divorce rate in Indonesia as of 2020 which exceeds this figure. The samples size for the study was determined using Raosoft with a margin of error of 5% and a response distribution of 50% resulting in a sample of 377 people. 429 individuals living on various islands in Indonesia were recruited as participants, who met the criteria of being aged 18-25, and who had parents who had been divorced for at least two years. The reason for these criteria was based on a study by Hetherington (2005) who states that 75% of children who are exposed to stress due to parental divorce can recover within a minimum of two years.

#### *Data Collection Technique*

Forgiveness was measured using the Emotional Forgiveness Scale of Worthington-Jr. et al. (2007) which was later adapted for Indonesia by (Kurniati et al., 2020) for use in their research. The measuring instrument shows good reliability at  $r = .83$  with good construct validity results  $r = .73$ . The measuring instrument comprises two dimensions: the presence of positive and prosocial feelings and a reduction of negative feelings toward the wrongdoer. In total there are eight items, with four per dimension.

Gratitude was measured using the Gratitude Questionnaire – 6 scale of McCullough et al. (2002) which was later adapted by Grimaldy and Haryanto (2020) for an Indonesian sample and increased to 11 items. The measuring instrument shows good reliability with the result = .879, also construct validity which divides the measuring instrument into eleven items divided into two dimensions. The two dimensions of the measuring instrument are appreciation of the constant experience of life, consisting of six items; and appreciation of individuals involved in one's life, consisting of five items.

Flourishing was measured using the PERMA Profiler subscale of Butler and Kern (2016) which was later adapted by Elfida et al. (2021) for an Indonesian sample. Fifteen items were used in this study, divided into three items per dimension which were positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments. The final item, overall happiness was included as a complementary item. The reliability results for the total score show a good value = .92 with convergent validity results for the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLWS) of  $r = .554$ .

#### *Data Analysis*

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha and repeated to establish the reliability of the item in the context of emerging adults whose parents were divorced. Forgiveness produced as Cronbach's alpha of .752, gratitude of .907, and flourishing an alpha of .935. Hypothesis testing was conducted using multiple regression.

## **Results**

Table 1 shows that most participants were aged 18-21 at 69.2% (297 people). Most (44.1%, 189 people) had parents who had been divorced for more than 17 years. The distribution of respondents' domicile was not evenly distributed, most (75.1%, 322 people) from Java, followed by Sumatra at 13.9% (60 people), Kalimantan 6.5% (28 people), Sulawesi 1.9% (8 people), Nusa Tenggara Islands including Bali 1.9% (8 people), Papua 0.5% (2 people), and the Maluku Islands 0.2% (1 person). The majority of respondents were single (58.3%, 250 people) and lived with their biological mother (52.9%, 227 people).

The results of the hypothesis testing shown in Table 2 indicate that forgiveness and gratitude can predict flourishing in emerging adults whose parents are divorced ( $R^2 = .382$ ,  $F = 131.634$ ,  $p < .01$ ). More specifically, gratitude was shown to contribute more to predicting such flourishing ( $\beta = 1.299$ ,  $p < .01$ ) than forgiveness ( $\beta = .722$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Table 1***Demographic Data*

No.	Demographic	Details	Number (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Age (years old)	18	82	19.1
		19	77	17.9
		20	72	16.8
		21	66	15.4
		22	43	10.0
		23	37	8.6
		24	23	5.4
		25	29	6.8
2	Time since parents' divorce (years)	2 – 9	66	15.4
		10 – 17	174	40.6
		> 17	189	44.1
3	Domicile	Java	322	75.1
		Sumatra	60	13.9
		Kalimantan	28	6.5
		Sulawesi	8	1.9
		Nusa Tenggara (+Bali)	8	1.9
		Papua	2	0.5
		Maluku Islands	1	0.2
4	Occupation	College student	214	49.9
		Working	110	25.6
		Currently not working	85	19.8
		Student and working	20	4.7
5	Living status	With biological mother	227	52.9
		Alone	60	14.0
		With relatives	60	14.0
		With biological father	57	13.3
		With biological siblings	12	2.8
		With partner	7	1.6
6	Relationship status	Move between father and mother	6	1.4
		Single	250	58.3
		Dating	161	37.5
		Married	18	4.2
Total			429	100

**Table 2***Hypothesis Test Results*

No.	Variable	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig.	β
1	Forgiveness and Gratitude with Flourishing	.382	131.634	.001	-
2	Forgiveness	-	-	.001	.722
3	Gratitude	-	-	.001	1.299

**Table 3**  
*Correlation Test Results between Dimensions*

No.	Dimensions of Forgiveness	Dimensions of Flourishing	Correlation coefficient	Sig.
1	Reduction of negative feelings toward the transgressor	Positive Emotions	.328**	.001
		Engagement	.135**	.001
		Relationships	.247**	.001
		Meaning	.254**	.001
		Accomplishments	.154**	.001
		Overall Happiness	.326**	.001
2	Presence of positive emotions and prosocial feelings toward the wrongdoer	Positive Emotions	.322**	.001
		Engagement	.266**	.001
		Relationships	.281**	.001
		Meaning	.290**	.001
		Accomplishments	.270**	.001
		Overall Happiness	.289**	.001
No.	Dimensions of Gratitude	Dimensions of Flourishing	Correlation coefficient	Sig.
1	Appreciation of individuals who take part in my life	Positive Emotions	.525**	.001
		Engagement	.432**	.001
		Relationships	.475**	.001
		Meaning	.505**	.001
		Accomplishments	.444**	.001
		Overall Happiness	.451**	.001
2	Appreciation of the constant experience of life	Positive Emotions	.496**	.001
		Engagement	.416**	.001
		Relationships	.486**	.001
		Meaning	.530**	.001
		Accomplishments	.446**	.001
		Overall Happiness	.449**	.001

Table 3 shows that the dimension reduction of negative feelings from the forgiveness variable has a significant correlation on all dimensions of flourishing. The highest correlation figure relates to the positive emotions dimension at  $r = .328$  ( $p < .01$ ). The dimension of the presence of positive emotions and prosocial feelings toward the wrongdoer related to forgiveness also showed a significant correlation with all the dimensions of flourishing with the highest being the same dimension of  $r = .322$  ( $p < .01$ )

The dimension of appreciation of the individuals that take part in my life from gratitude has a significant correlation on all dimensions of

flourishing, with the highest being with the positive emotions dimension at  $r = .525$  ( $p < .01$ ) and the meaning dimension at  $r = .505$  ( $p < .01$ ). The dimension of appreciation of the constant experience of life from gratitude also shows a significant correlation with the highest correlation related the meaning dimension of  $r = .530$  ( $p < .01$ ).

**Discussion**

The results of the hypothesis test show that forgiveness and gratitude can simultaneously predict flourishing in emerging adults whose parents are divorced using the regression equation  $\text{flourishing} = (-5.000) + (.722$

forgiveness + (1.298) gratitude. More specifically, gratitude is shown to contribute more to predicting flourishing in emerging adults whose parents are divorced than forgiveness.

These results are in line with the experimental research conducted by Safaria et al. (2017) who found that adolescents' happiness increased when they were taught to consciously count positive events in life and forgive negative ones. Through the old negative experience of parental divorce, forgiveness can play a role in contributing to being grateful. This can happen because of an incident/individual that needs to be forgiven.

The results of this study contradict those of other previous research conducted by Safaria (2014) on forgiveness, gratitude, and well-being in college students. Safaria stated that gratitude could predict a student's well-being, but not forgiveness. The variance in the results may be due to the different context of the subjects studied, with this study considering the background of parents' divorce, while that of Safaria focused on the life of college students. The stress or difficulties experienced by college students compared to those experienced by emerging adults due to the divorce of their parents are certainly different, so the use of forgiveness as a coping strategy may not be needed in Safaria's research.

Based on the cognitive appraisal model theory which focuses on the effectiveness of coping strategies, the use of positive emotion-focused coping, such as forgiveness and gratitude can help emerging adults overcome feelings that arise due to parental divorce and help optimize individual flourishing (Lau & Cheng, 2017; Worthington & Scherer, 2004; Zeigler-Hill & Shackelford, 2020). In this study, forgiveness and gratitude help emerging adults regulate their feelings and play a role in contributing to increasing positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishments which are all part of flourishing.

The results of Pearson's correlation test on the dimensions of forgiveness flourishing show that the two dimensions of forgiveness: presence of positive emotions (PE) and reduction of negative feelings (RE) have an influence on all dimensions of flourishing (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment). Varied correlation coefficients indicate that there are both weak and strong relationships between dimensions. In this study, the strongest correlation between the dimensions of forgiveness and flourishing was between the RE dimension with positive emotions and PE with positive emotions. This means that when individuals can forgive bad events that they experienced, they also become more open to feeling happiness which as a result increases flourishing.

According to Witvliet et al. (2001) emotional forgiveness works by reducing the negative emotions and stress that arise because of mistakes and increasing positive emotions in individuals. When emerging adults choose to forgive their parents for the changes that their divorce has brought about, they no longer allow themselves to be carried away by negative thoughts and feeling instead to feel positive emotions towards their parents as well as those around them. Positive emotions are one of the dimensions in flourishing, therefore forgiveness can directly help emerging adults flourish.

When they experience an increase in positive emotions, many other aspects also improve, such as healthier relationships between emerging adults and their parents. This is because the loss of negative emotions not only concerns the divorce, but also their feelings towards their parents. When they no longer feel hatred or get angry with their parents, the relationship will automatically improve. According to Azra (2017) and Brann et al. (2007), when emerging adults forgive their parents, they will find meaning in their divorce and subsequently show high relational satisfaction.



The improved relationship of emerging adults with their parents helps them find meaning in their lives. If they conclude that this relationship is one of the contributors that gives meaning to their lives, then they will usually choose to forgive their parents so that their relationship will improve and continue to contribute meaning (Lambert et al., 2010; Thomas et al., 2017). This is because humans, who are well-known for being social beings, will grow when they are in close relationships, therefore relationships can give meaning and security to their existence (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

The low number of correlation coefficients between the two dimensions of forgiveness with the dimensions of engagement and accomplishment is because these are dimensions that focus on an activity that can make a person absorbed in their work or achieve an accomplishment. This study does not emphasize particular activities or work that can make an individual bonded/absorbed, which is why emerging adults' forgiveness of their parents does not have a strong correlation with engagement and accomplishment.

The results of the correlation test between the dimensions of gratitude and flourishing show a significant positive correlation. This is in accordance with previous research which has also found a significant positive relationship between gratitude and well-being (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; Permana, 2017; Rahayu & Setiawati, 2019). Gratitude together with forgiveness serves as a positive coping strategy that can help emerging adults deal with the stress that comes with the changes that parental divorce brings. In contrast to forgiveness, gratitude works by people's appreciation or gratitude for everything that happens in everyday life and not just focusing on parents. This allows emerging adults to see an event or experience in a more positive light and allows them to experience positive emotions and happiness in a broader way.

In this study, the relationship that is emphasized in emerging adults is that with their separated parents. When emerging adults are grateful, this allows them to feel positive emotions towards their parents and thereby strengthens their relationship. This is evidenced by the strong correlation between the two dimensions of gratitude with the dimension of positive emotions and relationships of flourishing. This will only occur if emerging adults feels that their relationship with their parents brings them merit, only then will they try to strengthen and maintain that relationship. This is in accordance with the find, remind, and bind theory of Algoe (2012) which shows that gratitude related to relationships.

The two dimensions of gratitude were the highest correlation results with the meaning dimension of flourishing. Parents' divorce which can be classified as a life event can be passed with gratitude. Through this, changing perspectives on parental divorce can help emerging adults to find meaning in the separation.

In this study, gratitude not only focuses on feeling grateful to one's parents, but also on every individual and experience that play a role in the lives of emerging adults. This results in gratitude and affects the dimensions of engagement and accomplishment from flourishing (Kersten, 2019; Komase et al., 2021). When emerging adults choose to be grateful, they are grateful for all the individuals who play a role in their lives. This allows them to develop quality interpersonal relationships and a positive culture which increases their engagement with jobs. Such an increase can help them make accomplishments. This study proves that gratitude has a significant positive correlation with the dimensions of engagement and accomplishment.

Regression results and correlations between dimensions demonstrate that forgiveness and

gratitude are more effective when used together because of their complementary nature. Forgiveness that does not strongly correlate with engagement and accomplishment can be complemented by gratitude, which has a strong relationship with both dimensions.

Based on the results and discussions presented, it can be understood that forgiveness and gratitude-based interventions can be beneficial for emerging adults who are experiencing or have parental divorce and optimize flourishing.

### Conclusion

Forgiveness and gratitude can predict the flourishing of emerging adults whose parents are divorced. In the study, gratitude is shown to

contribute to predicting flourishing than forgiveness. These new findings related to the effect of forgiveness and gratitude on flourishing in parental divorce contributed to positive psychology research, especially that of flourishing. This concept has yet to be extensively explored in Indonesia. The study also establishes in detail the flourishing factors that have a strong relationship with forgiveness and gratitude. There are some limitations to the study, such as the use of a gratitude scale that is not centered on parental divorce. In addition, gender specifications were not included in the study so it was not possible to observe differences by gender nor was the age of emerging adults at the time of parental divorce considered, which signals the start of the adaptation period and affects flourishing.[]

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