

Marital Quality and Parent-Child Relationships

Amato, P. R. (1986). Marital conflict, the parent-child relationship, and child self-esteem. *Family Relations, 35, 403-410.*

Examined the association between levels of marital conflict and the self-esteem of 132 children (aged 8-9 yrs) and 142 adolescents (aged 15-16 yrs) in Australia. Marital conflict was negatively associated with self-esteem among primary school girls but not among primary school boys. Weak negative associations between conflict and self-esteem were found for male and female adolescents. Marital conflict was negatively associated with the quality of the child-father relationship in all groups except among primary school boys. The negative effects of conflict tended to be strongest when children's relationships were poor with both parents. However, for young females, conflict was also negatively related to self-esteem when relationships with both parents were good.

Belsky, J., & Fearon, R. M. P. (2004). Exploring marriage-parenting typologies and their contextual antecedents and developmental sequelae. *Development & Psychopathology, 16, 501-523.*

To identify types of families, latent-class analysis was applied to (reported) marriage and (observed) parenting measures obtained during the infancy, toddler, and/or preschool years for 828 two-parent families participating in the NICHD Study of Child Care. Five types of families were identified: Consistently Supportive (i.e., good parenting, good marriage, 15% of sample), Consistently Moderate (i.e., moderate marriage, moderate parenting, 43%), Consistently Risky (i.e., poor parenting, poor marriage, 16%), Good Parenting/Poor Marriage (19%), and Poor Parenting/Good Marriage (7%). When groups were compared in terms of contextual antecedents (measured at child age 1 month) and child cognitive-academic and socioemotional functioning in first grade, results indicated (a) that contextual risks increased linearly and children's functioning decreased linearly as one moved across the first three aforementioned groups; and after controlling for group differences in background factors (b) that children in the Good-Parenting/Poor-Marriage families outperformed those in the Poor Parenting/Good Marriage; (c) that there was evidence of "added value" developmentally when children experienced two sources of support (i.e., good marriage and good parenting) rather than just one (i.e., good marriage or good parenting); but (d) that there was only modest evidence of protective buffering whereby children experiencing just good parenting (but not just good marriages) outperformed children experiencing poor parenting and poor marriages. Results are discussed in terms of the relative influence of marriage and parenting on child development and the potential benefits of applying typological approaches to the study of marriage-parenting family subsystems.

Belsky, J., Youngblade, L., Rovine, M., & Volling, B. (1991). Patterns of marital change and parent-child interaction. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 53, 487-498.*

To examine the interrelation of marital and parent-child subsystems in the family, 100 families participating in the Pennsylvania Infant and Family Development Project were studied when their 1st child turned 3. The goal of the work was to determine whether maternal, paternal, and child behavior differ in households in which marital quality declines vs. those in which it does not. Distinct patterns of marital change, identified on the basis of marital reports obtained at 4 points in time (during pregnancy and at 3, 9, and 36 mo), were related to parent and child behavior that was measured during free-play and teaching sessions and composited by means of

cluster analytic procedures. Results reveal more systematic associations between marital change patterns and father-child interaction than between marital changes and mother-child interaction. Whereas discerned associations in the case of men indicate that marriages that were deteriorating in quality were associated with more negative and intrusive father behavior and more negative and disobedient child behavior, some evidence of a more compensatory process was discerned in the case of associations between mothers' marriage and behavior. Findings are discussed in terms of relationship boundaries, styles, and alliances.

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*, 408-421.

The contribution of marital attributions to parenting and parent-child interaction was examined, along with the contribution of children's attributions for negative parental behavior to ineffective parent-child communication. Data from 170 children 10 to 12 years old (84 girls, 86 boys) were used to test a model of hypothesized links among conflict-promoting marital attributions, negative marital context, parenting practices, children's attributions for parent behavior, and ineffective parent-child communication. Husbands' and wives' marital attributions were related to the marital context, which was related to ineffective parent-child communication. Husbands' and wives' conflict-promoting marital attributions also were related to parenting practices, which were related to children's attributions for negative parental behavior. Children's attributions also accounted for unique variance in ineffective parent-child communication.

Brody, G. H., Pillegrini, A. D., & Sigel, I. E. (1986). Marital quality and mother-child and father-child interactions with school-aged children. *Developmental Psychology, 22*, 291-296.

The objective of the present study was to examine parent-child interactions with school-aged children in the context of the parents' marital relationship. Sixty families with a school-aged child served as subjects. Mother-child and father-child teaching interactions were videotaped, from which frequency counts of efficacious teaching behaviors were obtained for each parent-child teaching interaction. Parents completed a self-report measure of marital problems. A dyad score of marital problems was formed by adding the husbands' and wives' scores. A two-level variable of marital problems was then derived by performing a median split on the marital problem dyad scores. Normative comparisons suggested that the couples whose scores fell below the median were characterized as nondistressed and the couples whose scores fell above the median were characterized as slightly discontented with their marital relationship. Few differences in teaching styles were detected between mothers and fathers in the nondistressed group. Mothers in the slightly discontented group used more questions, positive feedback, informational feedback, and verbal task management and intruded less often into their children's learning efforts than did the fathers in this group. Fathers with increased reports of marital problems used less positive feedback and were more intrusive; mothers in this group appeared to compensate for a less than satisfactory marriage by being more involved in teaching their children. In turn, children of slightly discontented mothers were more actively responsive to their teaching behaviors than were children of nondistressed mothers.

Buehler, C., & Gerard, J. M. (2002). Marital conflict, ineffective parenting, and children's and adolescents' maladjustment. *Journal of Marriage & Family* 64, 78-92.

Data from the 1988 National Survey on Families and Households were analyzed to examine the associations among marital conflict, ineffective parenting, and children's and adolescents' maladjustment. The weighted sample for this study includes 2,541 married parents with a target child aged 2-18 yrs living in the household. Data indicate that parents' use of harsh discipline and low parental involvement helped explain the connection between marital conflict and children's maladjustment in children aged 2-11 yrs. Parent-child conflict was measured only in families with a target teenager and also was a significant mediator. Although ineffective parenting explained part of the association between marital conflict and children's maladjustment, independent effects of marital conflict remained in families with target children aged 2-11 yrs (but not for families with a teenager). With a few exceptions, this pattern of findings was consistent for mothers' and fathers' reports, for daughters and sons, for families with various ethnic backgrounds, and for families living in and out of poverty.

Burman, B., John, R. S., & Margolin, G. (1987). Effects of marital and parent-child relations on children's adjustment. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 1, 91-108.

Investigated the effects of marital dissatisfaction, marital conflict, and the parent-child relationship on the childhood adjustment of 30 boys and 26 girls (aged 6-14 yrs) in 47 nonclinic families. In support of previous findings, results of a battery of tests show a strong relationship between mothers' marital satisfaction and conflict style and their own ratings of boys' adjustment. However, based on fathers' and children's reports, marital satisfaction and conflict style did not contribute unique variance over the parent-child relationship in predicting children's adjustment.

Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P., Ablow, J., Johnson, V., & Measelle, J. (Eds.). (2005). The family context of parenting in children's adaptation to school. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. (published as a book and as part of Parenting: Science and Practice Monographs in a series edited by Marc Bornstein)

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 & Psychopathology*, 14, 731-759.

This paper addresses the role of family-based studies of preventive and therapeutic interventions in our understanding of normal development and psychopathology. The emphasis is on interventions designed to improve parent-child and/or marital relationships as a way of facilitating development and reducing psychopathology in children and adolescents. Intervention designs provide the gold standard for testing causal hypotheses. We begin by discussing the complexity of validating these hypotheses and the implications of the shift from a traditional emphasis on theories of etiology to developmental psychopathology's newer paradigm describing risks, pathways, and outcomes. We summarize correlational studies that document the fact that difficult and ineffective parent-child and marital relationships function as risk factors for children's cognitive, social, and emotional problems in childhood and adolescence. We then review prevention studies and therapy evaluation studies that establish some specific parenting and marital variables as causal risk factors with respect to these outcomes. Our discussion

focuses on what intervention studies have revealed so far and suggests an agenda for further research.

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). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

(from the chapter) To understand how marital conflict affects the way parent-child relationships develop, it is important to conceptualize the family as a system with multiple, mutually influential levels and relationships existing across time. Unfortunately, little research addresses the link between marital conflict and parent-child relationships in this way. These and other issues are considered in this chapter. The authors begin the chapter with a discussion of the different pathways that may link marital and parent-child relationships. They then turn to consider whether these relations differ by gender of child and parent. Finally, they conclude with a discussion of future directions.

Cummings, E. M., & Davies, P. T. (2002). Effects of marital conflict on children: Recent advances and emerging themes in process-oriented research. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 43, 31-63.

The effects of marital conflict on children's adjustment are well documented. For the past decade research has increasingly focused on advancing a process-level understanding of these effects, that is, accounting for the particular responses and patterns embedded within specific contexts, histories, and developmental periods that account for children's outcomes over time. As a vehicle for presenting an update, this review follows the framework for process-oriented research initially proposed by E. M. Cummings and J. S. Cummings (1988), concentrating on recent research developments, and also considering new and emerging themes in this area of research. Understanding of the impact of marital conflict on children as a function of time-related processes remains a gap in a process-oriented conceptualization of effects. Based on this review, a revised model for a process-oriented approach on the effects of marital discord on children is proposed and suggestions are made for future research directions.

Cummings, E. M., Goeke-Morey, M. C., & Graham, M. A. (2002). Interparental relations as a dimension of parenting. Monographs in parenting. In J. G. Borkowski & S. L. Ramey (Eds.), *Parenting and the child's world: Influences on academic, intellectual, and social-emotional development* (pp. 251-263). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

(from the chapter) Suggests that interparental relations should be considered as another dimension of parenting behavior since such behaviors involve a volitional choice by the parents with regard to how to behave, and these behaviors have effects and implications for children's development and functioning. This chapter examines evidence that the parents' behavior in the context of marriage is a significant influence on child development. In particular, the authors focus on the implications for children's functioning of how parents work through their everyday disagreements and problems, that is, interparental conflict behavior. Conflict behavior is a predictor of marital happiness and risk for divorce and marital distress is by some reports the most common reason why adults seek psychological help. In recent years considerable evidence has also accumulated to indicate that the qualities of interparental conflict predict children's

adjustment. Thus, an accumulating literature supports the thesis of this report: that marital functioning merits inclusion as a dimension of parenting.

Davies, P. T., Sturge-Apple, M. L., & Cummings, E. M. (2004). Interdependencies among interparental discord and parenting practices: The role of adult vulnerability and relationship perturbations. *Development & Psychopathology, 16, 773-797.*

We examined the nature and directionality of associations between interparental discord and parenting practices in a sample of 227 mothers and fathers of kindergarten children over two measurement waves spaced 1 year apart. Cross-lagged models indicated that associations between interparental discord and maternal and paternal parenting practices (i.e., acceptance, discipline) were generally negligible with one exception: interparental discord at Time 1 predicted decreases in maternal acceptance from Time 1 to Time 2. However, consistent with the family systems conceptualization of the family as an open system, prospective associations among interparental and parent-child subsystems varied significantly as a function of parental depressive symptoms, interparental relationship insecurity, and child-rearing disagreements. The moderating role of adult characteristics commonly varied across the type of adult vulnerability (e.g., depressive symptoms, interparental relationship insecurity, child-rearing disagreements), dimension of parenting practices (e.g., maternal and paternal acceptance and inconsistent discipline), and the directionality of the paths between interparental and parent-child subsystems.

El-Sheikh, M., & Elmore-Staton, L. (2004). The link between marital conflict and child adjustment: Parent-child conflict and perceived attachments as mediators, potentiators, and mitigators of risk. *Development & Psychopathology, 16, 631-648.*

Parent-child conflict and perceived attachments to parents were examined as predictors, mediators, and moderators in the marital conflict-child adjustment connection in a sample of older children and young adolescents. After controlling for marital conflict, parent-child conflict predicted additional unique variance mainly for children's externalizing problems, and attachments to parents accounted for unique variance in children's externalizing and internalizing problems. Moderation effects illustrated that a higher level of parent-child conflict was a vulnerability factor, whereas a secure attachment was a protective factor, for behavior problems associated with marital conflict. Mediation effects were also evident and supported the proposition that parent-child conflict and attachment to parents mostly are partial mediators of effects in the marital conflict-child outcomes link. The findings illustrate the aggregation, potentiation, and amelioration of risk for adjustment problems associated with marital conflict, and highlight the importance of assessing multiple systems within the family.

Erel, O., & Burman, B. (1995). Interrelatedness of marital relations and parent-child relations: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 118, 108-132.*

It is widely assumed that a linkage, crucial to the understanding of child behavior, exists between marital and parent-child relationship quality. A meta-analysis of 68 studies was conducted to determine whether this linkage exists and, if so, whether the linkage is positive (as suggested by the spillover hypothesis) or negative (as suggested by the compensatory hypothesis). Results supported the spillover hypothesis; a positive and nonhomogeneous effect size of moderate magnitude was found ($d = 0.46$). This suggests that research in this area can move beyond the question of whether a positive or negative association exists to identifying moderators of the association. Examination of the impact of 13 potential moderators did not support the existence

of any of these variables that could be adequately examined. This suggests that the link between marital and parent-child relations functions as a more stable force than previously thought.

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.

Presents a study concerned with the development and testing of a structural equation model wherein the relation of interparental conflict to the adjustment problems of young adolescents is mediated through its impact on three aspects of parenting behavior: lax control, psychological control, and parental rejection.

Fauchier, A., & Margolin, G. (2004). Affection and conflict in marital and parent-child relationships. *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy, 30*, 197-211.

In this study, we examined affection and conflict in marital and parent-child relationships, as reported by mothers, fathers, and 9- and 10-year-old children in a community sample of 87 families. Affection and conflict were inversely related within relationships, with mixed findings across relationships. Most reports showed an association between marital and parent-child conflict as well as between marital and parent-child affection. According to fathers, however, the association between marital affection and father-child affection is moderated by marital conflict. Clinical implications of the associations between positive and negative dimensions of family interaction and of the links between marital and parent-child relations are discussed.

Feldman, S. S., Wentzel, K. R., Weinberger, D. A., & Munson, J. A. (1990). Marital satisfaction of parents of preadolescent boys and its relationship to family and child functioning. *Journal of Family Psychology, 4*, 213-234.

Investigated the relationship between parents' marital satisfaction (MS) and family and child outcomes among 50 mothers and 43 fathers with 6th-grade sons. Outcomes in 3 domains of functioning were studied: within-family functioning, 2 aspects of sons' social-emotional (SEM) adjustment (distress and restraint), and sons' academic achievement. Two mediators by which MS might influence the outcomes were also assessed: individual parental characteristics (i.e., SEM functioning) and child-rearing practices. Quality of the marital relationship was significantly related to outcomes in each domain of functioning. Mothers' MS was related to overall family functioning; fathers' MS was related to sons' school achievement and development of self-control. The relationship between fathers' MS and sons' self-restraint was accounted for by fathers' SEM functioning and child rearing.

Fincham, F. D. (1994). Understanding the association between marital conflict and child adjustment: An overview. *Journal of Family Psychology, 8*, 123-127.

To highlight advances in the literature linking marital discord and child adjustment, a heuristic distinction is drawn between 1st and 2nd generation research. A review of 1st generation research documenting the existence of an association between marital and child functioning points to the need for 2nd generation research on why this association exists. Several issues that will facilitate research on the mechanisms linking marital and child functioning are therefore discussed. This discussion provides a framework for outlining how each of the contributions to the special section advances understanding of the impact of marital discord on child adjustment.

Frosch, C. A., & Mangelsdorf, S. C. (2001). Marital behavior, parenting behavior, and multiple reports of preschoolers' behavior problems: Mediation or moderation? *Developmental Psychology, 37, 502-519.*

Associations among positive and conflictual marital behavior and multiple reports of child behavior problems were examined in a community sample of 78 families with 3-year-old children. Maternal and paternal parenting behaviors were tested as potential mediators and moderators. Parents reported on child behavior problems and were observed during parent-child interaction and couple discussion in the presence of the child. Observers and preschool teachers also reported on child behavior problems. Less positive marital engagement and greater conflict were associated with observers' reports, but not with parents' or teachers' reports, of more behavior problems. Associations between marital behavior and child behavior problems were not explained by maternal or paternal behavior; stronger support was found for moderating effects of parenting. Also, positive marital engagement was a slightly better predictor of child behavior problems than was marital conflict.

Frosch, C. A., Mangelsdorf, S. C., & McHale, J. L. (2000). Marital behavior and the security of preschooler-parent attachment relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology, 14, 144-161.*

Longitudinal and concurrent relations among positive and negative marital behaviors in 2 contexts and preschoolers' security of attachment were examined for 53 families. At 6 months postpartum, couples were observed in their homes during couple discussion and family play. At 3 years, parents completed the Attachment Q-Set (E. Waters, 1987); marital and parenting behavior was also observed. Interparental hostility during family play at 6 months predicted less secure preschooler-mother attachment. Greater marital conflict at 3 years was associated with less security with mother and father, whereas positive marital engagement at 3 years was associated with more secure child-father attachment. Mothers' parenting partially explained the linkages between marital behavior and child-mother attachment. These results highlight the impact of positive and negative marital behaviors on children's abilities to use their parents as a secure base.

Gonzales, N. A., Pitts, S. C., Hill, N. E., & Roosa, M. W. (2000). A mediational model of the impact of interparental conflict on child adjustment in a multiethnic, low-income sample. *Journal of Family Psychology, 14, 365-379.*

Path analysis was used to determine whether the effects of interparental conflict on children's depression and conduct disorder are mediated by 3 dimensions of parenting: acceptance, inconsistent discipline, and hostile control. The study extends the literature by testing this mediational model with a low-income, predominantly ethnic minority sample of preadolescent children and by examining the effects of multiple dimensions of interparental conflict from the child's perspective. Results supported the mediational model when analyses were based on child's reports of all variables but not when mother's reports were used to assess child depression and conduct problems. Exploratory analyses revealed unique mediational paths associated with conflict frequency and resolution, which were examined along with intensity as distinct dimensions of interparental conflict.

Grych, J. H. (2002). Marital relationships and parenting. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 4: Social conditions and applied parenting* (2nd ed., pp. 203-225). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

(from the chapter) This chapter examines the theoretical and empirical underpinnings of research on the relation between marriage and parenting. Although parenting experiences undoubtedly affect marital functioning as well, the chapter focuses on understanding how marital relationships may support or undermine parenting. After a brief overview of the development of research in this area, the conceptual perspectives that have informed this work are described and the body of empirical findings linking marital quality with different aspects of parenting, including behavior, affect, cognition, and coparenting processes, are reviewed. The chapter closes by considering critical issues that need to be investigated if we are to more fully understand the links between marriage and parenting.

Grych, J. H., & Fincham, F. D. (1990). Marital conflict and children's adjustment: A cognitive-contextual framework. *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 267-290.

Marital problems have been related to numerous indexes of maladjustment in children. Although several parameters of this association have been identified, the process by which exposure to interparental conflict gives rise to adjustment problems in children is largely unexplored. Research on the link between marital conflict and child maladjustment therefore is critically evaluated, and a framework is presented that organizes existing studies and suggests directions for future research on processes that may account for the association. According to the framework, the impact of marital conflict is mediated by children's understanding of the conflict, which is shaped by contextual, cognitive, and developmental factors. The implications of the framework for children's adjustment are discussed.

Jaycox, L. H., & Repetti, R. L. (1993). Conflict in families and the psychological adjustment of preadolescent children. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 7, 344-355.

We examined the cross-sectional association between conflict in families and child psychological adjustment in 72 4th-5th graders. Multiple informants (parents, children, and teachers) assessed conflict and anger in the social climate of the home, marital discord, negative emotional tone in the parent-child relationship, and child adjustment. As predicted, child adjustment was more strongly related to family conflict than to marital discord. There was a stronger association between family conflict and maladjustment in girls. Moreover, the association between a general climate of conflict at home and child maladjustment was independent of anger and discord in the marital or parent-child relationships. During the study of the effects of interpersonal conflict at home, it appears to be important to identify the locus of anger and aggression. Findings suggest that researchers should distinguish between a general climate of conflict in the family and interparental discord.

Jenkins, J. M., & Smith, M. A. (1991). Marital disharmony and children's behaviour problems: Aspects of a poor marriage that affect children adversely. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, 32, 793-810.

Examined the elements of the parental marital relationship that put children at risk for behavioral and emotional problems, using data from 119 families with a child aged 9-12 yrs. The relationships among children's emotional and behavioral problems and overt parental conflict, covert tension between parents, and discrepancies in childrearing practices were assessed. Overt

parental conflict related most strongly to children's emotional and behavioral problems using mothers', fathers', and children's accounts of the children's symptoms. Aspects of the parent-child relationship were not mediating variables in the relationship between parental conflict and children's emotional and behavioral problems.

Jouriles, E. N., & Farris, A. M. (1992). Effects of marital conflict on subsequent parent-son interactions. *Behavior Therapy, 23*, 355-374.

48 maritally intact families with sons aged 41-82 mo were assigned to 1 of 4 conditions in which conflictual or nonconflictual marital interaction was followed by mother-son or father-son interaction. Marital conflict altered parents' general conversation with their sons, fathers' delivery of confusing and threatening commands, and sons' noncompliance to fathers' commands. Effects of marital conflict on each of these behaviors dissipated over time. Additionally, marital conflict interacted with parent gender, differentially influencing the probability of parents responding to noncompliance with vague/confusing commands.

Jouriles, E. N., Pfiffner, L. J., & O'Leary, S. G. (1988). Marital conflict, parenting, and toddler conduct problems. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 16*, 197-206.

Examined relationships involving marital conflict, parenting, and toddler conduct problems using 60 mother and toddler (aged 18-31 mo) dyads. Mothers completed measures of marital satisfaction and conflict and toddler conduct problems; dyads were also observed in a laboratory setting. Marital conflict was positively correlated with observations of toddler deviance and maternal reports of conduct problems as well as with the frequency of maternal disapproval statements directed toward sons' misbehaviors. Marital conflict was correlated negatively with the ratio of disapproval statements to daughters' misbehaviors. Results suggest the importance of examining parenting practices and child characteristics that may mediate the relationship between marital conflict and child behavior problems.

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.

Mothers, fathers, and 6- to 10-year-old children used the Family Cohesion Index to type their family system as cohesive (all close), separate (all distant), triangulated (cross-generational coalitions), or detouring (child excluded from the parental subsystem). Family members agreed modestly with one another. Multivariate analyses of variance showed that parents in triangulated families were higher in marital conflict and dissatisfaction than were cohesive and detouring parents. Children in triangulated families reported more interparental conflict and more negative affect in the family. Children in detouring families rated themselves higher in self-blame for their parents' conflicts, and their parents rated them highest in internalizing problems. Parents in separate families rated their children highest in externalizing problems. Implications for the integration of family systems perspectives with research on marriage and parenting are discussed.

Kerig, P. K., Cowan, P. A., & Cowan, C. P. (1993). Marital quality and gender differences in parent-child interaction. *Developmental Psychology, 29*, 931-939.

This microanalytic study of family interaction establishes links among marital quality, gender, and parent-child relationships. Dyadic conversational exchanges between 38 mothers and fathers and their 3.5 year-old first-born son or daughter were analyzed. Marital quality was related to

gender differences in both parent and child behavior, with less maritally adjusted fathers of daughters showing the most negativity toward their children. Sequential analyses showed that gender differences in parents' and children's responses to one another were also mediated by marital quality. Mothers in less satisfied marriages were the least accepting of daughters' assertiveness and were more likely to reciprocate the negative affect of sons. Daughters of parents lower in marital satisfaction were less compliant with their fathers. Implications of these findings for understanding gender differences in the effects of marital conflict on parenting and child development are discussed.

Kitzmann, K. M. (2000). Effects of marital conflict on subsequent triadic family interactions and parenting. *Developmental Psychology, 36, 3-13.*

This study examined marital conflict's indirect effects on children through disruptions in family alliances and parenting. Forty married couples were observed interacting with their 6-8-year-old sons after pleasant and conflictual discussions. After conflictual discussion, fathers showed lower support/engagement toward sons, and coparenting styles were less democratic. Couple negativity was correlated with family negativity, regardless of the topic of discussion, which suggests continuity in the affective quality of the two family subsystems. Mothers' marital satisfaction moderated families' responses to the experimental manipulation. The results provide stronger evidence than previously available of a causal link between conflict and disrupted parenting. Further research is needed to identify which conflict-related disruptions in parenting influence the development of children's problems.

Krishnakumar, A., & Buehler, C. (2000). Interparental conflict and parenting behaviors: A meta-analytic review. *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies, 49, 25-44.*

Examined the association between interparental conflict and parenting using meta-analytic review techniques. 138 effect sizes from 39 studies are analyzed. The overall average weighted effect size is -0.62, indicating a moderate association and support for the spillover hypothesis. The parenting behaviors most impacted by interparental conflict are harsh discipline and parental acceptance. Several moderating effects for subject and method characteristics are significant.

Kurdek, L. A. (1996). Parenting satisfaction and marital satisfaction in mothers and fathers with young children. *Journal of Family Psychology, 10, 331-342.*

This study examined parenting satisfaction (PS) and marital satisfaction (MS) in married couples over 4 yrs (ns ranged from 59 to 87). There was little evidence of interdomain spillover in that, for both husbands and wives, PS and MS were generally unrelated at each assessment and change in PS was unrelated to change in MS. With regard to interparent spillover, the link between spouses' MS tended to be stronger than the link between spouses' PS at each assessment, and the link between spouses' change in MS was stronger than the link between spouses' change in PS. A typology of satisfaction with family life is proposed as one way of integrating the study of marital relationships and parent-child relationships.

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.*

This study assessed longitudinally whether couples' dysregulated negative affect before parenthood is predictive of conflict, as well as diminished affective quality, in family relationships 5 years later. Observations of 25 couples' marital communication were made before parenthood and again 5 years later, when data also were collected on parent-child and family interactions. Husbands' prechild marital behavior and couples' prechild negative escalation were predictive of husbands' conflict and triangulation of the child into marital conflict. Family-level functioning (e. g. , coalition formation) was predicted by prechild negative escalation. Parenting behavior was not predicted by prechild marital functioning but was related to current marital functioning. The data provide support for the hypothesis that how couples regulate negative affect early on in marriage sets the tone for future interactions involving parents and their child.

Lindahl, K. M., & Malik, N. M. (1999). Marital conflict, family processes, and boys' externalizing behavior in Hispanic American and European American families. *Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, 28, 12-25.*

Used self-report and observational measures to explore associations among marital conflict, triadic family processes, and child adjustment in Hispanic American, European American, and biethnic families. One hundred and thirteen families with a 7- to 11-year-old son participated. More similarities than differences were found between European American and Hispanic American families. A hierarchical parenting style was associated with externalizing behaviors for European American and biethnic families but not for Hispanic American families. Marital conflict and disengaged family alliances were associated with child externalizing behavior for all ethnic groups. Ethnicity was not found to moderate the relation between marital conflict and family functioning, and greater levels of marital conflict were associated with disengaged family interactions and also with lax or inconsistent parenting. Implications for understanding cross-ethnic issues in family systems and child adjustment are discussed.

Margolin, G. O., Pamela H. M., Anna, M. (2001). Conceptual issues in understanding the relation between interparental conflict and child adjustment: Integrating developmental psychopathology and risk/resilience perspectives. In J. H. Grych & F. D. Fincham (Eds.), *Interparental conflict and child development: Theory, research, and applications* (pp. 9-38). New York, NY: Cambridge. 2001.

(from the chapter) Despite widespread acceptance of the belief that exposure to interparental conflict is a serious stressor for children, much remains unknown about exactly why and how this stressor translates into different outcomes across children. The assumption that marital conflict is a stressor for children stems from several explanatory frameworks--family systems theory, social learning theory, the transmission of affect, consistencies in cognitive style, genetic transmission theories, and trauma theory. This chapter reviews these frameworks and illustrates how a developmental psychopathology perspective can inform research in this area. Specifically, the authors analyze the status of marital conflict as a risk factor, consider how research on vulnerability and protective factors can delineate processes that intensify or interrupt the trajectory from marital conflict to negative child outcomes, and recommend greater attention to the resilience of many children living in highly conflictual homes. This perspective underscores the complexity of the relationship between marital conflict and child outcomes and suggests why conflict does not affect children in predictable or consistent ways.

Owen, M. T., & Cox, M. J. (1997). Marital conflict and the development of infant-parent attachment relationships. *Journal of Family Psychology, 11*, 152-164.

Couples were studied before and after the birth of their 1st child to understand processes by which marital conflict influences child development. Hypotheses were tested concerning direct and indirect processes relating marital conflict to the security of infant-mother and infant-father attachment and disorganized attachment behavior. Findings supported the prediction that chronic marital conflict interferes with sensitive, involved parenting and thereby predicts insecurity in attachment relationships, particularly for fathers. It was also argued that chronic marital conflict presents the infant with experiences of frightened or frightening parents and diminished behavioral options to alleviate accompanying distress. As predicted, disorganized attachment behavior with mother and father was explained by chronic marital conflict and not mediated by parental ego development or sensitive parenting.

Peterson, J. L., & Zill, N. (1986). Marital disruption, parent-child relationships, and behavior problems in children. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 48*, 295-307.

Examined the effects of marital disruption on children's behavior, accounting for variations in postdisruption living arrangements and the effects of parent-child relationships *and* marital conflict, in a 1981 national sample of 1,423 children aged 12-16 yrs. Disruption was associated with a higher incidence of several behavior problems (e.g., depression/withdrawal, antisocial behavior, impulsivity), negative effects being greatest with multiple marital transitions. The negative effects were lower if the S lived with the same-sex parent following divorce or maintained a good relationship with one or both parents. High, persistent conflict in intact families was also related to behavior problems.

Stone, G., Buehler, C., Barber, B. K. (2002). Interparental conflict, parental psychological control, and youth problem behavior. In B. K. Barber (Ed.), *Intrusive parenting: How psychological control affects children and adolescents* (53-95). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

(from the chapter) Discusses the understanding of parental psychological control of adolescents by setting it in the larger family context. The authors make a compelling theoretical and empirical link between parental psychological control and interparental conflict (particularly covert interparental conflict), both "indirect and insidious family patterns that disrupt the development of social and emotional competence in children." They show empirically that psychological control is distinct from interparental conflict, and that their findings of both direct and indirect associations of conflict (through parental psychological control) with adolescent functioning are independent of demographic variation. Further, although their adolescent self-reported measurement is common to the established work on psychological control, their multisample replication design adds confidence to the validity of the findings. In sum, this chapter provides an instructive and systematic analysis of the various ways in which multiple family processes can be understood, and the authors provide interesting initial information on the role of parental psychological control amid other key family processes.

Sturge-Apple, M. L., Gondoli, D. M., Bonds, D. D., Salem, L. N. (2003). Mothers' responsive parenting practices and psychological experience of parenting as mediators of the relation between marital conflict and mother-preadolescent relational negativity. *Parenting: Science & Practice, 3*, 327-355.

This study assessed direct and indirect relations between marital conflict and mother-preadolescent relational negativity. Self-report questionnaire data were gathered from 156 married mothers and their firstborn 5th graders who were between the ages of 10 and 12 years. Participants completed measures of marital conflict, responsive parenting practices, the psychological experience of parenting, and mother-preadolescent relational negativity. Structural equation modeling indicated that marital conflict was positively associated with maternal reports of negativity in the mother-preadolescent relationship. In contrast, marital conflict was not associated with preadolescent reports of negativity in the mother-preadolescent relationship. Subsequent analyses revealed that the relation between marital conflict and maternal report of mother-preadolescent relational negativity was indirect and mediated by responsive parenting practices and mothers' psychological experience of parenting. This study integrated essential components from the marital conflict, stress and coping, and parenting literatures. Understanding the roles of different aspects of parenting in the relation between marital conflict and the mother-child relationship suggests new directions for research.

Webster-Stratton, C. (1994). Advancing Videotape parenting training: A comparison study. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62, 583-593.

This study examines the specific effects of adding a broader based, videotape treatment component (ADVANCE) to a basic videotape parent skills training program (GDVM). ADVANCE treatment trains parents to cope with interpersonal distress through improved communication, problem solving, and self-control skills. Seventy-eight families with a child diagnosed as oppositional-defiant or conduct-disordered were randomly assigned to either GDVM alone or GDVM plus ADVANCE. Parent reports of child adjustment and parent distress, assessment of child's knowledge of social skills, as well as independent observations of mother- and father-child interactions and communication and of problem solving between parents were obtained at pre- and post-GDVM and at post-ADVANCE. Both groups significantly improved at short-term follow-up. ADVANCE produced additional significant improvements in parents' communication, problem-solving skills, and consumer satisfaction, as well as children's increased knowledge of prosocial solutions. The clinical significance of these findings is discussed.

Zimet, D. M., & Jacob, T. (2001). Influences of marital conflict on child adjustment: Review of theory and research. *Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review*, 4, 319-335.

This review summarizes the literature on the relationship between marital conflict and child maladjustment with an emphasis on variables that qualify, explain the association, or both. Following a historical review, the modest findings on the strength of the association between marital conflict and child maladjustment is explored. The definition of marital conflict is clarified through specification of its various dimensions (frequency, intensity, content, resolution). The role of variables that serve to moderate and/or mediate the relationship between marital conflict and child maladjustment are elaborated. Mediating models include exposure theories (Modeling, Cognitive-Contextual effects: appraisal of threat and blame, and Emotional Insecurity) and changes in the parent-child relationship (Spillover). Variables that moderate or qualify the relationship include children's cognitions and behaviors, contextual factors, and demographic differences. A model is presented summarizing these mechanisms. Research recommendations are proposed and the clinical implications of this literature are addressed.

Domestic Violence and Child Well-Being

Cummings, E. M. (1998). Children exposed to marital conflict and violence: Conceptual and theoretical directions. In G. W. Holden & R. Geffner (Eds.), *Children exposed to marital violence: Theory, research, and applied issues* (pp. 55-93). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

(from the chapter) Describes a family-wide perspective on the implications of marital conflict and violence for children and considers the effects of specific forms of interadult conflicts on children, including aggression and violence, providing evidence for a distinction between constructive and destructive forms of conflict from the children's perspective. The author examines (1) marital conflict and violence as they pertain to family functioning, (2) conceptualizations relevant to the process-oriented study of marital conflict, (3) marital conflict and violence on a continuum and the distinction between constructive and destructive conflict, and (4) sensitization and emotional insecurity as theoretical constructs for the processes mediating effects of marital conflict and violence on children.

Gordis, E. B., Margolin, G., & John, R. S. (1997). Marital aggression, observed parental hostility, and child behavior during triadic family interaction. *Journal of Family Psychology, 11*, 76-89.

This study used direct observation to examine how a history of exposure to interparental aggression relates to children's behavior during conflict with both parents present. Ninety 2-parent families with a child 9-13 years of age participated. Consistent with a sensitization hypothesis, results indicated that exposure to interparental physical aggression during the previous year was related to child withdrawal, anxiety, and distraction during a family discussion task. In addition, the interaction between reported interparental aggression and observed child-directed hostility accounted for significant variance in boys' behavior. Follow-up correlation analyses revealed that boys who had been exposed to physical marital aggression were more anxious and distracting when their parents were more hostile toward them during the discussion, whereas boys who had not been exposed withdrew more.

Harger, J., & El-Sheikh, M. (2003). Are children more angered and distressed by man-child than woman-child arguments and by interadult versus adult-child disputes? *Social Development, 12*, 162-181.

Six to 10-year-olds' responses to witnessing videotapes of five contexts of verbal and physical arguments (man-woman, man-boy, man-girl, woman-boy, and woman-girl) were compared to examine the hypotheses that: (1) man-child disputes would be perceived more negatively and evoke more negative affect in children than woman-child conflict; and (2) man-woman conflict would be viewed more negatively and elicit greater negative emotions in children than adult-child arguments. Results lend support to the two predictions, and consistent with the emotional security hypothesis, reveal that (1) man-child conflict evoked more sadness and fear in children than woman-child disputes; (2) man-woman arguments evoked more intense feelings of sadness and fear than any of the adult-child disputes, and the adult in the conflicts was perceived as more sad and scared when arguing with the spouse than with the girl or boy; and (3) physical conflict evoked more negative affect than verbal disputes.

Holden, G. W., & Ritchie, K. L. (1991). Linking extreme marital discord, child rearing, and behavior problems: Evidence from battered women. *Child Development, 62*, 311-327.

Relations between marital discord, parental behavior, and child behavior were investigated in a sample of 37 battered women and 37 comparison mothers and their children, aged 2-8 years. It was hypothesized that violent fathers would be more irritable but less involved, battered women more stressed and inconsistent in discipline, and both parents would reportedly use fewer positive and more negative child-rearing responses than comparison families. Based on maternal self-reports and mother-child observations, the only robust self-report difference between the groups of mothers was the level of stress and reports of inconsistency in parenting; in contrast, all of the expected differences were found between the mothers' reports of the 2 groups of fathers. Group effects on child behavior problems were also found. Children from violent families were reported to have more internalizing behavior problems, more difficult temperaments, and to be more aggressive than the comparison children. In the violent families, maternal stress and paternal irritability were the 2 significant predictors of child behavior problems, whereas in the comparison families only maternal stress was a reliable predictor.

Jouriles, E. N., Barling, J., & O'Leary, S. G. (1987). Predicting child behavior problems in maritally violent families. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 15*, 165-173.

Examined the relationships involving interspousal aggression, parent-child aggression, and child behavior problems in 22 boys (mean age 8.7 yrs) and 23 girls (mean age 8.2 yrs) from maritally violent families. Mothers indicated how often their children witnessed interspousal aggression and were victims of parent-child aggression; they also rated their children's problem behaviors, while Ss reported on their own depressive symptoms. The witnessing of interspousal aggression was highly associated with parental aggression directed toward children. Parent-child aggression related to attention problems, anxiety-withdrawal, motor excess, and conduct problems in children; however, the witnessing of interspousal aggression was not significantly related to child behavior problems. Results are consistent with theoretical predictions (e.g., G. R. Patterson, 1982) linking marital problems to child behavior by virtue of their association with parenting.

Jouriles, E. N., McDonald, R. Spiller, L., Norwood, W. D., Swank, P. R., Stephens, N., Ware, H., & Buzy, W. M. (2001). Reducing conduct problems among children of battered women. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 69*, 774-785.

This study was an experimental evaluation of an intervention designed to reduce conduct problems among children of battered women. Participants were 36 families (mothers and children) in which the mother had sought shelter because of relationship violence and had at least 1 child (4-9 years old) with clinical levels of conduct problems. The intervention consisted of 2 primary components: (a) providing instrumental and emotional support and (b) teaching child management skills to mothers. Families were randomly assigned to either the intervention condition or the existing services comparison condition and were assessed on 5 occasions over 16 months after shelter departure. Compared with families receiving existing services, children in the intervention condition improved at a faster rate, the proportion of children displaying clinical levels of conduct problems was greatly diminished, and mothers displayed greater improvements in child management skills.

Jouriles, E. N., & Norwood, W. D. (1995). Physical aggression toward boys and girls in families characterized by the battering of women. *Journal of Family Psychology, 9*, 69-78.

Forty-eight families (mothers and children) participated in a study on physical aggression toward boys and girls in households characterized by the battering of women. In each family, the mother had sought shelter because of relationship violence and had a son and daughter between 4 and 14 years. Mothers completed measures of physical marital violence directed at themselves, aggression toward children, and children's externalizing behavior problems. Older children completed measures of aggression directed at themselves. Results indicated that child gender moderates the relationship between the battering of women and aggression toward children. In families characterized by "more extreme" battering, boys were more often victims of aggression than girls, boys exhibited more externalizing problems than girls, and gender differences in externalizing problems helped account for the differential aggression directed at boys and girls.

Jouriles, E. N., Norwood, W. D., McDonald, R., & Peters, B. (2001). Domestic violence and child adjustment. In J. H. Grych & F. D. Fincham (Eds.), *Interparental conflict and child development: Theory, research, and applications* (pp. 315-336). New York, NY: Cambridge.

(from the chapter) This chapter reviews the empirical literature on the link between wife abuse (and marital violence) and child adjustment. The authors explore some of the parameters of this association and note conceptual, methodological, and practical issues confronting researchers in the area. They also highlight several controversial issues in the conceptualization of violence and note gaps in our knowledge that limit what can be concluded about this association. The authors conclude by offering several suggestions for future research.

Kanoy, K., Ulku-Steiner, B., Cox, M., & Burchinal, M. (2003). Marital relationship and individual psychological characteristics that predict physical punishment of children. *Journal of Family Psychology, 17*, 20-28.

The relationships among use of physical punishment of children, marital conflict, and individual adult hostility were examined longitudinally. Couples expecting their first child completed self-report scales of individual hostility and were observed in marital problem-solving situations for level of marital conflict during the prenatal period. The marital problem-solving situations were again assessed at 2 years and 5 years following the child's birth. At the later time points, discipline practices were assessed through interview. A climate of negativity, manifested through either high rates of individual hostility or marital conflict, predicted the use of more frequent and severe physical punishment of children at 2 and 5 years, even when parent educational level was controlled. Implications for policy and parent education are discussed.

Katz, L. F., & Woodin, E. M. (2002). Hostility, hostile detachment, and conflict engagement in marriages: Effects on child and family functioning. *Child Development, 73*, 636-651.

Examined the relations between patterns of marital communication, child adjustment, and family functioning. Couples with a 4- or 5-year-old child were divided into three groups based on observed patterns of emotional communication: Hostile couples showed a cumulative increase in negative speaker behaviors over the course of a high-conflict marital discussion; hostile-withdrawn couples showed a cumulative increase in both negative speaker and negative listener

behaviors over the course of the interaction; and engaged couples showed a cumulative increase in both positive speaker and listener behaviors over the course of the interaction. The families of these three types of couples were then compared on child outcomes (i.e., peer relations, behavior problems), parenting quality, co-parenting quality, and family-level functioning. Differences in marital violence and marital satisfaction between marital couples were also examined in relation to family risk. Families in which couples were hostile-detached showed the most negative outcomes. Hostile-detached couples were more likely than hostile or conflict-engaging couples to use more power-assertive methods of discipline; to be ineffective in co-parenting; and to have family units that were less cohesive and more conflictual.

Kitzmann, K. M., Gaylord, N. K., Holt, A. R., Kenny, E. D. (2003). Child witnesses to domestic violence: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 71*, 339-352.

This meta-analysis examined 118 studies of the psychosocial outcomes of children exposed to interparental violence. Correlational studies showed a significant association between exposure and child problems ($d = -0.29$). Group comparison studies showed that witnesses had significantly worse outcomes relative to nonwitnesses ($d = -0.40$) and children from verbally aggressive homes ($d = -0.28$), but witnesses' outcomes were not significantly different from those of physically abused children ($d = 0.15$) or physically abused witnesses ($d = 0.13$). Several methodological variables moderated these results. Similar effects were found across a range of outcomes, with slight evidence for greater risk among preschoolers. Recommendations for future research are made, taking into account practical and theoretical issues in this area.

Margolin, G. (1998). Effects of domestic violence on children. In P. K. Trickett & C. J. Schellenbach (Eds.), *Violence against children in the family and the community* (pp. 57-101). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

(from the chapter) Witnessing violence, in general, has been associated with emotional, behavior, and learning problems in children, with children's susceptibility affected by developmental level, chronicity of exposure, physical closeness to the incident, and emotional closeness to the victim. On the basis of those parameters, one may conclude that witnessing violence between parents is a particularly insidious event. It is most likely to occur in the home--the one environment generally associated with safety and protection of the child. It is not surprising, therefore, that exposure to marital violence has been associated with a variety of problems in children. Issues on this topic discussed in this chapter include: incidence and prevalence of children's exposure to marital violence; co-occurrence of exposure to marital violence and to other forms of violence; features of exposure to marital violence; outcomes associated with exposure to marital violence; summary of outcomes; factors mediating the effects of exposure to interparental violence; explanatory factors and mechanisms; and questions for further research.

Margolin, G. G., Oliver, E. B., Pamella, H. (2004). Links between marital and parent-child interactions: Moderating role of husband-to-wife aggression. *Development & Psychopathology, 16*, 753-771.

The present study examined how marital conflict may compromise parenting by identifying interdependencies across marital and parent-child subsystems in a sample of 86 two-parent families with a child aged 9-13. The study used direct observation of three family discussions to examine interdependencies across family subsystems. The study also assessed whether a history

of husband-to-wife aggression strengthened interdependencies. Overall, families with husband-to-wife aggression showed a negative tone that pervaded throughout the family. Consistent with theories about physically aggressive men tending to withdraw from conflict, fathers who had engaged in husband-to-wife aggression showed an association between marital hostilities and lower levels of empathy toward their children. Consistent with stress theories, women who had been exposed to husband-to-wife aggression showed a link between marital hostilities and negative affect when interacting with their children. These findings illustrate how a history of exposure to marital aggression can create a family environment of multiple risks for children. For children in families with prior marital aggression, ongoing marital hostilities can be linked to the additional risk of erosions in parental support.

Meredith, W. H., Abbott, D. A., & Adams, S. L. (1986). Family violence: Its relation to marital and parent satisfaction and family strengths. *Journal of Family Violence, 1*, 299-305.

Studied the association between satisfaction with family relationships and the occurrence of family violence in a sample of 304 respondents to a survey of married parents (61% were female, and 39% were male). The Conflict Tactics Scale of M. A. Straus (1979), the Family Strengths Scale of D. Olson et al (1982), the Marital Satisfaction subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale of G. B. Spanier (1976), and the Parent Satisfaction Scale of Meredith et al (1986) were used. Perceived family strength, marital satisfaction, and parent satisfaction decreased as family violence increased. Marital violence was related to parent-child violence. Results provide evidence that violence damages relationships within a family.

Yates, T. M., Dodds, M. F., Sroufe, L. A., & Egeland, B. (2003). Exposure to partner violence and child behavior problems: A prospective study controlling for child physical abuse and neglect, child cognitive ability, socioeconomic status, and life stress. *Development & Psychopathology, 15*, 199-218.

Previous research suggests an association between partner violence and child behavior problems. However, methodological shortcomings have precluded the formation of directional conclusions. These limitations include failure to control for the effects of child physical abuse and general life stress, employment of nonrepresentative samples from battered women's shelters, and reliance on a single contemporaneous reporter, usually the mother, for information on both independent and dependent measures. This study used prospective, longitudinal data (N=155) and multiple informants to examine the relation between maternal reports of partner violence in the home and teacher- and youth-report ratings of concurrent and prospective child behavior problems. Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were used to control for the effects of child physical abuse, child physical neglect, socioeconomic status, child cognitive ability, and life stress. The contribution of partner violence to child behavior problems was confirmed for boys' (n=81) externalizing problems and girls' (n=74) internalizing problems. Child developmental status at the time of exposure further influenced these relations.

Fathering and Co-parenting Relationships

Belsky, J., Crnic, K., & Gable, S. (1995). The determinants of coparenting in families with toddler boys: Spousal differences and daily hassles. *Child Development, 66, 629-642.*

In order to advance understanding of the phenomenon of coparenting, naturalistic observations of firstborn sons were undertaken when they were 15 months of age at a time when both parents were home and family life was demanding. Narrative records of coparenting events were scored to determine the frequency with which parents supported and undermined each other and to test two hypotheses pertaining to individual differences in coparenting: that greater differences between spouses in demographic factors, personality, styles of relatedness and child-rearing attitudes would forecast more unsupportive and less supportive coparenting; and that the adverse effects of such spousal differences would be amplified by high levels of family stress, as indexed by frequency and intensity of daily hassles. Both hypotheses received support and are discussed in turn.

Coiro, M. J., & Emery, R. E. (1998). Do marriage problems affect fathering more than mothering? A quantitative and qualitative review. *Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review, 1, 23-41.*

The important question of whether marital problems disrupt fathering more than mothering is addressed in (a) a quantitative review of evidence on marital conflict and parenting in intact families, and (b) a qualitative review of research on mother and father involvement with their children following divorce. We conclude that (a) there is limited evidence that, relative to mothering, fathering is more likely to be affected by marital conflict, but suggest that (b) marital status (i.e., divorce) affects fathering notably more than it affects mothering. We further suggest that marital problems may disrupt father involvement which, in turn, weakens the quality of father-child relationships; there likely are multiple alternative pathways through which marriage problems affect parenting, including both "spillover" and "compensation"; researchers need to examine more carefully how marital problems disrupt coparenting; child age and gender may moderate linkages between the parental and marital subsystems; and coparenting, marital happiness, and the institution of marriage itself may be essential first avenues of intervention for those who wish to improve or maintain fathers' involvement with their children.

Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (1987). Men's involvement in parenthood: Identifying the antecedents and understanding the barriers. In P. Berman & F. A. Pederson (Eds.), *Fathers' transition to parenthood* (pp. 145-174). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

(from the chapter) Men differ in the extent of their participation in family life.

Contemporary fathers fight an uphill battle against their socialization history, societal constraints, and complex dynamics within the couple relationship that both encourage and discourage their participation in childrearing. How involved men become in that relationship and how stressed or satisfied they feel in the early years of parenthood depends on what is happening in many aspects of life within and outside the family.

Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P., & Kerig, P. K. (1993). Mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters: Gender differences in family formation and parenting style. In P. A. Cowan & D.

Field (Eds.), *Family, self, and society: Toward a new agenda for family research* (pp. 165-195). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

(from the chapter) For the past 17 years, we [the authors] have been studying families in the process of development. Although we did not initially plan to concentrate on gender issues, our longitudinal findings make it clear that we cannot describe parents without knowing whether we are talking about mothers or fathers, nor can we discuss children without specifying whether we are talking about boys or girls. We believe that it is not possible to understand family processes without paying attention to the particularities of husband-wife, father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, and mother-daughter relationships--at least in the early phases of family development. We have amassed considerable evidence in the course of our longitudinal research to support the contention that one key source of gender-differentiated parenting is inherent in the process by which men and women make their transition from couple to family. We focus on the marital relationship as an important context in which parent-child relationships develop. In the Becoming a Family Project, we assessed 72 expectant couples with interviews, questionnaires, and observations: 48 of the couples completed interviews and questionnaires in late pregnancy and an additional 24 completed questionnaires after birth only. Then, all of the couples were reassessed when their children were 6, 18, 42, and 66 months old. In the last two assessments, the children were approximately 3 1/2 and 5 1/2 years.

Cox, M. J., Owen, M. T., Lewis, J. M., & Henderson, V. K. (1989). Marriage, adult adjustment, and early parenting. *Child Development, 60, 1015-1024.*

Assessed the impact of parents' marriages, measured prenatally, on their parenting of firstborn, 3-mo-old infants. Though the association between marriage and parenting was the focus, adult psychological adjustment was also measured to rule out the alternative hypothesis that psychological adjustment relates to both marital quality and parenting quality and accounts for any association between them. Even when differences in individual psychological adjustment were considered, mothers were warmer and more sensitive with their infants; fathers held more positive attitudes toward their infants and their roles as parents when they were in close/confiding marriages. Qualities of marriage play an important part in the development of parent-child relationships.

Deal, J. E., Halverson, C. F., & Wampler, K. S. (1989). Parental agreement on child rearing orientations: Relations to parental, marital, family, and child characteristics. *Child Development, 60, 1025-1034.*

136 families and their preschool children were studied by observation and an extensive self-report questionnaire package. Parental agreement was assessed using the Block Child-rearing Practices Report Q-Sort (J. Block and J. Block, 1980). Analyses revealed that the agreement score rarely added any information not already provided by the parental effectiveness scores. A Q-factor analysis revealed that the agreement score actually represented agreement to a standard of good parenting. Parents who were high agreeers were good parents who agreed with other good parents, while low agreeers were ineffective parents who disagreed with other parents, good or bad.

Dickstein, S., & Parke, R. (1988). Social referencing in infancy: A glance at fathers and marriage. *Child Development, 59, 506-511.*

Social referencing was defined as the tendency of a person to look to a significant other in an ambiguous situation to obtain clarifying information. 40 11-month-old infants were observed once with their mothers and once with their fathers in a 15-min social referencing situation that involved entrance of a female stranger as the ambiguous stimulus. Infants used their fathers and mothers as referencing targets to an equal extent. Additionally, marital satisfaction was found to be a significant modifier of referencing. Paternal marital satisfaction predicted social referencing to fathers as well as to mothers; no effect was found for maternal marital satisfaction alone.

Doherty, W. J., & Beaton, J. M. (2004). Mothers and fathers parenting together. LEA's communication series. In A. L. Vangelisti (Ed.), *Handbook of family communication* (pp. 269-286). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

(from the chapter) The purpose of this chapter is to summarize contemporary research on the parenting relationship between mothers and fathers, to delineate conceptual frameworks that can be fruitful for understanding the co-parenting relationship, to offer a preliminary theoretical model of factors influencing co-parenting, and to suggest fruitful areas for further research. An emerging body of research is demonstrating the importance of co-parenting relationships in families and the value of a triadic approach to studying families. The four conceptual frameworks for co-parenting research discussed in the article are social constructionism, family systems theories, family development theories, and human ecology theories. The focal point of the conceptual model presented in the chapter is the triadic mother-father-child relationship and the marital status of the parents. Outside the triangle are depicted several categories of influences on the co-parental relationship: individual factors, mother-father relationship factors, and broader ecological factors. Gaps in the current research on co-parenting include co-parenting relationships during the child's adolescence and young adulthood, how children participate in socially constructing the co-parenting relationship, and co-parenting among various racial groups.

Feinberg, M. E. (2002). Coparenting and the transition to parenthood: A framework for prevention. *Clinical Child & Family Psychology Review*, 5, 173-195.

Notes that the way that parents work together in their roles as parents, the coparenting relationship, has been linked to parental adjustment, parenting, and child outcomes. The coparenting relationship offers a potentially modifiable, circumscribed risk factor that could be targeted in family-focused prevention. This paper briefly outlines an integrated and comprehensive view of coparenting, and suggests that the time around the birth of the first child is an opportune moment for coparenting intervention. To support the development of such prevention programs, an outline of the possible goals of coparenting intervention is presented with a description of the processes by which enhanced coparenting may have effects in each area. The paper discusses several issues involved in developing and disseminating effective coparenting interventions.

Feinberg, M. E. (2003). The internal structure and ecological context of coparenting: A framework for research and intervention. *Parenting: Science & Practice*, 3, 95-131.

Research on coparenting has grown over the past decade, supporting a view of coparenting as a central element of family life that influences parental adjustment, parenting, and child outcomes. This article introduces a multi-domain conception of coparenting that organizes existing research and paves the way for future research and intervention. This article advances a conceptualization

of how coparenting domains influence parental adjustment, parenting, and child adjustment. An ecological model that outlines influences on coparenting relationships, as well as mediating and moderating pathways, is described. Areas of future research in the developmental course of coparenting relationships are noted.

Gable, S., Crnic, K., & Belsky, J. (1994). Coparenting within the family system. *Family Relations*, 43, 380-387.

The article focuses on coparenting in families raising toddler sons. Researches have shown that there are positive associations between the quality of marital relations and parenting effectiveness and indicators of children's well-being. Beginning early in life, systematic connections have been demonstrated between marital quality, parenting style, and infant and toddler development. One characteristic of the marital relationship that has emerged as a potent predictor of problems during the preschool and adolescent years involves interadult conflict. The connections between inter-spousal conflict, troubled parenting, and problems for children appear to persist from the preschool years through adolescence. Thus, one specific characteristic of the marital relationship-overt conflict-appears to function prominently as a process variable for interrupting effective parenting and explaining how adults' behavior might directly and indirectly contribute to children's growth and development.

Grossman, F. K., Pollack, W. S., & Golding, E. (1988). Fathers and children: Predicting the quality and quantity of fathering. *Developmental Psychology*, 24, 82-91.

This study looked at the quality and quantity of interactions between fathers and their firstborn 5-year-olds from the perspective of the family as a developmental interdependent system. The goals were to identify predictors of men's parenting from men's own adaptation (direct effects) and from their wives' characteristics (indirect effects), both measured during the expectancy. Twenty-three families from the Boston University Pregnancy and Parenthood Project made up the sample. Measures included self-report scales, observations, and semistructured interviews. Several of men's psychological characteristics, particularly their autonomy and job satisfaction, predicted their play time and the quality of their interactions with their children. Women's autonomy, occupation, and age in the expectancy predicted men's caretaking and weekday time involvement with their 5-year-olds. We suggest that the findings can best be explained by the concepts of complementarity and identification.

Laakso, J. (2004). Key determinants of mothers' decisions to allow visits with non-custodial fathers. *Fathering*, 2, 131-145.

Increases in single-parent households, often involving never married couples, have heightened the urgency to understand decisions parents make about parent-child relationships after separation. This qualitative study provides a descriptive analysis of the concerns of mothers in non-marital relationships that may affect their decisions regarding visitation and clarifies the relationship between visitation and paying child support. Weighing the benefits versus the costs, most mothers were willing to allow visitation even if the father did not pay child support, recognizing the importance of father-child relationships. It is imperative to make parenting plans and visitation as important as payment of child support. Funding for fathering programs and creation of father-friendly environments are essential to increase involvement of non-custodial fathers.

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.

Coparenting is examined as an explanatory link between marital conflict and parent-child relations in 2-parent families. Data were collected from 3 samples (pilot sample, n = 220 mothers; preadolescent sample, n = 75 couples; preschool sample, n = 172 couples) by using the Coparenting Questionnaire (G. Margolin, 1992b) to assess parents' perceptions of one another on 3 dimensions—cooperation, triangulation, and conflict. Main effects for child's age and for parents' gender were found for cooperation, and an interaction between parent and child gender was found for triangulation. Regression analyses were consistent with a model of coparenting mediating the relationship between marital conflict and parenting. Discussion addresses the theoretical and clinical importance of viewing coparenting as conceptually separate from other family processes.

McHale, J. P., Kazali, C., Rotman, T., Talbot, J., Carleton, M., & Lieberman, R. (2004). The transition to coparenthood: Parents' prebirth expectations and early coparental adjustment at 3 months postpartum. *Development & Psychopathology, 16*, 711-733.

In the decade since the first observationally based empirical studies of coparenting process in nuclear families made their mark, most investigations of early coparenting dynamics have examined whether and how such dynamics drive child development trajectories, rather than identifying factors that may contribute to the differential development of such dynamics in the first place. In this prospective study, we examined both individual-representational and dyadic-interpersonal predictors of early coparental process. Fifty married couples expecting their first child portrayed their expectations and concerns about family life after the baby's arrival, and took part in a set of problem-solving tasks used to help evaluate marital quality. Both mothers' and fathers' prebaby expectations about the future family, and prenatal marital quality, predicted observed coparenting cohesion at 3 months postpartum. Maternal- and marriage-coparenting trajectories differed as a function of infant characteristics, with pathways most pronounced when infants were rated high in negative reactivity. Results reveal how the prenatal environment can come to shape early coparenting process, and indicate that family models must take into account the role that child characteristics can play in altering prebirth-postpartum pathways.

McHale, J., Khazan, I., Erera, P., Rotman, T., DeCoursey, W., McConnell, M. (2002).

Coparenting in diverse family systems. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 3: Being and becoming a parent* (2nd ed., pp. 75-107). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

(from the chapter) This review of the coparenting field begins with a brief discussion of families and coparenting research in a historical context. The authors outline central conceptual issues in thinking about coparenting and summarize the essential tenets of structural family theory. This is followed by a review of coparenting research, emphasizing issues such as insider and outsider views of coparental and family dynamics, as well as linkages between coparental functioning and child adjustment. The authors then provide a section on practical issues in coparenting of interest to both scientists and professionals working with families, and close with a section summarizing future directions in coparenting theory and research. Among the topics considered in this concluding section are the limits of the coparenting construct, and the applicability of

coparenting theory to diverse family systems and to the coparenting of multiple children in the same family.

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.

Fifty-two married partners played with their 30-month-olds in both dyadic (parent-child) and whole family contexts and reported on their own coparenting activities (family integrity-promoting behavior, conflict, disparagement, and reprimand). Coparenting behavior observed in the whole family context was evaluated for antagonism, warmth and cooperation, child-adult centeredness, balance of positive involvement, and management of toddler behavior. Parallel balance and management scores were also formed using dyadic session data. Men's reported family integrity-promoting activities and women's reported conflict and reprimand activities were reliable correlates of family group process in both bivariate and discriminant analyses, with links enduring even after controlling for marital quality. Whole family- and dyad-based estimates of coparenting were altogether unrelated, and reported coparenting was tied only to behavior in family context, not to family measures created from dyad-based data.

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: Erlbaum.

(from the chapter) Provides an overview of family group dynamics. First, the authors draw on the work of the anthropologist S. Harrell to describe 4 basic family system formations. The authors then consider more specifically family groups in the US and the roots of American psychologists' current belief system about "optimal" family functioning. Next, the authors spotlight recent research on coparenting and family group process in the nuclear family group and discuss studies linking these dynamics to important indicators of young children's development and adaptation. The authors emphasize the need to extend this fledging knowledge base on how coparental and family group processes affect children's development to include family systems beyond the 2-parent nuclear family, and the authors conclude with some thoughts about clinical practice, public policy, and future coparenting and family group research.

Parke, R. D. (2002). Fathers and families. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 3: Being and becoming a parent* (2nd ed., pp. 27-73). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

(from the chapter) This chapter begins with a discussion of the nature of the father-child relationship and how this relationship shifts across the development of the child. Next, the chapter moves to an examination of the determinants of father involvement to examine the impact of the marital relationship on the parent-child relationship. The author reviews the effect of historical changes, namely shifts in work patterns of family members and changes in the timing of the onset of parenthood, on father-child relationships. Finally, the implications of fathering for men themselves, their wives, and their children are examined.

Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., Frosch, C. A., & McHale, J. L. (2004). Associations between coparenting and marital behavior from infancy to the preschool years. *Journal of Family Psychology, 18*, 194-207.

This study examined the associations between coparenting and marital behavior from infancy to the preschool years. Coparenting and marital behavior were assessed in 46 families during observations of family play and marital discussions at 6 months and 3 years. Both coparenting and marital behavior showed moderate stability from 6 months to 3 years. In addition, coparenting and marital behavior were more consistently associated at 3 years than at 6 months. When the predictive capabilities of early coparenting and marital behavior for later coparenting and marital behavior were considered, early coparenting predicted later marital behavior but not vice versa. This study highlights the importance of early coparenting behavior, especially undermining coparenting behavior, for understanding both subsequent coparenting behavior and subsequent marital behavior.

Talbot, J. A., & McHale, J. P. (2004). Individual parental adjustment moderates the relationship between marital and coparenting quality. *Journal of Adult Development, 11*, 191-205.

Contemporary family research studies have devoted surprisingly little effort to elucidating the interplay between adults' individual adjustment and the dynamics of their coparental relationship. In this study, we assessed two particularly relevant "trait" variables, parental flexibility and self-control, and traced links between these characteristics and the nature of the coparents' interactions together with their infants. It was hypothesized that parental flexibility and self-control would not only explain significant variance in coparenting quality, but also act as moderators attenuating anticipated relationships between marital functioning and coparental process. Participants were 50 heterosexual, married couples and their 12-month-old infants. Multiple regression analyses indicated that even after controlling for marital quality, paternal flexibility and maternal self-control continued to make independent contributions to coparenting harmony. As anticipated, paternal flexibility attenuated the association between marital quality and coparenting negativity. Contrary to predictions, maternal flexibility and self-control did not dampen, but actually heightened the extent to which coparenting harmony declined in the face of lower marital quality.