

Parenting and the Marital Relationship

Frank D. Fincham
Florida State University

Julie H. Hall
University at Buffalo, The State University of New York

INTRODUCTION

Parent and spouse roles are characterized by numerous expectations and responsibilities that tend to be fulfilled simultaneously as partners in a marriage are often partners in parenting as well. Thus, it can be quite difficult to disentangle marital and parenting processes, and to determine how one relationship impacts the other. Considerable attention has been devoted to exploring how becoming a parent affects the marital relationship; the birth of a child is associated with an increase in marital conflict and a decrease in marital satisfaction, but an increased sense of partnership (Belsky, Lang, Rovine, 1985; Cowan, Cowan, Heming, Garrett, Coysh, Curtis-Boles, & Boles, 1985). Yet at the same time, marital relationships also exert a considerable influence on parenting processes and behaviors. Given the nature of this book, we focus on this aspect of the association between marriage and parenting.

In Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) ecological model, the marital relationship constitutes part of a child's microsystem, and thus directly influences the child. Behavioral exchanges between spouses are one of the major vehicles through which the immediate environment directly affects a child's psychological growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1992). Beyond the direct effects of the marital relationship on child development, Bronfenbrenner also highlighted how marriage impacts children indirectly, through the parenting relationship. Such indirect influence, defined as

second-order effects, points out how the marital relationship can affect interactions between parent and child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecological model also emphasizes the importance of the marital relationship as a support system for parenting; Bronfenbrenner (1986) reviewed evidence that mothers who felt supported by their husbands tended to have higher marital satisfaction and more positive attitudes toward parenting. This research helped lay the foundation for much current work on marital and parenting processes, and illustrated the importance of the environment in such processes.

In keeping with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, this chapter explores the direct effects of the marital relationship on child development, as well as the indirect effects that occur through parenting. We review briefly direct effects, before turning to the primary focus of the chapter, how marital and parenting processes interact to influence child development. Following consideration of the major research in this area, the next section identifies promising avenues for future research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main arguments.

DIRECT EFFECTS OF THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

There is a robust association between marital conflict and child behavior problems. For example, the meta-analysis by Buehler, Anthony, Krishnakumar, and Stone (1997) of 68 studies testing the association between marital conflict and child adjustment showed that the average effect size for this association was .32, midway between a small (.20) and medium (.50) effect as described by Cohen (1977). According to social learning theory, negative marital interactions lead children to adopt similar maladaptive behaviors through the processes of modeling. Children who are repeatedly exposed to marital conflict may acquire negative strategies of conflict resolution and affective expression through observing their parents' behavior (Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988), and they are at greater risk for externalizing disorders (Cummings & Davies, 1994). Children also tend to be more aggressive towards peers after observing an angry argument between adults (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Walker, 1985), and are more likely to have social problems with siblings and peers (Stocker & Youngblade, 1999).

There is also a direct relation between marital conflict and disorganized-disoriented infant attachment behavior (Owen & Cox, 1997). It has been suggested that exposure to negative marital interactions adversely affects the organization of children's emotional response to stressful situations (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Owen and Cox (1997) argued that exposure to chronic marital conflict leads infants to experience their parents as

frightening, and to have limited options for alleviating accompanying distress. In contrast, marital satisfaction is associated with secure attachment in toddlers (Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984).

Specific aspects of marital conflict appear to have differential effects on child adjustment; Buehler and colleagues (1997) showed that effect sizes differed depending on how conflict was expressed. Studies assessing overt conflict, defined as direct expressions of hostile behavior and affect, produced a larger effect size (.35) than studies examining covert conflict (.28), in which hostility is expressed indirectly, withdrawal from conflict (.27), or studies simply measuring conflict frequency (.19). These differences suggest that the way parents manage conflict, rather than its occurrence per se, determines its impact on children.

The direct relation between marital conflict and child adjustment can also be understood by conceptualizing conflict as a stressor on children (Fincham, Grych, & Osborne, 1994; Wilson & Gottman, 1995). Children report that observing interparental conflict is a significant stressor (Lewis, Siegel, & Lewis, 1984), and observational studies show that children typically exhibit distress when exposed to angry or aggressive interactions involving their parents (see Cummings, Davies & Campbell, 2000). Even at a young age, children become distressed when observing family conflict (Cummings, Zahn-Walker, Radke-Yarrow, 1981), and that distress increases with more frequent exposure to anger and aggression (Cummings et al., 1985). Exposure to conflict has also been found to threaten children's sense of safety and emotional security (Davies & Cummings, 1994).

However, as noted, interparental conflict may not be intrinsically damaging to children; rather, *how* conflict is handled may determine whether the interaction will serve as a stressor for the child. Frequent conflicts that are intense, unresolved, and child-related tend to be more distressing to children than non-child related conflicts that are resolved constructively and nonaggressively (Grych & Fincham, 1992). It has also been suggested that children are more affected by marital conflict when parent-to-child hostility is expressed during the course of the conflict (Gordis, Margolin, & John, 2001).

Although some scholars have argued that the relation between conflict and child adjustment is due to the effects of marital conflict on parenting (e.g., Fauber & Long, 1991), others have argued that this relation cannot be reduced to variations in parenting. In support of this position it is noted that overt marital conflict has a greater impact on children than covert conflict (Emery, Fincham, & Cummings, 1992) and that children's perceptions of marital conflict tend to be related to their adjustment (Cummings, Davies, & Simpson, 1994; Harold, Fincham, Osborne, & Conger, 1997). Such findings would be unlikely if parenting processes accounted for all of the variance in child adjustment.

Ex: "Siegel" or "Siegal"
in refs) ← Siegal
is correct

INDIRECT EFFECTS OF THE MARITAL RELATIONSHIP ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Parenting has consistently been shown to play a mediating role in the relation between marital quality and child functioning. High marital quality is associated with sensitive parenting and optimal toddler functioning (e.g., Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984), whereas marital discord undermines and disrupts effective parenting practices and is associated with poor child adjustment (Belsky, 1984; Fauber & Long, 1991; Reid & Crisafulli, 1990). However, before one can fully explore such associations, it is critical to examine central constructs. For example, Erel and Burman (1995) were not able to test adequately whether relevant variables moderated the association between the marital and parent-child relationships owing to the heterogeneity of effect sizes within categories of the moderator variables that they examined (e.g., different operationalizations of marital quality).

Marital Quality Is Not Marital Quality Is Not Marital Quality

Much of the literature regarding the marriage-parenting association has focused on the general concept of marital quality, and how it relates to parenting practices. As noted by Erel and Burman (1995) and Goldberg and Easterbrooks (1984), however, studies have varied widely in the conceptualization and measurement of marital quality. The emergence of a replicable association between marital quality and the quality of parenting is noteworthy. But both of these constructs are multidimensional. Thus, it is important to distinguish among their dimensions and to consider how specific aspects of the marital relationship are associated with specific aspects of parenting. The importance of such conceptual development is emphasized by the fact that even the most sophisticated statistical analyses cannot clarify ambiguous constructs.

Erel and Burman (1995) identified three conceptualizations of marital quality used by researchers: general marital satisfaction, overt marital conflict, and marital coalition. Before we consider the first two of these in greater detail, it is important to note that parenting can be conceptualized along numerous dimensions, including global quality, satisfaction, covert control, discipline, or within/between parent consistency. However, the majority of the studies in Erel and Burman's (1995) meta-analysis measured marital quality in terms of marital satisfaction and the parent-child relationship in terms of global quality. Nevertheless, it is important to consider these distinctions when reviewing the literature, as a general association between marital quality and parenting could reflect several different relationships.

What is Marital Satisfaction? This is not the context in which to offer a definitive answer to this question, and we therefore limit ourselves to two observations. First, two of the most commonly used measures of marital satisfaction, the Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959) and Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976), combine heterogeneous question types, including general evaluative questions and specific descriptive questions about behavior (e.g., communication, affection). As a result, these scales may overestimate associations between marital quality and self-reported interpersonal processes within marriage because of item overlap (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Feeney, Noller, & Ward, 1997). This has led some researchers to suggest that global, evaluative measures of marital satisfaction (e.g., Quality Marriage Index, QMI; Norton, 1983; Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale, KMSS; Schumm, Paff-Bergen, Hatch, Obiorah, Copeland, Meens, & Bugaighis, 1986) are more appropriate when seeking to capture an individual's overall sentiment toward the marriage (Fincham, 1998; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987). However, global measures are only appropriate when the researcher is seeking to measure marital quality as an overall evaluative judgment, and they are less useful when information is sought about specific dimensions of marital quality.

Second, it is important to note that marital satisfaction is not the mere absence of dissatisfaction, and that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not necessarily inversely related (Bradbury et al., 2000). In actuality, it is possible for an individual to evaluate his or her marriage as both positive and negative (Fincham, Beach, & Kemp-Fincham, 1997; Fincham & Linfield, 1997). Conceptualizing marital quality as bi-dimensional allows researchers to distinguish between people who may score similarly on measures of global marital satisfaction, despite the fact that some are high in positivity and negativity (i.e., ambivalent), whereas others are low on both dimensions (i.e. indifferent; see Fincham & Linfield, 1997). Few researchers have so far adopted this bi-dimensional approach.

In summary, then, marital quality has been operationalized in different ways. The vast majority of studies have used the MAT, DAS or some variant of these measures. Increasingly, however, researchers are limiting marital satisfaction to global judgments of the marriage and using separate measures to assess different aspects of marriage (e.g., communication, consensus) that are also tapped by instruments such as the MAT and DAS.

What Is Marital Conflict? Marital conflict has been conceptualized in several different ways, with most sharing the common themes that conflict can be overt or covert, can arise from the perceived conflict of interests, goals, wishes, expectations, or interference with behavior, and that conflict behaviors vary across time and situation (Fincham & Beach, 1999). Couples can be differentiated based on their marital conflict styles, including physi-

cal aggression, verbal aggression, withdrawal, and nondistressed/low levels of conflict (Burman, Margolin, & John, 1993). Marital conflict can also be considered in terms of process, by exploring cycles of escalation and resolution within couples. For example, Burman et al. (1993) found that physically aggressive and nondistressed couples display similar negative conflict behavior patterns, but nondistressed couples are able to exit from negative exchanges more quickly. As with measures of marital satisfaction, measures of marital conflict vary according to the specific dimensions of interest to the researcher.

Overlap Between Satisfaction and Conflict. Although we have discussed marital satisfaction and marital conflict as separate constructs, empirical evidence suggests that conflict directly affects satisfaction in well established relationships (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997). When compared to nondistressed couples, distressed couples experience more frequent conflict (Christensen & Margolin, 1988), engage in more criticism and disagreement, and are more likely to reciprocate negative behaviors. In fact, negative reciprocity is more consistent across different types of situations than is the amount of negative behavior, making it the most reliable overt signature of a dissatisfied marriage. Both frequency and reciprocity of negative behavior are more pronounced in couples where physical aggression is found (Fincham, 2003). Marital conflict also predicts deterioration in relationship satisfaction over time (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Nevertheless, they are distinct constructs, as it is possible for marriages to be high in conflict and satisfaction or low in both. Furthermore, marital satisfaction and conflict have unique effects on parenting and parent-child behavior. Thus, we continue to consider them separately.

Models of the Association Between Marriage and Parenting

Erel and Burman (1995) found a positive association between marital quality and parenting (the composite mean weighted effect size was .46). Thus, on the whole, harmonious marriages tend to be associated with effective parenting, whereas troubled marriages are linked to maladaptive parenting. This finding supports a spillover model whereby the affective tone of the marriage spills over into the parent-child relationship; it stands in sharp contrast to the alternative compensatory model in which marital quality and parenting quality are posited to be negatively related (Erel & Burman, 1995; Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984).

However, there is some empirical support for the compensatory model in which parents are hypothesized to compensate for marital frustration and dissatisfaction by channeling these negative emotions into positive parenting behaviors (Amato, 1986; Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling,

1991). Parents may attempt to fill the void left by their unhappy marriage by establishing fulfilling relationships with their children. Nevertheless, Cox, Paley, and Harter (2001) point out that it is difficult to differentiate between genuinely positive parenting and parent-child relationships that seem positive but actually serve to meet the needs of the parent. As a whole, support for the compensatory model is limited and difficult to interpret.

Krishnakumar and Buehler's (2000) meta-analysis of interparental conflict and parenting behaviors suggests a third model, compartmentalization, in which parents are able to maintain the boundaries between their spousal and parenting roles. Such a model requires partners to contain their feelings about the marriage and to not let them contaminate the parent-child relationship. This model implies that there is no relationship between marital quality and parenting. However, neither Erel and Burman (1995) nor Krishnakumar and Buehler (2000) found support for this model in their meta-analyses. In fact the latter authors found an average weighted effect size of $-.62$ between interparental conflict and positive parenting behaviors which lends further support to the spillover model.

What Processes Account for the Spillover Effect? Grych (2002) reviewed several conceptual models that might explain the association between marital and parenting domains. Family systems theory accounts for this association through the idea of circular causality in which relationships within the family are reciprocally related. From a stress and coping perspective, the marital relationship is conceptualized as a source of stress or support for parenting processes. Third, the affective spillover model posits that emotional experiences in the marriage carry over to affective expression in parent-child relationships. A fourth conceptual model proposes that spouses in distressed marriages withdraw from their children, leading to problems in parenting. However, it is also possible that a third variable influences behavior in both marital and parenting domains. Although each of these models is theoretically sound, it is difficult to distinguish among them empirically because the processes described in each lead to the same outcomes.

A general theoretical framework would facilitate research on the interrelationship of marriage and parenting, but it is equally important to explore empirically specific associations to identify which elements of marital functioning are linked to parenting. As noted, one important association supported by empirical research is the link between marital satisfaction and quality of parenting.

Marital Satisfaction/Adjustment and Parenting

High marital satisfaction/adjustment is related to parenting that is sensitive, responsive, warm, and accepting (Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984; Grych, 2002), whereas lower marital satisfaction is related to permissive parenting

and more negative parent-child relationships (DeVito & Hopkins, 2001; Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988). However, the direction of causality in such relationships is uncertain since most data are cross-sectional.

However, there is a handful of relevant longitudinal studies. Kurdek (1998) found that marital adjustment in the first year of marriage was not predictive of parenting satisfaction eight years later. Similarly, Lindahl, Clements, and Markman (1997) showed that parents' affective responsiveness to their children was not predicted by prechild marital satisfaction, but was related to current marital satisfaction. Prebirth marital adjustment also does not predict cognitive and verbal stimulation of the infant (Heinicke, 1995).

In contrast, Shek (1998) found that marital adjustment was longitudinally associated with parent-child relational quality and perceived demands from children, and suggested that marital quality predicted change in parent-child relational quality. Cowan and Cowan (2000) also found that greater marital satisfaction during pregnancy was associated with parenting that was warm, responsive, and structuring when children reached preschool age, whereas marital dissatisfaction predicts more authoritarian and less authoritative parenting (Cowan & Cowan, 1992). Thus, further research is needed to determine the strength of the longitudinal relationship between marital satisfaction/adjustment and parenting. This is an especially interesting area of research because marital satisfaction changes across the life cycle and is generally believed to follow a U-shaped pattern of declining in the early years of parenthood and increasing in the later years (Emery & Tuer, 1993).

In the past decade, efforts to understand the association between marital processes and child development increasingly have focused on how couples express and manage conflict in their relationship. It is now clear that marital conflict is more important for understanding child development than satisfaction (Grych & Fincham, 2001).

Marital Conflict and Parenting

Several studies show that ineffective parenting partially or fully mediates the relation between marital conflict and children's maladjustment (Osborne & Fincham, 1996; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1999). Three processes have been suggested to account for such indirect effects; marital conflict disrupts parental discipline, diminishes the affective quality of parent-child interactions, and increases parent-child aggression (Fincham et al., 1994).

Discipline and Affect in Parent-Child Interactions. A meta-analysis suggested that the parenting behaviors impacted most by interparental conflict are harsh discipline and parental acceptance (Krishnakumar & Buehler,

2000). Marital conflict is also related to child rejection, low parental involvement, and low emotional responsiveness (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1999). Parents often become so consumed by marital conflicts that their parenting behavior grows less effective and more inconsistent (Fauber & Long, 1991). Indeed, marital conflict may drain parent resources to the point that it reduces parents' ability to recognize and respond to the child's emotional needs (Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984). Children may perceive parental inattention as rejection, leading to emotional and behavioral problems (Fincham et al., 1994). In addition to diminishing the quantity of parent-child interactions, marital conflict may also influence the quality of these exchanges. Negative affect from the marital context may spillover into parent-child relationships (Kerig, Cowan, & Cowan, 1993), leading to disciplinary techniques that are harsh, critical, and rely on guilt and anxiety induction (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Fauber et al., 1990; Fincham et al., 1994; Gable, Belsky, & Crnic, 1992; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1999). When compared to nondistressed families, tension in distressed families endures for a longer period of time, and marital conflict increases the probability of parent-child conflict (Christensen & Margolin, 1988; Margolin, Christensen, & John, 1996).

Parent-Child Aggression. Children whose parents engage in physical violence toward one another are at increased risk of being abused by their parents; the median base rate of co-occurrence in clinical samples is 40% (Appel & Holden, 1998). In a nationally representative sample, the conditional probability of child abuse given the presence of partner abuse is 31% (O'Leary, Slep & O'Leary, 2000). Appel and Holden (1998) identified five models that may underlie this association. The simplest is a single perpetrator model, in which one parent (stereotypically the father) aggresses toward spouse and child. This pattern can also be sequential, such that the victim of marital violence becomes aggressive toward the child, or follow a dual model in which one spouse is violent toward his/her partner, and both are violent toward the child.

The remaining two models are bi-directional and thus incorporate the child and victimized partner as active agents in the system. In the marital violence model, both partners are abusive toward one another and towards the child, whereas the family dysfunction model includes a pathway in which the child aggresses towards both parents. Although the single perpetrator model has received the most empirical support, these models have not been empirically contrasted with one another and thus their relative utility remains uncertain. However, some researchers have cautioned that marital conflict and parent-child aggression may not lead to one another; rather, both may arise from a third factor, such as the individual

characteristics of one or both parents (e.g., antisocial personality; Fincham et al., 1994).

As noted earlier, a more fine-grained examination of the dimensions of conflict is necessary to advance our understanding of the impact of interparental conflict on parenting, parent-child relationships, and child development. The impact of conflict is likely to depend on the intensity, frequency, resolution, content, and context of the dispute (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Fincham, 2003; Fincham et al., 1994; Zimet & Jacob, 2001). Children's understanding and appraisals of the conflict are also likely to influence its impact as there is already evidence that stable and global attributions for interparental conflict and/or blaming the self leads to negative consequences for the child (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 1990).

In a similar vein there is a small body of research that emphasizes the importance of spousal appraisals, particularly attributions or explanations for marital conflict, for parenting and parent-child relationships.

The Role of Marital Attributions

Maritally distressed couples tend to attribute their difficulties to causes that are stable or unchanging, global (affect many areas of the relationship), and located within the other spouse (see Fincham, 2001). Negative attributions such as these serve to exacerbate and maintain marital difficulties and have been shown to predict behavior in marital interactions (Bradbury & Fincham, 1992). The relation between such conflict promoting attributions and behavior holds across different levels of marital satisfaction (Bradbury, Beach, Fincham, & Nelson, 1996) and is not due to general negative affectivity (Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994).

Maladaptive marital attributions are also associated with negative attributions for child behavior (Fincham & Grych, 1991). Thus, spouses who interpret their partner's negative behavior as internal, stable, and global tend to perceive their children's misbehavior in the same way, and such attributions influence subsequent behavior. Parents' attributional styles are related to how coercive, harsh, and authoritarian their interactions are with their children (Bugental & Johnston, 2000). Slep and O'Leary (1998) found that mothers who believe that their child is to blame for his/her misbehavior are angrier and more overreactive in their disciplinary responses when compared to mothers who believe their child is not to blame. There is also an association between attributions for child behavior and parental maltreatment of children. Abusive/neglectful mothers tend to make more internal (to the child) and stable attributions for their children's negative behavior than do non-abusive mothers (Larrance & Twentyman, 1983). Similarly, Bugental, Blue, and Cruzcosa (1989) found that parents who per-

ceive themselves as lacking power are most likely to use coercive control tactics with their children.

Brody, Arias, and Fincham (1996) further explored how marital attributions are related to parenting, and also examined the link with children's attributions for negative parental behavior. Consistent with prior research, they found that husbands' and wives' conflict promoting attributions were related to negativity in the marital context, which was associated with harsh, punitive parenting, less involved communicative parenting, and ineffective parent-child communication. Harsh, punitive parenting tends to be associated with conflicted and distant parent-child relationships, whereas involved communicative parenting is associated with harmonious and cohesive parent-child relationships (Collins, 1990). The direct effects of attributions on parent-child relationships were also stronger for fathers than for mothers. Brody et al. (1996) also found that parenting behavior was related to children's attributions for negative parental behavior. Involved communicative parenting was negatively related to children's conflict promoting attributions, and harsh, punitive parenting was positively related (Brody et al., 1996).

Implicit in our discussion thus far is the assumption that the processes discussed are gender neutral. But the same behavior performed by a father versus a mother may be experienced quite differently. Not only might responses differ because boys and girls develop different relationships with fathers and mothers, but factors such as size and strength differences can make a slap delivered with the same force more or less threatening depending on whether the mother slaps the father or vice versa. We therefore turn to consider the role of gender.

Gender Matters

There has been a great deal of controversy as to whether there are systematic differences in the association between marital quality and fathering versus mothering. Several studies have suggested that fathering is more affected by marital quality than is mothering (Belsky et al., 1991; Coiro & Emery, 1998; Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988; Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984; Kitzmann, 2000). Some researchers have posited that this is because male familial roles are less defined than those of females, and/or that mothers are better able to maintain boundaries between familial roles (Belsky et al., 1991).

Marital satisfaction and conflict also have been linked to gender differences in parenting behaviors and attitudes. Marital satisfaction is positively related to fathers' childrearing attitudes but is unrelated to the attitudes of mothers (Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988). Fathering is also more likely to be affected by marital conflict than mothering (Coiro & Emery, 1998), with fa-

thers being more likely to withdraw from their wives and children following marital conflict or when in distressed marriages (Christensen & Heavey, 1990; Howes & Markman, 1989). There is an especially strong link between destructive forms of marital conflict and negative fathering behaviors (Lindahl & Malik, 1999). Fathers tend to be less supportive and engaged when interacting with their sons after a conflictual marital discussion whereas mothers do not show such an effect (Kitzmann, 2000). There is also evidence of gender specific longitudinal associations between marital quality and parenting, as deterioration in marital quality over time is associated with more negative and intrusive fathering behavior but facilitative mothering behavior (Belsky et al., 1991).

While these findings may suggest that there is a null or compensatory relation between marital quality and maternal parenting behavior, there is evidence that marital distress is linked to lower maternal involvement and increased negativity (Erel & Burman, 1995; Grych & Fincham, 1990). Furthermore, Osborne and Fincham (1996) found that boys' perceptions of interparental conflict were more strongly associated with mother-child relationships than father-child relationships, and that there was no difference in the associations for girls. As these findings show, it is insufficient merely to introduce gender at the parental level. Only by considering both parent and child gender is it possible to show that interparental conflict is especially deleterious for cross-gender parent child relationships (e.g., Kerig, Cowan, & Cowan, 1993) which, unlike same-sex relationships, predict child outcome even though boys and girls report similar levels of exposure to interparental conflict (Osborne & Fincham, 1996). Despite the considerable attention given to child gender, our understanding of the impact of the interparental relationship on boys versus girls remains limited (see Davies & Lindsay 2001).

Kerig, Cowan, and Cowan (1993) found that, overall, both fathers and mothers tend to respond negatively towards daughters more often than sons. Also, less maritally adjusted fathers behave most negatively towards daughters, whereas mothers in less satisfied marriages are the least accepting of daughter's assertiveness and are more likely to reciprocate their sons' negative affect. However, Reid and Crisafulli (1990) found that there is a stronger association between marital conflict and externalizing child behavior for sons than for daughters. Similarly, Gordis, Margolin, and John (2001) showed that parent-to-child hostility increases the effects of marital hostility on child adjustment among boys but not among girls. This could be due to the fact that boys are less shielded from family conflict than girls (Grych & Fincham, 1990), or that girls are more likely to react with internalizing behaviors than externalizing behaviors. Thus, evidence of gender effects in the association between marriage and parenting is somewhat

mixed. It is important that future research examine not only the effects of parent and child gender, but also their interaction (Grych, 2002; Snyder, 1998).

In sum, consideration of parent and child gender is likely to yield a more textured picture of the associations among the marital relationship, parenting and child development. Moving beyond consideration of family dyads is similarly likely to yield a more sophisticated understanding. We therefore turn to briefly consider triadic family interactions.

Triadic Family Interactions

In recent years, it has become increasingly apparent that parents treat their children differently when their spouse is present than they do when alone with their children. However, triadic interactions are extremely complex to study, as they require a focus on three different dyadic relationships, as well as an examination of how the third person influences each of these dyads. Vuchinich, Emery, and Cassidy (1988) found that in situations with dyadic conflict, a third family member intervened more than one-third of time, and often in a way that formed an alliance with one of the parties. Children tended to use distraction tactics to intervene, and girls were more likely than boys to intervene in all family disputes except marital conflicts. Fathers tended to use authority strategies to intervene, whereas mothers used mediational tactics, but mothers and fathers were unlikely to side against each other when intervening in dyadic conflicts.

Early studies showed that parents tend to have less physical contact and talk less to their infants when in triadic situations than they do in dyadic parent-child interactions (Belsky, 1979). However, when looking at adolescents, Gjerde (1986) found that both the quantity and the quality of parenting behaviors changed across contexts, as well as by gender. The quality of mother-son interactions improved when the father was present, with mothers becoming more engaged, secure, consistent, and affective than they were when they were alone with their sons. However, father-son interactions deteriorated in quality when in the presence of the mother, with fathers decreasing in involvement, engagement, and egalitarianism, and increasing in criticism and antagonism. In contrast, Johnson (2001) found that both parents displayed less negative affect and were less engaged with their children in triadic interactions than in dyadic parent-child interactions, but that parental warmth and responsiveness were stable across contexts. There also tends to be greater role differentiation between mothering and fathering in triadic interactions than in dyadic parent-child interactions. Mothers are more at ease and traditional in their mothering

role when in the presence of the father. In contrast, fathers are more likely to withdraw from a primary parenting role when in the presence of their wives (Gjerde, 1986; Johnson, 2001).

Marital Conflict and Triadic Interaction. Marital conflict has a negative impact upon triadic family interactions. Kerig (1995) found that marital conflict and dissatisfaction are positively associated with triangulation (cross-generational coalitions) in triadic interactions. Similarly, destructive marital conflicts are associated with parental withdrawal during triadic interactions, and fathering behaviors that are rejecting, coercive, and less emotionally supportive (Lindahl & Malik, 1999). Marital hostility is also associated with fathers being more intrusive and less positively involved in triadic interactions, and mothers displaying more derisive humor (Katz & Gottman, 1996). However, when husbands withdraw from the marriage, mothers are more intrusive and critical in triadic interactions (Katz & Gottman, 1996). There is also a longitudinal association between marital conflict and triadic interaction, as negative escalation of marital discussions before children are born is predictive of coalition formation and low family cohesion, as well as father's triangulation of the child into marital conflict (Lindahl et al., 1997).

Marital Power and Triadic Interaction. Lindahl and Malik (1999) examined how the balance of power within marriage relates to parenting in triadic situations, and classified marriages as balanced, male dominant, or power struggle. The results varied according to gender, level of marital distress, and ethnicity. Mothers from male-dominant marriages were more emotionally supportive in triadic interactions than mothers from power struggle marriages, but only when they were European American and were not maritally distressed. However, maritally distressed fathers from male-dominant marriages were more coercive with sons than fathers from balanced or power struggle marriages. Hispanic American fathers from balanced marriages were more emotionally supportive of sons in triadic interactions than fathers from male-dominant or power struggle marriages. Meanwhile, European American fathers from power struggle marriages were more withdrawn than fathers from the other power groups. These results illustrate the complexity of triadic interactions, and the variety of ways in which marital processes can interact with parenting behavior.

In sum, it is clear that the marital relationship-parenting association cannot be adequately understood without consideration of the broader context of triadic family processes. At the same time, it is apparent that work on triadic family processes is in its infancy. In the next section of the chapter we turn explicitly to identifying directions for future research that

might provide a more complete understanding of marriage, parenting, and child development.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As emphasized throughout this chapter it is crucial to pinpoint specific aspects of the marital relationship that are associated with specific dimensions of parenting. However, identification of such associations begs the important question of why such associations exist. What processes or mechanisms give rise to the associations? We therefore discuss one particularly promising mechanism before exploring the implications of current marital research for future research on the link between marriage and parenting.

The Search for Mechanism: Coparenting

Coparenting refers to how mothers and fathers function together in their roles as parents, and reflects discrepancies in parenting involvement, as well as the extent to which parents support or undermine one another. Coparenting has been conceptualized bidimensionally, in terms of mutual support in parenting and mutual involvement with the child (McHale, 1995) and has been broken down into four dimensions: family integrity, disparagement, conflict, and reprimand (McHale, 1997). Using this definition, McHale (1997) found evidence of five types of coparenting families: disconnected, supportive, average, distressed–conflicted, and passionate. An alternative conceptualization of coparenting is offered by Margolin, Gordis, and John (2001) who identified three coparenting dimensions: conflict over parenting issues, cooperation, and triangulation. Further distinctions have been drawn between overt and covert coparenting processes, with the former referring to triadic interactions in which both parents and the child are present, whereas the latter refers to dyadic (parent–child) interactions involving family issues when the other partner is not present (Margolin et al., 2001; McHale, 1997). Covert processes illustrate how coparenting continues even in one partner's absence; such behaviors can either strengthen or undermine a child's sense of family integrity (McHale, Lauretti, Talbot, & Pouquette, 2002). McHale and Rasmussen (1998) found that mothers' verbal and nonverbal messages about fathers in the fathers' absence have a powerful influence on the child; children whose mothers engage in negative covert coparenting behavior (e.g., disparagement of the father) are rated by teachers as showing more behavior prob-

lems than peers (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998). Thus, both overt and covert coparenting processes may influence child adjustment.

How Is Coparenting Related to Marriage, Parenting, and Child Adjustment?

Co-operative coparenting is positively associated with marital satisfaction and parenting quality. However, it is important to note that coparenting and marital relationships are distinct, because the former is motivated by concern for the child, whereas the latter is motivated by concern for the self, the partner, and/or the dyad (Margolin et al., 2001). Nevertheless, positive coparenting behaviors, such as supporting the other parent's disciplinary attempts, are related to higher marital satisfaction and more effective parenting. In contrast, negative coparenting behaviors, such as disparagement and conflict, are associated with lower marital satisfaction and marital discord (Christensen & Margolin, 1988; McHale, 1997). Belsky, Crnic, and Gable (1995) found that greater differences between spouses (e.g., in terms of demographic factors, personality, and so forth) were associated with unsupportive coparenting, and that this association was strongest in families with high levels of stress. As regards different types of coparenting, supportive coparenting families tend to display high marital satisfaction, whereas disconnected and distressed-conflicted coparenting families express low marital satisfaction (McHale, 1997).

Coparenting is also related to marital conflict. Katz and Gottman (1996) found that marital hostility was associated with hostile and competitive coparenting, lower partner responsiveness and interaction, and greater father withdrawal from children. Coparenting styles are also less democratic after a conflictual marital discussion (Kitzmann, 2000). It has also been suggested that positive coparenting strengthens individual parenting (e.g., Margolin et al., 2001). These findings suggest that marital conflict impairs a couples' abilities to be supportive coparents.

Coparenting is also associated with child adjustment, even after controlling for other factors such as parental well-being and marital quality (McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, Lauretti, & Rasmussen, 2000; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998), parent-child relationship quality (Belsky, Putnam, & Crnic, 1996), and marital conflict (Frosch, Mangelsdorf, & McHale, 2000). Unsupportive coparenting predicts child externalizing behavior, low inhibition, and the severity of child behavior problems (Bearss & Eyberg, 1998; Belsky et al., 1996; Floyd & Zmich, 1991; Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001). McHale and Rasmussen (1998) found that larger parenting discrepancies are predictive of greater child anxiety, whereas more hostile-competitive coparenting and lower harmony predicts higher child aggression. Coparenting is also related to negative peer behavior (McHale, Johnson, & Sinclair, 1999) and children's classroom adjustment, as it predicts atten-

tion, passivity/dependence, and grades, even after controlling for child gender and parents' rejection (Stright & Neitzel, 2003).

Gender Differences. Among maritally distressed families, the association between marital quality and coparenting differs by child gender. Marital conflict has been associated with hostile-competitive coparenting in triadic interactions with sons, whereas a link between marital distress and discrepant levels of parental involvement is more characteristic of parent-daughter interactions (McHale, 1995). These findings are consistent with research suggesting that boys are at greater risk for exposure to interparental conflict and childrearing disputes (e.g., Block, Block, & Morrison, 1981), whereas maritally distressed fathers are more likely to withdraw from their daughters (Amato, 1986). However, several other studies, including Margolin et al. (2001) found that child gender did not affect the way that coparenting mediated the link between marital conflict and parenting.

Nevertheless, parent gender may influence coparenting, as Katz and Gottman (1996) found that the spillover from marital to parenting/coparenting processes differed for fathers and mothers. Marital hostility was associated with greater father withdrawal from children in subsequent triadic interactions. On the other hand, husbands' withdrawal from marital conflict was associated with fathers being more positively involved with children in triadic interactions. However, husbands' withdrawal from marital conflict was associated with mothers being less positively involved with children in subsequent triadic interactions. Thus, spousal behavior also plays a role in gendered parenting.

Coparenting as a Mediator. Coparenting lies at the intersection of marital and parent-child relationships, and several studies suggest that coparenting is more proximally and strongly associated with parenting and child adjustment than is the marital relationship (Abidin & Brunner, 1995; Bearss & Eyberg, 1998; Feinberg, 2002; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998). This lends support to the view that coparenting is the mechanism that explains the link between marriage and parenting. Margolin et al. (2001) presented evidence suggesting that coparenting mediates the relation between marital functioning and parenting. More specifically, they found that reports of one's spouse's coparenting mediated the association between spouse reports of marital conflict and one's own parenting practices and stress. The authors suggested that this occurs because "conflict in the marriage may spill over and be reflected in the coparenting relationship, which, in turn, affects the level of efficacy and the amount of stress experienced in the parenting relationship" (p. 4). Margolin et al. (2001) further explained that coparenting may represent a risk mechanism, whereas marital proc-

esses are actually risk indicators (Rutter, 1994). Floyd, Gilliom, and Costigan (1998) also found that coparenting (parenting alliance) mediated the effects of marital quality on parenting and did not find evidence of a reciprocal relation (i.e., parenting \rightarrow marital quality).

Parenting behavior may have a particularly strong influence on child behavior when coparenting is unsupportive; parental rejection plays an especially important role in predicting attention, passivity/dependence, and grades when supportive coparenting is low (Stright & Neitzel, 2003). Similarly, unsupportive coparenting influences externalizing behavior when family structure is less adaptive (Schoppe et al., 2001). This interaction also extends to positive affect in the family—when positive affect is low, supportive coparenting protects against the development of externalizing problems, but when positive affect is high, supportive coparenting is not associated with such problems (Schoppe et al., 2001).

As research on coparenting as a mechanism continues, it will be necessary to explore what aspects of marriage are related to coparenting, and which aspects of coparenting are related to parenting. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that coparenting is only one of several likely mechanisms operating in the relation between marriage and parenting. Other possibilities include parent's own adjustment (Cowan & Cowan, 2002; Seifer & Dickstein, 2000), individual personality differences (Belsky et al., 1995), and/or disrupted sibling relationships (Deal, Hagan, Bass, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1999). The field will benefit from further exploration of possible mechanisms in this relationship.

Causal Pathways in Relations Among Marriage, Coparenting, and Parenting.

The findings described earlier lend further support to a model in which marital conflict affects parenting through changes in coparenting. One difficulty in interpreting such findings is that both coparenting and parenting are, in part, a response to child behavior. As a consequence, they will always covary more with each other than with factors (e.g., marital discord) that may also potentially explain parenting but which are not necessarily direct responses to child behavior. In light of such observations it is perhaps not surprising to note that the relation between marriage and coparenting may be a reciprocal one, in which coparenting styles can also influence marital relations. But virtually no attempt has been made to examine possible bi-directional causal relations.

Two relatively simple steps can be taken to increase confidence in causal inference. First, a temporal dimension can be introduced into correlational studies to determine whether marital conflict (a) precedes the onset of deleterious coparenting practices and (b) predicts later coparenting independently of earlier coparenting. The converse temporal relations can also be examined allowing investigation of bi-directional relations. Although data from

such longitudinal studies are still correlational, they do permit one to make slightly stronger causal inferences. Second, intervention studies allow experimental manipulation and thus stronger causal inference. We therefore highlight the role of intervention research in the next section.

Intervention Research

Although longitudinal studies are informative, they cannot answer questions of causality. Instead, the most powerful way to address the question of directionality in the relations among marriage, coparenting, parenting, and child adjustment is to conduct intervention research.

Coparenting Interventions. A growing body of research suggests that marital quality influences coparenting and one study suggests that the converse may also be true. Belsky and Hsieh (1998) found that unsupportive coparenting predicted a later deterioration in marital quality. Should future research show that coparenting mediates the relation between marriage and parenting, interventions targeted at coparenting could be valuable.

Feinberg (2002) suggested that the coparenting relationship is a more malleable intervention target than the marital relationship and has the potential to bring about greater improvements in parenting processes. Positive coparenting appears to help buffer the deleterious effects of marital distress and conflict on parenting (Feinberg, 2002; Margolin et al., 2001). Such findings have led researchers to suggest that improving the quality of coparenting will enhance parenting sensitivity, warmth, and consistency, which will in turn lead to positive emotional consequences for children (Feinberg, 2002). Thus, coparenting interventions may be a powerful way to control the negative effects of marriage on parenting and determine the nature of potential causal relations between the two variables.

Marital and Parenting Intervention Research. Intervention research can also explore whether marital/parenting therapy benefits child adjustment and/or whether family therapy improves marital relations and parenting. Cowan and Cowan (2002) point out that, if a family-based intervention “produces a positive change in parent–child or marital relationship quality, and if change in these two central family relationships is associated with improvement in the child’s adaptation, that would constitute strong support, though not absolute proof, of the causal relevance of family relationship patterns to the child outcomes under study” (pp. 733–734). These issues are important in choosing the most effective course of treatment for child behavior problems, and can also inform preventive interventions. Cowan and Cowan (2002) acknowledge that even with random assignment to intervention

condition, intervention studies establish associations between risk and outcome, but do not address the issue of etiology.

There is very little existing research examining the interplay of marital quality, parenting, and child adjustment in family interventions. However, it has been demonstrated that parenting interventions are associated with improved child adjustment (see Cowan & Cowan, 2002). Parent training is also associated with improved marital satisfaction—but only for troubled couples, not those who are satisfied (Brody & Forehand, 1985). As regards the link between marital quality and child adjustment, Dadds, Schwartz, and Sanders (1987) explored how marital discord affects treatment outcome in behavioral treatment of child conduct disorders. They compared child management (CMT) to a combination of CMT and partner support training that focused on marital issues such as conflict and communication. At follow-up, children whose parents received the treatment combination performed significantly better than children whose parents received only CMT, but again only for couples with marital discord.

Few marital interventions have looked beyond how the intervention affects the marriage, to explore its effects on parenting, coparenting, and child adjustment. Cowan, Cowan, Ablow, Johnson, and Measelle (in press) recently conducted a study in which maritally focused couples groups and parenting focused couples groups were compared to controls, and found that the interventions affected the appropriate mediators (i.e., marital vs. parenting quality), and that these mediators were associated with child adjustment one to two years later. However, couples in the parenting focused groups showed improvements in parenting but not in marital interaction, whereas couples in the maritally focused groups showed improvement in both areas. This suggests a marriage → parenting → child adjustment pathway, rather than vice versa. Consistent with such a model, Oltmanns, Broderick, and O'Leary (1977) found that improvements in child behavior were not associated with improvements in marital satisfaction, and Margolin and Christensen (1981) showed that marital therapy improves both marital and parent-child problems, but family therapy does not help marital problems. These findings are consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) observations about second order effects in that improving the marriage had a salutary impact on parenting.

Cowan and Cowan (2002) make several suggestions for the future of intervention research. They first highlight the importance of linking theories of development and theories of intervention explicitly rather than implicitly. They also proposed that researchers test a wider variety of theories and attempt to narrow the gap between correlational data and results of intervention studies. Research will further benefit from including fathers in intervention studies and focusing on moderators and mediators. Finally, these authors suggested that we emphasize developmental outcomes rather

than just child adaptation. The bottom line is that the field of intervention research on parenting and coparenting needs to move beyond asking if an intervention works, to ask whom it works for and under what conditions, and to focus on specific intervention targets (Cowan & Cowan, 2002).

In addition to an increased focus on intervention our understanding of the relation among marital processes, parenting, and child development will benefit from attention to recent advances in marital research, a topic that we now briefly address.

Recent Developments in Marital Research

Recent calls have been made to reconsider the role of conflict in marriage (e.g., Bradbury, Rogge & Lawrence, 2001; Fincham, 2003). These calls reflect, in part, recognition of the fact that couple conflict varies according to contextual factors. For example, conflictual marital interactions occur more frequently in couples' homes on days of high general life stress (e.g., Repetti, 1989), and at times and places associated with multiple competing demands (e.g., Halford, Gravestock, Lowe, & Scheldt, 1992). Similarly the interior context of the marriage is important for understanding marital conflict. For example, in the context of poor support communication, conflict produces the greatest risk of marital deterioration (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; see also Carels & Baucom, 1999; Saitzyk, Floyd, & Kroll, 1997), whereas in the context of high levels of affectional expression between spouses, the inverse correlation between negative spouse behavior and marital satisfaction decreases significantly (Huston & Chorost, 1994).

As a result, greater attention is being paid to positive aspects of marriage, a development further facilitated by the emergence of positive psychology (Sheldon & King, 2001), with its emphasis on shifting attention from repairing distressed marriages to building up happy, satisfying marriages (Seligman, 2002). This shift is paralleled in the more general family literature. As noted by McHale, Kuersten, and Lauretti (1996), much of the current research on family processes focuses on conflict, and we must look beyond that in order for the field to progress.

The implications are relatively straightforward. First, the ecological niche of the couple—their life events, family constellation, socioeconomic standing, and stressful circumstances—can no longer be ignored. For example, Conger, Rueter, and Elder (1999) found that economic pressure in a sample of predominantly rural families at Time 1 predicted individual distress and observed marital conflict at Time 2, which in turn predicted marital distress at Time 3. Such findings have led to the argument that it may be “at least as important to examine the struggle that exists between the couple . . . and the environment they inhabit as it is to examine the interpersonal struggles that are the focus of our work” (Bradbury et al., 2001, p.76). To the extent that

work on marriage and parenting takes into account the broader ecological niche of the couple it is likely to be more informative.

Second, it is important to recognize the processes that promote and maintain good marriages, and examine how they relate to parenting. Focusing on positive marital processes and strengths will allow researchers to broaden their conceptual frameworks and look at a range of emotions, not solely negative ones. It has become increasingly apparent that marital satisfaction and marital conflict are not mutually exclusive, and that positive, satisfying marital processes reflect much more than the absence of negative processes (Fincham, 1998; Reis & Gable, 2003). However, at the same time, we must not conclude that marital conflict is wholly negative; there are no doubt constructive elements that might even be beneficial (e.g., in building resilience in the couple, providing children with a model of conflict resolution). The field will benefit from incorporating into research on parenting and marriage these and other constructive variables such as positive affect (Dix, 1991), communication (McHale et al., 1996), marital intimacy (O'Brien & Peyton, 2002), and spousal supportive behavior (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we map the terrain that stands at the interface of marital and parenting research. Our initial brief review of the direct effects of marital processes on child development serves as a springboard for an extended discussion of how the marital relationship may be linked to child development via parenting behavior. We consider several models of the association between marital processes and parenting before examining specific ways in which marital conflict might influence parent behavior. This, in turn, highlights the need to consider marital attributions, child gender and triadic interactions to gain a more complete understanding of the marital relationship–parenting association. In the penultimate section of the chapter, we offer some signposts that might guide future exploration, focusing in particular on coparenting as a process that links marital processes to mothering and fathering and, to a lesser extent, the implications of recent developments in marital research. Although our map is far from complete, we hope it will provide a heuristic stepping stone for cartographers as they develop a more detailed map of the ecology of parenting and its implications for understanding child development.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This chapter was written while the first author was supported by a grant from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (R21AA013690).

REFERENCES

- Abidin, R., & Brunner, J. (1995). Development of a parenting alliance inventory. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 24*, 31–40.
- Amato, P. (1986). Marital conflict, the parent–child relationship, and child self-esteem. *Family Relations, 35*, 403–410.
- Appel, A. E., & Holden, G. W. (1998). The co-occurrence of spouse and physical child abuse: A review and appraisal. *Journal of Family Psychology, 12*(4), 578–599.
- Beauss, K., & Eyberg, S. (1998). A test of the parenting alliance theory. *Early Education and Development, 9*, 179–185.
- Belsky, J. (1979). Mother–father–infant interaction: A naturalistic observational study. *Developmental Psychology, 15*(6), 601–607.
- Belsky, J. (1984). The determinants of parenting: A process model. *Child Development, 55*, 83–96.
- Belsky, J., Crnic, K., & Gable, S. (1995). The determinants of coparenting in families with toddler boys: Spousal differences and daily hassles. *Child Development, 66*(3), 629–642.
- Belsky, J., & Hsieh, K. (1998). Patterns of marital change during the early childhood years: Parent personality, coparenting, and division-of-labor correlates. *Journal of Family Psychology, 12*, 511–528.
- Belsky, J., Lang, M. E., & Rovine, M. (1985). Stability and change in marriage across the transition to parenthood: A second study. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 47*, 855–865.
- Belsky, J., Putnam, S., & Crnic, K. (1996). Coparenting, parenting and early emotional development. In J. P. McHale & P. A. Cowan (Eds.), *Understanding how family-level dynamics affect children's development: Studies of two-parent families* (pp. 45–56). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Belsky, J., Youngblade, L., Rovine, M., & Volling, B. (1991). Patterns of marital change and parent–child interaction. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 53*, 487–498.
- Block, J., Block, J., & Morrison, A. (1981). Parental agreement–disagreement on child-rearing orientations and gender-related personality correlates in children. *Child Development, 52*, 965–974.
- Bradbury, T. N., Beach, S. R., Fincham, F. D., & Nelson, G. M. (1996). Attributions and behavior in functional and dysfunctional marriages. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology, 64*, 569–576.
- Bradbury, T. N., & Fincham, F. D. (1992). Attributions and behavior in marital interaction. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 63*, 613–628.
- Bradbury, T. N., Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (2000). Research on the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction: A decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62*(4), 964–980.
- Bradbury, T. N., Rogge, R., & Lawrence, E. (2001). Reconsidering the role of conflict in marriage. In A. Booth, A. C. Crouter, & M. L. Clements (Eds.), *Couples in conflict* (pp. 59–81). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Brody, G. H., Arias, I., & Fincham, F. D. (1996). Linking marital and child attributions to family processes and parent–child relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology, 10*(4), 408–421.
- Brody, G. H., & Forehand, R. (1985). The efficacy of parent training with maritally distressed and nondistressed mothers: A multimethod assessment. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 23*, 291–296.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1986). Ecology of the family as a context for human development: Research perspectives. *Developmental Psychology, 22*(6), 723–742.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). Ecological systems theory. In R. Vasta (Ed.), *Six theories of child development: Revised formulations and current issues* (pp. 187–249). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Ed: "Block, J., Block, J."
 ok? yes

- Buehler, C., Anthony, C., Krishnakumar, A., & Stone, G. (1997). Interparental conflict and youth problem behaviors: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Child & Family Studies, 6*, 223–247.
- Buehler, C., & Gerard, J. M. (2002). Marital conflict, ineffective parenting, and children's and adolescents' maladjustment. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 64*, 78–92.
- Bugental, D. B., Blue, J., & Cruzcosa, M. (1989). Perceived control over caregiving outcomes: Implications for child abuse. *Developmental Psychology, 25*(4), 532–539.
- Bugental, D. B., & Johnston, C. (2000). Parental and child cognitions in the context of the family. *Annual Review of Psychology, 51*, 315–344.
- Burman, B., Margolin, G., & John, R. S. (1993). America's angriest home videos: Behavioral contingencies observed in home reenactments of marital conflict. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 61*(1), 28–39.
- Carels, R. A., & Baucom, D. H. (1999). Support in marriage: Factors associated with on-line perceptions of support helpfulness. *Journal of Family Psychology, 13*, 131–144.
- Christensen, A., & Heavey, C. L. (1990). Gender and social structure in the demand/withdraw pattern of marital conflict. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 59*(1), 73–81.
- Christensen, A., & Margolin, G. (1988). Conflict and alliance in distressed and non-distressed families. In R. Hinde & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), *Relationships within families* (pp. 263–282). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Christensen, A., & Walczynski, P. T. (1997). Conflict and satisfaction in couples. In R. J. Sternberg & M. Hojjat (Eds.), *Satisfaction in close relationships* (pp. 249–274). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Cohen, J. (1977). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. New York: Academic Press.
- Coiro, M. J., & Emery, R. E. (1998). Do marriage problems affect fathering more than mothering? A quantitative and qualitative review. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 1*(1), 23–40.
- Collins, W. A. (1990). Parent-child relationships in the transition to adolescence: Continuity and change in interaction, affect, and cognition. In R. Montemayor, G. Adams, & T. Gullotta (Eds.), *Advances in adolescent development: Vol. 2. From childhood to adolescence: A transitional period?* (pp. 85–106). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Conger, R. D., Rueter, M. A., & Elder, G. H., Jr. (1999). Couple resilience to economic pressure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*, 54–71.
- Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (1992). *When partners become parents: The big life change for couples*. New York: Basic Books.
- Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (2000). *When partners become parents: The big life change for couples*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cowan, P. A., & Cowan, C. P. (2002). Interventions as tests of family systems theories: Marital and family relationships in children's development and psychopathology. *Development and Psychopathology, 14*, 731–759.
- Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P., Ablow, J., Johnson, V. K., & Measelle, J. (Eds.). (in press). *The family context of parenting in children's adaptation to elementary school*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cowan, C. P., Cowan, P. A., Heming, G., Garrett, E., Coysh, W. S., Curtis-Boles, H., & Boles, A. J. (1985). Transition to parenthood: His, hers, and theirs. *Journal of Family Issues, 6*, 451–481.
- Cox, M. J., Paley, B., & Harter, K. (2001). Interparental conflict and parent-child relationships. In J. H. Grych & F. D. Fincham (Eds.), *Interparental conflict and child development: Theory, research, and applications* (pp. 249–272). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. (1994). *Children and marital conflict: The impact of family dispute and resolution*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Cummings, E. M., Davies, P. T., & Campbell, S. B. (2000). *Developmental psychopathology and family process*. New York: Guilford Press.

- Cummings, E. M., Davies, P. T., & Simpson, K. S. (1994). Marital conflict, gender, and children's appraisals and coping efficacy as mediators of child adjustment. *Journal of Family Psychology, 8*(2), 141–149.
- Cummings, E. M., Iannotti, R. J., & Zahn-Walker, C. (1985). The influence of conflict between adults on the emotions and aggression of young children. *Developmental Psychology, 21*, 495–507.
- Cummings, E. M., Zahn-Walker, C., & Radke-Yarrow, M. (1981). Young children's responses to expressions of anger and affection by others in the family. *Child Development, 52*, 1274–1282.
- Dadds, M. R., Schwartz, S., & Sanders, M. R. (1987). Marital discord and treatment outcome in behavioral treatment of child conduct disorders. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 55*, 396–403.
- Davies, P. T., & Cummings, E. M. (1994). Marital conflict and child adjustment: An emotional security hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 116*(3), 387–411.
- Davies, P. T., & Lindsay, L. L. (2001). Does gender moderate the effects of marital conflict on children? In J. H. Grych & F. D. Fincham (Eds.), *Interparental conflict and child development: Theory, research, and applications* (pp. 64–97). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deal, J. E., Hagan, M. S., Bass, B., Hetherington, E. M., & Clingempeel, G. (1999). Marital interaction in dyadic and triadic contexts: Continuities and discontinuities. *Family Process, 38*(1), 105–115.
- DeVito, C., & Hopkins, J. (2001). Attachment, parenting, and marital dissatisfaction as predictors of disruptive behavior in preschoolers. *Development and Psychopathology, 13*, 215–231.
- Dix, T. (1991). The affective organization of parenting: Adaptive and maladaptive processes. *Psychological Bulletin, 110*, 3–25.
- Easterbrooks, M. A., & Emde, R. N. (1988). Marital and parent-child relationships: The role of affect in the family system. In R. Hinde & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), *Relationships within families* (pp. 83–103). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Emery, R. E., Fincham, F. D., & Cummings, E. M. (1992). Parenting in context: Systemic thinking about parental conflict and its influence on children. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 60*, 909–912.
- Emery, R. E., & Tuer, M. (1993). Parenting and the marital relationship. In T. Luster & L. Okagaki (Eds.), *Parenting: An ecological perspective* (pp. 121–148). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Erel, O., & Burman, B. (1995). Interrelatedness of marital relations and parent-child relations: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 118*, 108–132.
- Fauber, R., Forehand, R., Thomas, A. M., & Wierson, M. (1990). A mediational model of the impact of marital conflict on adolescent adjustment in intact and divorced families: The role of disrupted parenting. *Child Development, 61*, 1112–1123.
- Fauber, R. L., & Long, N. (1991). Children in context: The role of the family in child psychotherapy. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 59*, 813–820.
- Feeney, J. A., Noller, P., & Ward, C. (1997). Marital satisfaction and spousal interaction. In R. J. Sternberg & M. Hojjat (Eds.), *Satisfaction in close relationships* (pp. 160–189). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Feinberg, M. E. (2002). Coparenting and the transition to parenthood: A framework for prevention. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 5*(3), 173–195.
- Fincham, F. D. (1998). Child development and marital relations. *Child Development, 69*, 543–574.
- Fincham, F. D. (2001). Attributions and close relationships: From balkanization to integration. In G. J. Fletcher & M. Clark (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of social psychology* (pp. 3–31). Oxford: Blackwells.
- Fincham, F. D. (2003). Marital conflict: Correlates, structure, and context. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 12*, 23–27.

- Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (1999). Conflict in marriage: Implications for working with couples. *Annual Review of Psychology, 50*, 47-77.
- Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R., & Kemp-Fincham, S. I. (1997). Marital quality: A new theoretical perspective. In R. J. Sternberg & M. Hojjat (Eds.), *Satisfaction in close relationships* (pp. 275-304). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Fincham, F. D., & Bradbury, T. N. (1987). The assessment of marital quality: A reevaluation. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 49*, 797-809.
- Fincham, F. D., & Grych, J. H. (1991). Explanations for family events in distressed and nondistressed couples: Is one type of explanation used consistently? *Journal of Family Psychology, 4*, 341-353.
- Fincham, F. D., Grych, J. H., & Osborne, L. N. (1994). Does marital conflict cause child maladjustment? Directions and challenges for longitudinal research. *Journal of Family Psychology, 8*, 128-140.
- Fincham, F. D., & Linfield, K. J. (1997). A new look at marital quality: Can spouses feel positive and negative about their marriage? *Journal of Family Psychology, 11*, 489-502.
- Floyd, F. J., Gilliom, L. A., & Costigan, C. L. (1998). Marriage and the parenting alliance: Longitudinal prediction of change in parenting perceptions and behaviors. *Child Development, 69*, 1461-1479.
- Floyd, F. J., & Zmich, D. E. (1991). Marriage and the parenting partnership: Perceptions and interactions of parents with mentally retarded and typically developing children. *Child Development, 62*, 1434-1448.
- Frosch, C., Mangelsdorf, S., & McHale, J. (2000). Marital behavior and the security of preschooler-parent attachment relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology, 14*, 144-161.
- Gable, S., Belsky, J., & Crnic, K. (1992). Marriage, parenting, and child development: Progress and prospects. *Journal of Family Psychology, 5*(3/4), 276-294.
- Gjerde, P. F. (1986). The interpersonal structure of family interaction settings: Parent-adolescent relations in dyads and triads. *Developmental Psychology, 22*(3), 297-304.
- Goldberg, W. A., & Easterbrooks, M. A. (1984). Role of marital quality in toddler development. *Developmental Psychology, 20*, 504-514.
- Gordis, E. B., Margolin, G., & John, R. S. (2001). Parents' hostility in dyadic marital and triadic family settings and children's behavior problems. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 69*, 727-734.
- Grych, J. H. (2002). Marital relationships and parenting. In M. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 4. Social conditions and applied parenting* (pp. 203-225). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Grych, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (1990). Marital conflict and children's adjustment: A cognitive-contextual framework. *Psychological Bulletin, 108*, 267-290.
- Grych, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (1992). Interventions for children of divorce: Toward greater integration of research and action. *Psychological Bulletin, 111*, 434-454.
- Grych, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (2001). *Interparental conflict and child development: Theory, research, and applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Halford, W. K., Gravestock, F. M., Lowe, R., & Scheldt, S. (1992). Toward a behavioral ecology of stressful marital interactions. *Behavioral Assessment, 14*, 199-217.
- Harold, G. T., Fincham, F. D., Osborne, L. N., & Conger, R. D. (1997). Mom and dad are at it again: Adolescent perceptions of marital conflict and adolescent psychological distress. *Developmental Psychology, 33*, 333-350.
- Heinicke, C. M. (1995). Determinants of the transition to parenting. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 3. Status and social conditions of parenting* (pp. 277-303). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Howes, P., & Markman, H. J. (1989). Marital quality and child functioning: A longitudinal investigation. *Child Development, 60*, 1044-1051.

- Huston, T. L., & Chorost, A. F. (1994). Behavioral buffers on the effect of negativity on marital satisfaction: A longitudinal study. *Personal Relationships, 1*, 223–239.
- Johnson, V. K. (2001). Marital interaction, family organization, and differences in parenting behavior: Explaining variations across family interaction contexts. *Family Process, 40*, 333–342.
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1995). The longitudinal course of marital quality and stability: A review of theory, method, and research. *Psychological Bulletin, 118*, 3–34.
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (1997). Neuroticism, marital interaction, and the trajectory of marital satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72*, 1075–1092.
- Karney, B. R., Bradbury, T. N., Fincham, F. D., & Sullivan, K. T. (1994). The role of negative affectivity in the association between attributions and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology, 66*(2), 413–424.
- Katz, L. F., & Gottman, J. M. (1996). Spillover effects of marital conflict: In search of parenting and coparenting mechanisms. In J. P. McHale & P. A. Cowan (Eds.), *Understanding how family-level dynamics affect children's development: Studies of two-parent families* (pp. 57–76). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kerig, P. K. (1995). Triangles in the family circle: Effects of family structure on marriage, parenting, and child adjustment. *Journal of Family Psychology, 9*, 28–43.
- Kerig, P. K., Cowan, P. A., & Cowan, C. P. (1993). Marital quality and gender differences in parent-child interaction. *Developmental Psychology, 29*, 931–939.
- Kitzmann, K. M. (2000). Effects of marital conflict on subsequent triadic family interactions and parenting. *Developmental Psychology, 36*, 3–13.
- Krishnakumar, A., & Buehler, C. (2000). Interparental conflict and parenting behaviors: A meta-analytic review. *Family Relations, 49*, 25–44.
- Kurdek, L. A. (1998). Prospective predictors of parenting satisfaction for fathers and mothers with young children. *Journal of Family Psychology, 12*, 56–65.
- Larrance, D. T., & Twentyman, C. T. (1983). Maternal attributions and child abuse. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 92*(4), 449–457.
- Lewis, C. E., Siegal, J. M., & Lewis, M. A. (1984). Feeling bad: Exploring sources of distress among pre-adolescent children. *American Journal of Public Health, 74*, 117–122.
- Lindahl, K. M., Clements, M., & Markman, H. (1997). Predicting marital and parent functioning in dyads and triads: A longitudinal investigation of marital processes. *Journal of Family Psychology, 11*, 139–151.
- Lindahl, K. M., & Malik, N. M. (1999). Observations of marital conflict and power: Relations with parenting in the triad. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61*, 320–330.
- Locke, H. J., & Wallace, K. M. (1959). Short marital adjustment prediction tests: Their reliability and validity. *Marriage and Family Living, 21*, 251–255.
- Margolin, G., & Christensen, A. (1981). *The treatment of families with marital and child problems*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy, Toronto.
- Margolin, G., Christensen, A., & John, R. S. (1996). The continuance and spillover of everyday tensions in distressed and nondistressed families. *Journal of Family Psychology, 10*, 304–321.
- Margolin, G., Gordis, E. B., & John, R. S. (2001). Coparenting: A link between marital conflict and parenting in two-parent families. *Journal of Family Psychology, 15*, 3–21.
- McHale, J. P. (1995). Coparenting and triadic interactions during infancy: The roles of marital distress and child gender. *Developmental Psychology, 31*, 985–996.
- McHale, J. P. (1997). Overt and covert parenting processes in the family. *Family Process, 36*, 183–201.
- McHale, J. P., Johnson, D., & Sinclair, R. (1999). Family dynamics, preschoolers' family representations, and preschool peer relationships. *Early Education & Development, 10*, 373–401.
- McHale, J. P., Kuersten, R., & Lauretti, A. (1996). New directions in the study of family-level dynamics during infancy and early childhood. In J. P. McHale & P. A. Cowan (Eds.), *Under-*

- standing how family-level dynamics affect children's development: *Studies of two-parent families* (pp. 5–26). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- McHale, J. P., Kuersten-Hogan, R., Lauretti, A., & Rasmussen, J. L. (2000). Parental reports of coparenting and observed coparenting behavior during the toddler period. *Journal of Family Psychology, 14*, 220–236.
- McHale, J. P., Lauretti, A., Talbot, J., & Pouquette, C. (2002). Retrospect and prospect in the psychological study of coparenting and family group process. In J. P. McHale & W. S. Grolnick (Eds.), *Retrospect and prospect in the psychological study of families* (pp. 127–165). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- McHale, J. P., & Rasmussen, J. L. (1998). Coparental and family group-level dynamics during infancy: Early family precursors of child and family functioning during preschool. *Development & Psychopathology, 10*, 39–59.
- Norton, R. (1983). Measuring marital quality: A critical look at the dependent variable. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 45*, 141–151.
- O'Brien, M., & Peyton, V. (2002). Parenting attitudes and marital intimacy: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology, 16*, 118–127.
- O'Leary, K. D., Slep, A., & O'Leary, S. (2000). Co-occurrence of partner and parent aggression: Research and treatment implications. *Behavior Therapy, 31*, 631–648.
- Oltmanns, T. F., Broderick, J. E., & O'Leary, K. D. (1977). Marital adjustment and the efficacy of behavior therapy with children. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology, 45*(5), 724–729.
- Osborne, L. N., & Fincham, F. D. (1996). Marital conflict, parent-child relationships, and child adjustment: Does gender matter? *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 42*(1), 48–75.
- Owen, M. T., & Cox, M. J. (1997). Marital conflict and the development of infant-parent attachment relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology, 11*(2), 152–164.
- Pasch, L. A., & Bradbury, T. N. (1998). Social support, conflict, and the development of marital dysfunction. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology, 66*(2), 219–230.
- Reid, W. J., & Crisafulli, A. (1990). Marital discord and child behavior problems: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 18*(1), 105–117.
- Reis, H. T., & Gable, S. L. (2003). Toward a positive psychology of relationships. In C. L. Keyes & J. Haidt (Eds.), *Flourishing: Positive psychology and the life well-lived* (pp. 129–159). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Repetti, R. (1989). Effects of daily workload on subsequent behavior during marital interaction: The roles of social withdrawal and spouse support. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 57*, 651–659.
- Rutter, M. (1994). Family discord and conduct disorder: Cause, consequence, or correlate? *Journal of Family Psychology, 8*, 170–186.
- Saitzyk, A. R., Floyd, F. J., & Kroll, A. B. (1997). Sequential analysis of autonomy-interdependence and affiliation-disaffiliation in couples' social support interactions. *Personal Relationships, 4*, 341–360.
- Schoppe, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., & Frosch, C. A. (2001). Coparenting, family process, and family structure: Implications for preschoolers' externalizing behavior problems. *Journal of Family Psychology, 15*(3), 526–545.
- Schumm, W. R., Paff-Bergen, L. A., Hatch, R. C., Obiorah, F. C., Copeland, J. M., Meens, L. D., & Bugaighis, M. A. (1986). Concurrent and discriminant validity of the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 48*, 381–387.
- Seifer, R., & Dickstein, S. (2000). Parental mental illness and infant development. In C. H. Zeanah, Jr. (Ed.), *Handbook of infant mental health* (2nd ed., pp. 145–160). New York: Guilford Press.
- Seligman, M. E. (2002). Positive psychology, positive prevention, and positive therapy. In C. R. Snyder & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Handbook of positive psychology* (pp. 3–9). London: Oxford University Press.

- Shek, D. T. (1998). Linkage between marital quality and parent-child relationship: A longitudinal study in the Chinese culture. *Journal of Family Issues, 19*(6), 687-703.
- Sheldon, K. M., & King, L. (2001). Why positive psychology is necessary. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 216-217.
- Slep, A. S., & O'Leary, S. (1998). The effects of maternal attributions on parenting: An experimental analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology, 12*(2), 234-243.
- Snyder, J. R. (1998). Marital conflict and child adjustment: What about gender? *Developmental Review, 18*, 390-420.
- Spanier, G. B. (1976). Measuring dyadic adjustment: New scales for assessing the quality of marriage and similar dyads. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 38*, 15-28.
- Stocker, C. M., & Youngblade, L. (1999). Marital conflict and parental hostility: Links with children's sibling and peer relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology, 13*(4), 598-609.
- Stright, A. D., & Neitzel, C. (2003). Beyond parenting: Coparenting and children's classroom adjustment. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 27*(1), 31-39.
- Vandewater, E. A., & Lansford, J. E. (1998). Influences of family structure and parental conflict on children's well-being. *Family Relations, 47*(4), 323-330.
- Vuchinich, S., Emery, R. E., & Cassidy, J. (1988). Family members and third parties in dyadic family conflict: Strategies, alliances, and outcomes. *Child Development, 59*(5), 1293-1302.
- Webster-Stratton, C., & Hammond, M. (1999). Marital conflict management skills, parenting style, and early-onset conduct problems: Processes and Pathways. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, 40*, 917-927.
- Wilson, B. J., & Gottman, J. M. (1995). Marital interaction and parenting. In M. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 4. Applied and practical parenting* (pp. 33-55). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Zimet, D. M., & Jacob, T. (2001). Influences of marital conflict on child adjustment: Review of theory and research. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 4*, 319-335.