MANIFESTATIONS OF RESPONSIVENESS AND CONTROL IN HUSBANDS'

AND WIVES' MARITAL AND PARENTAL COMMUNICATION

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Manifestations of Responsiveness and Control in Husbands' and Wives' Marital and

Parental Communication

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This study applied assumptions from family systems theory (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin,

1974) and the theoretical foundations underlie Fitzpatrick's (1988) marital typology and

Baumrind's (1967, 1971) parenting styles typology to explore similarities and differences

within and across marital and parental subsystems and to examine their associations with

marital quality. The first goal of this dissertation is to examine the extent to which

individuals enact similar communication behaviors of responsiveness and control in their

roles as spouses and parents. The second goal is to explore the extent to which spouses

perceive and demonstrate similar parental communication behaviors and this similarity's

impact on marital outcomes. The third goal is to examine how members' perceived

marital and parental communication are consistent or inconsistent with the way

independent coders observe that communication. The final goal of this dissertation is to

examine how biases in perceived versus observed communication predict marital

satisfaction. 51 couples and their 3-6 year old child participated in this study. Spouses

first completed close-ended survey questions about their marital relationship, and their

beliefs about marriage and parenting. Next, each parent worked individually with the child on two tasks that were challenging for their child. While one parent worked with the child, the other parent watched that interaction and evaluated the spouse's parenting strategies. After the interaction ended, spouses switched roles. Finally, the parents engaged in a conversation about their thoughts on the interactions with the child, followed by completing a questionnaire about the marital interaction. Independent coders rated marital and parent-child interactions for observed marital and parental responsiveness and control. Results indicated that responsiveness was correlated across marital and parental subsystems, but control was not. Observed responsiveness and both perceived and observed control were positively correlated across spouses. Multi-level modeling (HLM) revealed that inter-parental similarity in the observed variables was more explicitly associated with marital outcomes than similarity in perceived communication. Marital communication was correlated across participants' reports and coders' ratings but not parental communication. Finally, marital satisfaction increased when perceived marital responsiveness was higher than observed marital responsiveness, and when perceived marital control was lower than observed marital control.

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DEDICATION

To my wife and daughters, Galia, Noa, Shira, and Maya

For being who you are and for constantly reminding me the important things in life

To my parents

For making me believe that nothing is impossible, and for making me understand that

nothing is more important than family and family communication

To my advisor, Dr. Jennifer Theiss

For being so open, kind, dedicated, committed, and professional

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Chapter One

Communication of Responsiveness and Control in the Family System

Few relationships are more significant, long standing, and central to people's

well-being than their family relationships. From the beginning of life to the very end,

family relationships remain a constant touchstone and a vital influence in people's lives.

Families are significant in members' lives because interactions in the family shape the

course of individuals' life-span and forever influence the way they view the social world

and manage close relationships. Communication, then, is the mechanism through which

relationships between family members are created, shaped and reshaped, maintained, as

well as destroyed. Thus, understanding the dynamics of communication in the family is

an important area of inquiry for promoting strong, healthy, and satisfying relationships

among family members.

Family systems theory is one theoretical perspective that highlights the central

role communication plays in families (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974). The theory posits

that family members dynamically interact among themselves in order to function and to

achieve goals. In that sense, families are systems where elements (i.e. the members in the

family) are interdependent, mutually influencing one another through their interaction

(Broderick, 1993). The family is made up of subsystems which are smaller units of the

system as a whole. The two significant subsystems in families are the marital, which is

made up of the marriage partners, and parental, which is composed of the individuals

who are responsible for the care and socialization of the children in the family

(Broderick, 1993; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). Drawing on the assumption that elements

in the family system are interdependent and mutually affect each other, there is a need to consider how members, within and across subsystems, interact to manage relationships and family functioning.

This dissertation responds to the need for increased understanding of the communication dynamics that characterize interdependent family systems. Specifically, the goals of this dissertation are fourfold. First, I examine the extent to which individuals enact similar communication behaviors in their roles as spouses and parents. Second, I explore the extent to which husbands and wives are similar or different in their parental responsiveness and control to explore the impact that such similarity or dissimilarity may have on marital outcomes in terms of relational satisfaction and appraisals of a partner's parenting behavior. Third, I examine how members' perceived family communication is consistent or inconsistent with their actual observed interaction behaviors. Finally, I examine how biases in perceived versus observed marital communication predict spouses' relational satisfaction. In this chapter, I provide a brief overview of the marital and parental subsystems in the family and identify the goals and objectives that are the focus of this dissertation.

The Marital Subsystem

Researchers have long been interested in understanding marital relationships for two main reasons. First, marriage continues to constitute a strong societal expectation, with approximately 90% of all Americans expected to marry at least once in their lives (Segrin & Flora, 2011). Because marriage is a normative social institution, exploring what makes some marital relationships satisfying and stable, whereas others are

dissatisfying and turbulent is an important inquiry to be undertaken by scholars. Over four decades ago, researchers started to look at the communication between spouses, rather than their individual characteristics and personality, as predicting marital satisfaction. That research shows that certain communication behaviors and patterns are associated with marital satisfaction, whereas other marital interaction strategies are associated with decreased relationship satisfaction among spouses (Gottman & Notarius, 2000, 2002).

Second, an extensive body of literature highlights the influence that the marital unit can have on the whole family structure and its members' well-being (Cummings & Davies, 2010; Simon, 2004). Marriage and family scholars have investigated the ways that marital interaction may affect the well-being and development of individuals in the marital subsystem, as well as the implications that marital communication can have for children's well-being and adjustment. Most of that research has focused on the associations between characteristics of marital conflict and children's psychological, social, and academic characteristics (e.g., Cummings & Davies, 2010; Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2001; Doherty & Beaton, 2004). Both lines of research on marital communication highlight communicative behaviors that reflect and promote closeness, support, and intimacy in the form of responsiveness among members on one hand, and behaviors that demonstrate and advance distance, power, and demandingness in the form of control on the other hand.

As will be discussed later, marital communication of responsiveness includes such behaviors as self-disclosure, verbal expressions of closeness and support, nonverbal and

physical expressions of intimacy and affection, and material evidence for love (e.g.,

giving gifts) as well as nonmaterial evidence for love (e.g., spending time together in

joint activities) (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). Such responsive behaviors reflect and

promote closeness between marital partners and are reflected in their communication.

Marital communication of control is employed by spouses in marital conflict and reflects

power dynamics in the relationship (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). The conflict literature

highlights reciprocated negative behavior and the demand-withdraw interaction pattern as

two main patterns of communication behavior that marks marital control. In addition, a

prominent topic of communication in the marital conflict literature refers to expectations

about marital roles and the way couples manage these roles. Both marital responsiveness

and marital control are associated with marital outcomes, such as marital satisfaction and

marital distress (e.g., Greef & Malherbe, 2001; Weger, 2005). Research on marital

conflict also reveals associations between marital discord and children's well-being (e.g.,

Cummings & Davies, 2010; Parke, 2002). Communicative manifestations of

responsiveness and control in marriage, then, have implications for spouses, as well as for

children, which underscores the interdependence that exists among family members.

The Parental Subsystem

In addition to marital dynamics, a large body of research on parent-child

relationships highlights parental communication as central in shaping the relationships

between parents and children and in molding children's characteristics and abilities

(Darling, 1999). Research consistently reveals the crucial role parent-child interactions

play in children's developmental processes in all areas of life (Grolnick & Gurland,

2002). As their primary socializers, parents guide their children how to act, react, and interact in their social environment. Thus, parental messages and practices are particularly influential for encouraging social behaviors in their children that will be relevant to social and relational situations over their life-span (Feldman, 2009).

Looking at the ways in which parental interaction patterns shape children's personality and characteristics, many studies have suggested that the nature of the communication of parents directly affect children's development and well-being (e.g., Baumrind, 1967, 1971; Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Park, 2008; Wilson & Whipple, 2001). Although parenting is a complex activity that includes many specific behaviors that work individually and together to influence child outcomes, looking at any specific behavior in isolation may be misleading (Darling, 1999). Scholars suggest that specific parenting practices are less important in predicting child well-being as compared to the broader pattern of parenting (Baumrind, 1969; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Feldman, 2009). Thus, the parenting literature has focused on two major parenting dimensions of parental responsiveness and parental control. Whereas parental responsiveness characterizes communication of warmth, affection, and support, parental control is hierarchy-oriented and reflects communication of demandingness, supervision, and discipline (Grolnick & Gurland, 2002; Segrin & Flora, 2011; Stafford & Bayer, 1993).

Responsive parental communication includes nonverbal and verbal practices of supportive, warm, and sensitive child-rearing (Peterson & Hann, 1999). Specifically, whereas nonverbal communication behaviors involve infant-directed speech, gaze, and touch, verbal manifestations of responsiveness involve messages of support and

involvement (e.g., Brousseau, Malcuit, Pomerleau, & Feider, 1996; Deak, Flom, & Pick, 2000; Hertenstein, 2002). Research shows that responsive parental behaviors contribute to a variety of positive outcomes for children, such as high levels of confidence, self-esteem, and pro-social abilities (e.g., Domitrovich & Bierman, 2001; Noller, 1995; Sandstorm, 2007). Manifestations of parental control include psychological strategies, such as love withdrawal, disappointment, and intrusiveness, or behavioral strategies, such as directive declarative statements or the use of physical punishments (Baumrind, 1995; Miller-Day & Lee, 2001; Sergin & Flora, 2011; Wilson and Whipple, 2001). Research shows that high levels of parental control, with limited parental responsiveness, are associated with negative outcomes for children, such as high dependence on parents, passively hostile behavior, and high aggressiveness (Barber, 2002; Darling, 1999). Parental control also predicts withdrawal behavior and high levels of depression in children (Barber, 2000; Baumrind, 1971; Feldman, 2009). When parental control is employed in combination with parental responsiveness and reflects age-appropriate demands, however, it is associated with positive outcomes where children perform better scholastically, exhibit fewer problem behaviors, and show high levels of self-reliance (e.g., Aunola & Nurmi, 2004; Domitrovich & Bierman, 2001; Mize, & Petit, 1997). Thus, understanding how parents balance appropriate levels of responsiveness and control in their parenting behavior may promote more pro-social outcomes for children.

Exploring Interdependence between the Marital and Parental Subsystems

A review of the extensive marital and parenting literatures reveals parallel dimensions of responsiveness and control in both family contexts. To address this

dissertation's major goal of exploring the interdependence that exists within and across marital and parental subsystems, I examine similar and different manifestations of responsiveness and control among spouses and parents, which is important for establishing a larger picture of family dynamics within a cohesive theoretical framework. Highlighting associations between marital and parental communication enables a closer look at how family members enact similar behaviors under different roles (i.e. as spouse and as parent) to further understand the functions that responsiveness and control serve in the family system, as these have been identified as the two major features that underlie communication in family relationships (LePoire, 2006). To address this goal, this dissertation first presents an extensive review of the literatures on marital communication and parental communication and highlights interaction behaviors and patterns of responsiveness and control identified by that research.

Since the marital and parenting literatures have found associations between certain patterns of communication and family outcomes (i.e. marital functioning and children's wellbeing), I am also interested in understanding how marital outcomes are predicted by similarities and differences between spouses in terms of their parenting behavior. Thus, in this dissertation, I also explore the interdependence that exists between partners in the form of inter-parental similarity in both perceived and observed responsiveness and control. This aspect of the dissertation examines how co-parenting dynamics contribute to marital satisfaction and spouses' evaluations of their partner's parenting behavior. Accordingly, I investigate how individuals perceive their marital and parental communication and how they actually enact marital and parental responsiveness

and control. This feature of the investigation also highlights the interplay between the

cognitive and the behavioral levels of interpersonal communication in family systems and

the possible influence that consistencies or inconsistencies have on the marital

relationship.

Chapter Two

Marital Communication

Marital researchers have long tried to understand what makes a successful marriage and what distinguishes it from unsuccessful marriage (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). Marital satisfaction is often used interchangeably with success (e.g., Feeney, 2002; Fitzpatrick, 1988), although the marital literature sometimes refers to marital satisfaction as only one component of marital success, alongside commitment and stability (e.g., Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999; Wright, Nelson, & Georgen, 1994). Research shows that marital satisfaction and marital success predict various psychological, developmental, social and health outcomes for spouses (Cummings & Davies, 2010). Whereas early research on marriage privileged personality traits, demographic factors, and individual psychological processes as predictors of marital success (e.g., Carter & Glick, 1978; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1988; Coombs & Zumeta, 1970; Glenn & Shelton, 1985; Greenberg & Nay, 1982; South & Spitze, 1986), more recent research has focused on the influence of interpersonal communication on marital outcomes (e.g., Gottman, 1994; Fitzpatrick, 1988; Jacobson, Gottman, Gortner, Berns, & Sortt, 1996; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 2005; Segrin, Hanzal, & Demschke, 2009). The interest in the communication between spouses is related to the assumption that dyadic interaction patterns play a central role among the factors that explain successful and satisfying marital relationships (Feeney, 2002). Moreover, an extensive empirical body of evidence has consistently documented an association between a couple's communication and the

quality of their marriage (e.g., Bodenmann, 2005; Fitzpatrick, 1984, 1988; Flora & Segrin, 2000; Gottman, 1979, 1994, 1998; Gottman, Ryan, Swanson, & Swanson, 2005).

In the current study, I examine manifestations of responsiveness and control in marriage to better understand marital behavioral patterns of communication and their possible associations with relational outcomes, such as satisfaction. Focusing on communication behaviors between spouses as predictors of marital outcomes, means research needs to consider what aspects of communication contribute to successful and satisfying marriage. Whereas previous studies on marital communication have sporadically looked at different communicative behaviors and patterns between spouses, theoretically organizing these behaviors under the dimensions of responsiveness and control allows an exploration of them through one unifying and convenient lens (see Le Poire, 2006). Studying marital communication in terms of responsiveness and control also promotes a systematic way to understand these behaviors in the marital context, helps to understand the associations between these behaviors and marital outcomes, and portrays a more comprehensive picture of this phenomenon.

A review of the existing typologies of marital couples (e.g., Fitzpatrick, 1988; Gottman, 1994) reveals that scholars at least indirectly drew on the dimensions of responsiveness and/or control to categorize marital types. The typologies offer little scientific explanation, however, as they do not constitute an explanatory mechanism to suggest causes or reasons for communication in marriage, nor do they offer any predictions to understand the associations of the described patterns to other family or relational contexts (see Fitzpatrick, 1988). These typologies are also descriptive in nature,

rather than theoretically driven, which makes them, at best, an initial step toward creating theoretical frameworks of the phenomenon they explore. By looking at the underlying dimensions of the different types of marriage from a responsiveness/control perspective allows for a close look at the forces that may explain these behavioral manifestations.

In this chapter, I define the characteristics that constitute and contribute to marital success. I then summarize the marital literature, organizing it around the two prominent dimensions that emerge in this literature, namely, communication of responsiveness and closeness and communication of control and conflict. I explain how communicative behaviors of responsiveness and control in marriage are related to marital satisfaction, and then I explore how these two dimensions shape the predominant marital typologies. Finally, I explain how Fitzpatrick's (1988) marital typology is particularly useful to guide the current study.

Marital Success

Studies have found that a satisfying couple relationship promotes both psychological and physical well-being for both spouses, as well as for other family members (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cummings & Davies, 2010; Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2001; Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Notarius, 2000). Due to this subject's obvious importance, marital researchers have long tried to understand what makes a successful marriage and what distinguishes it from unsuccessful marriage (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). Generally, researchers evaluate marital success by measuring one or more of these constructs: Marital stability, marital commitment, and marital satisfaction.

Marital stability refers to whether or not a marriage is intact (Wright, Nelson, & Georgen, 1994). Although approximately 90% of all Americans get married at least once in their lives (Segrin & Flora, 2011), the number of marriages that experience disruption (i.e. divorce or separation) has dramatically and consistently increased during the 20th century (Gottman, 1994). According to the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (2010), over 50% of all marriages in the United States end in divorce (see also Bryant & Bryant, 2006). Although the measurement of stability is relatively straightforward (i.e. the duration of a marriage, or number of years that the marriage remains intact), being in a stable marriage does not by itself indicate that it is successful. Spouses may maintain their marriage for various psychological, social, or financial reasons, even though they are unsatisfied or uncommitted to their partner and their relationship (Simpson, Rohles, Campbell, Wilson, & Tran, 2002). Thus, in order to portray a fuller picture of the quality of marriage, researchers usually look at the dimensions of marital commitment and marital satisfaction.

Marital commitment was identified as an important dimension of marital success in the 1990's (Segrin & Flora, 2011). Johnson and his associates (Johnson, 1991; Johnson, Caughlin, & Huston, 1999) indicate that marital commitment is itself composed of three dimensions: (a) *personal commitment* refers to a partner's desire to continue a relationship and is affected by the attraction they feel to their partner; (b) *moral commitment* refers to the set of values one has that determine their moral obligation regarding the relationship; and (c) *structural commitment* refers to the possible constraints to leaving a relationship, such as pressure from social networks, fear of being

alone, or loss of resources provided by a partner. Empirically, research suggests that commitment promotes pro-relationship motivation and behavior (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Finkel, & Wildschut, 2002; Van Lange, Rusbult, Drigota, Arriga, Witcher, & Cox, 1997).

Marital satisfaction is often used as an exclusive indicator of marital success. Accordingly, it has been the most researched dependent variable in the marriage literature (Baldwin, Ellis, & Baldwin, 1999; Kelley, 1999). Marital satisfaction is used interchangeably with marital quality or marital happiness (e.g., Feeney, 2002; Leinonen, Solantaus, & Punamaki, 2003; Norton, 1983), and refers to a partner's subjective evaluation of the extent to which he or she feels enjoyment, contentment, and love in their marriage (Hendrick, 1988).

Several components have been included in the measurements of marital satisfaction. Most self-report measures of marital satisfaction query the partners' attitudes and feelings about their relationship (e.g., Hendrick, 1988; Norton, 1983), but some scales also measure marital adjustment, which refers to the ways individuals deal with various marital issues, such as conflict, shared activities, expression of affection, disclosure of emotions, role orientation, sexual communication, and agreement (e.g., Gottman, 1994; Snyder, 1981; 1997; Spainer, 1976). Marital satisfaction is a predictor of various psychological, developmental, social, and health outcomes for spouses and other family members (Cummings & Davies, 2010). Studies also suggest that couples experience a decrease in marital satisfaction during times of change or transitions in their family cycle, such as the transition to marriage (e.g., Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998), the transition to parenthood (e.g., Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan &

Cowan, 2000; Gottman & Gottman, 2007; Smith, Vivian, & O'Leary, 1990), or when launching children (e.g., Heidemann, Suhomlinova, & O'Rand, 1998; Pryor, 1999).

Thus, marital success is marked by marital stability, marital commitment, and especially by marital satisfaction and adjustment. Studies have found high correlations among these dimensions (Segrin & Flora, 2011), suggesting that they all work together in identifying, at least theoretically, which marital relationships can be said to be more successful than others. Although the notion of successful relationships, and successful marriages in particular, has been largely defined and characterized by psychological and clinical scholarship, many family communication scholars have adopted the pursuit of identifying relationship behaviors that contribute to stable, committed, and satisfying partnerships (see Finchman, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 1988). Thus, it is not surprising to find communication behaviors at the forefront of studies that attempt to understand marital dynamics and marital success.

Communication Behaviors and Patterns in Marriage

A little over four decades ago, scholars began a major conceptual shift away from individual factors as the primary determinant of marital success and toward social interaction and communication processes and patterns between spouses as among the most significant determinants of successful marriages (e.g., Kolb & Strauss, 1974; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). This change took place because researchers started to believe that the essence of the marital relationship lies in the day-to-day interactions in which married couples engage (Noller & Feeney, 2002). Hence, the presumed role of communication in generating marital success has led to a substantial

literature on the communication behaviors and patterns used by spouses to maintain their relationship. This literature generally shows that "happily" married couples communicate in significantly different ways from "unhappily" married couples (Fitzpatrick, 1988; Gottman & Notarius, 2002). Specifically, research shows that specific communication behaviors and patterns are associated with marital satisfaction. As the central role of communication in families, marriage included, is managing, balancing, and promoting responsiveness (e.g., closeness, support, intimacy) and control (e.g., hierarchy, power, conflict) (Le Poire, 2006), I characterize the identified marital communication patterns and behaviors under these dimensions of responsiveness and control. Such categorization helps in understanding the functions of communication in the context of marriage. Thus, in the next sections, I present the findings of this literature by summarizing them under two general categories: one includes communication behaviors that express responsiveness, closeness, and affection and the other includes communication behaviors that are used to negotiate conflict as a representation of control.

Communication Behaviors that Express Responsiveness and Closeness

Researchers have looked at various communication behaviors that express responsiveness, intimacy, and affection among spouses. Findings from previous studies show that a majority of relationship maintenance behaviors are the seemingly small, routine behaviors that keep a healthy marriage going (Canary & Stafford, 2001; Noller & Feeney, 2002). The ways partners show closeness and love for each other include such behaviors as self-disclosure, verbal expressions of closeness and support, nonverbal and physical expressions of intimacy and affection, and material evidence for love (e.g.,

giving gifts) as well as nonmaterial evidence for love (e.g., spending time together in joint activities) (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993; Segrin & Flora, 2011). Responsive behaviors that promote closeness are constituted, reflected, and negotiated by the communication between the partners.

Self-disclosure in romantic relationships has been approached by researchers mostly as a means of increasing understanding, maintaining emotional intimacy, and staying connected (Segrin & Flora, 2011). Studies have found that nondistressed, satisfied couples show more self-disclosures in their communication during discussions related to relational issues (Birchler, Clopton, & Adams, 1984) and spend more time "debriefing" each other about the events of the day (Vangelisti & Banski, 1993). Although research suggests that the amount of self-disclosure often decreases over the course of marriage (e.g., Hendrick, 1981), the depth or quality of self-disclosure continues to be important for predicting marital satisfaction (Caughlin & Petronio, 2004; White, 1983). Specifically, self-disclosures that convey positive information about the speaker or positive feelings toward their partner are associated with increased satisfaction with the marriage (Schumm et al., 1986). Although full disclosure may not always be desirable in relationships (e.g., sharing complaints or criticisms that will hurt a partner's feelings), too much avoidance of disclosure may have long-term costs in marriages (e.g., damage to marital trust, and one's feelings of rejection and exclusion that correspond with low marital satisfaction; Finkenauer & Rime, 1998; Finkenauer & Hazam, 2000).

Verbal expressions of closeness and support include verbal behaviors that promote affection, positivity, and assurances (Gottman, 1999; Stafford, Dainton, & Hass,

2000). Studies found that these communication behaviors are influential in enhancing marital satisfaction (Eldridge and Christensen, 2002; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 2001). Moreover, Gottman et al. (1998) found that positive affect during conflict discussions between spouses in the early months of marriage was the only predictor of both later divorce and levels of marital happiness, which highlights the importance of this behavior in marital dynamics.

Other researchers also found evidence of the importance of verbal expression of positive affect and support. Cordova and his colleagues (Cordova, Gee, & Warren, 2005; Mirgain & Cordova, 2007) found that expressing positive emotions to one's partner, as well as showing empathy (both by communicating that they see things from their spouse's point of view and experiencing feelings of sympathy and compassion for their partner), are strongly associated with promoting perceptions of intimate safety between the spouses. These perceptions, in turn, are highly correlated with marital satisfaction (Cordova et al., 2005; Mirgain & Cordova, 2007). Stafford et al. (2000) found that offering advice promoted relational maintenance among married couples, and Noller and Fitzpatrick (1993) found that calling a partner by public or private nicknames was an important means for spouses in demonstrating responsiveness and communicating intimacy and closeness.

Nonverbal and physical expressions of intimacy and affection have been found to be even more strongly related to marital satisfaction than verbal expressions of closeness and support (Noller, 1992; Smith et al., 1990). Studies have shown that satisfied couples communicate nonverbally in different ways than dissatisfied couples, such that satisfied

couples incorporate more pleasurable emotions, genuine smiles and laughs, humor, and closer interpersonal distance with their partner during interaction (Gottman, Levenson, & Woodin, 2001; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Weiss & Heyman, 1997).

Nonverbal behaviors play a significant role in creating relational involvement during marital interactions which, in turn, promotes intimacy (Gottman & Silver, 1999). Weger (2005) indicates that satisfied couples communicate more involvement and less indifference by maintaining more eye contact and more physical contact (i.e. touching) during interactions. More eye contact during marital interactions was found to be positively associated with marital satisfaction in other studies as well (e.g., Pasupathi, Carstensen, Levenson, & Gottman, 1999; Flora & Segrin, 2000). In addition, Gottman et al. (2001) found that facial expressions of fear, anger, contempt, disgust, and unfelt happiness during marital interactions are associated both with spouses' perceptions of their marriage as poor, as well as with negative marital outcomes, such as early dissolution of marriage and even physical illnesses.

Researchers also found associations between increased physical intimacy and marital quality. Physical intimacy includes manifestations of touch, such as holding hands, hugging, and putting arms around a partner's shoulder in public, as well as the couple's private sexual relationship (Segrin & Flora, 2011). Tolstedt and Stokes (1983) found that increased physical intimacy, measured by items such as holding hands, kissing, and engaging in sexual intercourse, was associated with increased marital satisfaction. In another study, Dainton, Stafford, & Canary (1994) found a strong positive correlation between the perceptions of a partner's use of physical affection – such as

touching while watching television together, initiating hugs and kisses, and kissing a partner before leaving the house in the morning – with respondents' satisfaction with the marriage and feelings of love and liking toward their spouse.

Studies also point to a strong positive association between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction (LePoire, 2006). That is not to say that the more sexual activity spouses are involved in, the more satisfied they are, but rather that satisfied spouses report greater congruence between the sexual activity that they desire and the sexual activity that they experience (Greef & Malherbe, 2001) which is directly linked to spousal responsiveness in this context. Findings also indicate that both marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction are higher when romantic partners are involved in more open communication about sexual intimacy (Greeff, 2000; Haavio-Mannila & Kontula, 1997). This finding suggests that nonverbal behaviors and verbal behaviors are often interrelated in maintaining marital relationships.

Material and *nonmaterial evidence of love* refer primarily to couples' ways of maintaining their intimate partnership through rituals, (romantic) gestures, and joint activities (Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993). Rituals have a meaning component which involves expectations for attendance, how important the act is, and the symbolic significance of the act (Baxter & Clark, 1996). In this sense, Gottman (1999) suggests that rituals are a way a couple may create a shared meaning if the ritual represents something valued and positive in the relationship. Examples of rituals include celebrating each other's birthdays or an anniversary by going out to a restaurant or a weekend trip, or nursing a sick spouse back to health by staying at home with him or her (Segrin & Flora,

2011). Sometimes rituals in a couple's life contain romantic gestures, and sometimes gestures can be more mundane and not part of a ritual. Cowan and Cowan (2000) indicate that many of the married couples in their longitudinal study on the transition to parenthood reported that bringing flowers or special surprises were romantic gestures they had described as an important part in what they did to show they cared, which was positively correlated with marital satisfaction. For the first six months after the child was born, however, both these gestures and the levels of marital satisfaction were lower for the majority of the couples in the study. In another study, marital satisfaction was positively related to religious holiday rituals and other religious practices of the couple (Fiese & Tomcho, 2001). Similarly, Mahoney et al. (1999) found that joint religious activities are linked to marital satisfaction because they entail opportunities for couples to participate in meaningful or enjoyable rituals together.

Other studies have also found that joint activities and spending time together, in rituals and in other forms, often enhances marital satisfaction (Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993; Stafford et al., 2000). The positive association between spending time together in joint activities and a couple's marital satisfaction is especially true when the time spent together is in leisure activities (Aron, Norman, Aron, McKenna, & Heyman, 2000; Canary, Stafford, Hause, & Wallace, 1993). For example, spouses who are both runners and run together experience above-average marital satisfaction (Baldwin, Ellis, & Baldwin, 1999). This is consistent with the literature suggesting that exciting positive activities increase marital satisfaction (Reissman, Aron, & Bergen, 1993). Not all joint activities, however, are relationship enhancing. Holman and Jacquart (1988), for

example, found that the positive association between joint activities and marital

happiness is moderated by whether the activity is a high leisure activity (i.e. involves

high levels of dialogue between spouses) or a low leisure activity (i.e. an activity in

which both partners participate together, but with little communication between them).

They conclude that "simply `doing things together' without a high level of perceived

communication had at best no relationship to marital satisfaction, or even a negative

relationship if the time together was accompanied by low communication" (p. 73). This

suggests that it is not the amount of time spouses spend together in joint activities that is

associated with their perceptions of successful relationship, but rather *how* they spend it

together and how responsive they are toward one another during the activity.

In sum, although studies have found a great deal of evidence to suggest that

responsive communication behaviors that express closeness and affection are better in

promoting marital satisfaction, they also paint a more complex picture of the factors that

influence relational outcomes. The ways and levels of sharing intimacy and affection

vary by couple, over the course of marriage, and also by the context wherein the behavior

takes place. Even so, research indicates that negotiating closeness and affection through

responsive communication plays a significant role in marital dynamics.

Communication Behaviors Used to Negotiate Conflict as a Representation of

Control

Marital conflict and control have been the most studied communication processes

in the marital literature (Segrin et al., 2009). Examining how spouses approach conflict in

their marriage has been at the core of a large body of research that explored the

relationship between marital success, or rather marital distress, and the way spouses act

and express control during argumentative episodes. The research on marital conflict

indicates that specific aspects of couples' communication around conflict-laden topics are

associated with, and predictive of, marital satisfaction (Elridge & Christensen, 2002).

Conflict is also a dominant component in the body of research that focuses on power in

marital dynamics and the role of communication of control in these processes (see

Gottman & Notarius, 2000, 2002). One obvious feature of the typical paradigm of marital

dynamics and marital interaction over the last decades has been the focus on conflict

discussions and the negative behaviors that marked interaction of distressed (and

nondistressed) couples in this context (Gottman & Notarius, 2000). Two main *patterns* of

communication behavior are prevalent in the conflict literature: the existence of

reciprocated negative behavior and the demand-withdraw interaction pattern. In addition,

one of the most prominent *topics* of communication in the marital conflict literature

refers to expectations about spousal roles and the way couples negotiate these roles in

their marriage. These three areas will be addressed next.

     Reciprocated negative behavior is the "signature" of distressed couple

communication (Fincham, 2004). This pattern refers to the observation that distressed

couples rely on negative rather than positive techniques when attempting to resolve

disagreements (Gottman, 1998; Jacobson & Margolin, 1979), creating escalating negative

sequences during conflict. Studies indicate that negative sequences are associated with

marital distress and dissatisfaction and that both frequency and sequences of negative

behavior are more salient among couples who demonstrate physical aggression in their relationship (Burman, John, & Margolin, 1992; Gottman, 1994).

Cycles of negative exchange occur when one partner attempts to repair the interaction by commenting on the communication itself that is taking place (Gottman, 1994, 1998). In couples who lack the ability to effectively repair the situation, these responses are usually delivered with negative affect (e.g., irritation, sadness) and evoke more negative responses from the other partner, creating power struggles over who controls the interaction (Gottman, 1998, 1999). The attempt to gain control over one's partner and over the interaction creates a situation where expressions of negative affect begin to get out of control and exceed the negative threshold where the partners believe a resolution cannot be achieved (Gottman, 1999). Studies show this pattern to specifically promote counter-complaining loops where one spouse's relational complaint is met with a counter-complaint by the partner (Alberts, 1988; Rollof, 2009), as well as confrontation-defense-complaint cycles where the spouses' interaction is mainly characterized by reciprocal patterns of verbal confrontation, ending with complaints and anger where the partners show no compromising or cooperation in their interaction (Ting-Toomey, 1983). Whereas distressed couples show these patterns, nondistressed couples show more responsiveness and active listening in their repair attempts (Fincham, 2004; Gottman, 1999), more frequency of reciprocity of positive nonverbal affect (Gottman, 1979), and more reciprocity of positive conflict behavior (Rollof & Waite-Miller, 2006).

In *the demand-withdraw interaction pattern* (Christensen, 1987), one spouse presents a demand, complaint, or criticism, while the partner responds with withdrawal,

defensiveness, or passive inaction. Early studies showed that frequency of demands by the female partner and withdrawal by the male partner are associated with marital dissatisfaction (e.g., Christensen & Heavy, 1990). Moreover, couples seeking a divorce or who are in marital therapy report more demand-withdrawal patterns in their interactions than do happily married couples (Christensen & Shenk, 1991).

As research on the demand-withdraw pattern accumulated, evidence revealed the stereotypical perception of the nagging wife and the withdrawn husband as being false. Roberts (2000) found that in some couples the wife demonstrated a withdraw pattern to her husband's demands. Roberts found that among these couples, husbands' marital satisfaction was especially low. Heavy, Christensen, and Malamuth (1995) found that when discussing the husband's issue, there were no systematic differences in the roles (i.e. the one who demands vs. the one who withdraws) taken by each spouse; but when discussing the wife's issue, women were much more likely to be demanding and men more likely to be withdrawing. This suggests that the roles in this communication pattern are sensitive to context and to whose issue is under discussion (Fincham, 2004). With that said, Caughlin and Huston (2002) found that regardless of who was in the demand role and who was in the withdrawal role, the demand-withdraw interaction pattern was negatively correlated to both husbands' and wives' satisfaction.

The way a couple negotiates roles in the relationship often sparks conflicts between spouses. Marital roles refer to the perceptions of the spouses as to "who does what" (Cowan & Cowan, 2000, p. 92) in their shared lives. Scholars have been studying couples' role arrangements for managing the household tasks (e.g., Huston & Vangelisti,

1995), financial management tasks (e.g., DeFrain & Olsen, 1999), managing dual-careers (e.g., Gilbert, 1993), and child-rearing tasks (e.g., Perry-Jenkins, Pierce, & Goldberg, 2004). Negotiation on roles often reflects spouses' expectations about relational power and control in their marriage and can generate conflicts when these expectations, as well as actual behaviors based on these expectations – two aspects often intricately tied – are unmet or perceived as wrong (Segrin & Flora, 2011).

Division of household tasks has been the most studied aspect of role negotiation in the marital dynamic literature (Perry-Jenkins et al., 2004). Communication about household tasks is a means of maintaining a marital relationship, which demonstrates commitment and even affection to the spouse (Canary & Stafford, 2001; Stafford et al., 2000). Research generally shows that in most marriages, household tasks tend to be treated as the wife's issue (Cowan & Cowan, 2000). South and Spitze (1994) found that women complete 70% of the housework, even if they work outside the home. Moreover, Cowan and Cowan (2000) indicate that after becoming parents, women find themselves doing much more of the housework than before they became mothers, whereas new fathers do less at home than before the transition to parenthood. Along those lines, DeFrain and Olsen (1999) suggest that household chores still have a tendency to be more gender segregated than are child-rearing tasks or financial management tasks.

Unequal division of household labor may have consequences for spouses' perceptions of their marital quality as the division of household work is ranked among the topics spouses report to most likely spark conflict in marital relationships (Davidson & Moore, 1992; Perry-Jenkins et al., 2004). In turn, studies show that inequity in household

labor has a strong impact on both husbands' and wives' psychological distress (Bird, 1999; Glass & Fujimoto, 1994). In contrast, findings reveal that couples who share tasks exhibit more mutual control, like each other more, and are more committed to and satisfied with their relationship (Stafford & Canary, 1991). Grote and Clark (2001) suggest that these associations stem from perceptions of unfairness in the relationship. They found that the perceived inequality of the division of labor at one point predicts later marital conflict and marital dissatisfaction for wives.

The literature on negotiating marital roles also focuses on dual-career couples and their adjustments to balancing their commitment to their marital relationship and the development of their careers. As the number of marriages in which both partners maintain careers has consistently increased over the last decades (Cowan & Cowan, 2000; Pearson, 1993), dual-career couples face various challenges regarding their sometimes conflicting roles in and out of the home (Gilbert & Rachlin, 1987). In trying to understand the role of communication in these challenges, Rosenfeld, Bowen, and Richman (1995) distinguish three types of dual-career couples: (a) *collapsing* couples include spouses who both show low levels of adjustment to their demands at home and at their jobs, which contributes to marital conflicts and negative communication; (b) *work-oriented* couples include spouses who are highly adjusted to their roles at work, but moderately or poorly adjusted to their roles at home, which contributes to open communication and frequent discussions between spouses; and (c) *traditional role* couples include spouses where the husband is high in both his work adaptation and his home adaptation and the wife is well-adjusted to the roles at home, but low-adjusted to

her role in a career, which contributes to the highest levels of communication openness and marital satisfaction.

In sum, research on marital conflict and control suggests that it involves both behavioral aspects – namely, interaction sequences and communication patterns – and topical aspects – namely, perceptions on roles in the marriage. Studies have shown that satisfied married couples and dissatisfied married couples demonstrate different characteristics in both realms.

Typologies of Married Couples

Marital scholars have suggested ways to organize couples' attitudes toward marriage and communication behaviors in their relationship to characterize marital couple types (e.g., Fitzpatrick, 1988; Gottman, 1994). Although marital typologies are not directly based on responsiveness and control, these communicative dimensions constitute the foundations that underlie these typologies. In what follows, I discuss the leading typologies in the field of marital communication, suggesting how responsiveness and control can be the principles for organizing and understanding the different marital types. As I will show later, marital responsiveness and control parallel parental responsiveness and demandingness as the two dimensions that underlie the dominant parenting typology. Organizing typologies of different family subsystems around parallel theoretical dimensions allows for characterizations of the family as one dynamic system with potentially similar communication behaviors demonstrated by members across family realms.

Reflecting scholars' belief that typologies bring order to the phenomena they study, categorization of marriages into different types has been suggested by researchers in the marital area. Probably the first attempt to organize marriages into different categories, taking into account the dynamic and complex nature of the marital relationship, was proposed by Cuber and Harroff (1965). These researchers based their classification on two general categories of marriages, institutional and companionate marriage, where an institutional marriage emphasizes the values of laws, mores, and authority, and a companionate marriage emphasizes the values of mutual affection, common interest, and consensus.

Cuber and Harroff (1965) identified three types of institutional marriage: (a) *conflict-habituated* couples who fight often but rarely come to a satisfying resolution; (b) *devitalized* couples who spend most of their time conducting family duties (e.g., taking the children to and from school, eating together, etc.), but feel distant from each other; and (c) *passive-congenial* couples who are traditional in their perception of marriage and marital roles, rarely argue, and emphasize their professional, civic, and familial roles as they perceive them. The authors also found two categories of companionate marriage: (a) *vital* couples who share a deep psychological connection and spend time together as much as they can, and (b) *total* couples who share their lives interdependently in an extreme way.

This categorization was intuitive in nature; thus, the authors offered no real way to measure how couples could fit the different types of marriage (Fincham, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 1988). Seeking an alternative to this intuitively derived typology, Snyder and

Smith (1986) offered an empirical approach, based on their Marital Satisfaction

Inventory, to organize marriages into five categories: (a) *Type I* marriages are relatively

nondistressed with both husbands and wives reporting a great deal of flexibility in the

sharing of traditional marital and parental roles; (b) *Type II* marriages are similar to Type

I marriages, only that spouses in this category claim to have a perfect marriage denying

ever having any doubt about their relationship or their partner; (c) *Type III* couples show

moderate levels of marital distress, where husbands are discontent with the way marital

disagreements are resolved and wives are dissatisfied with the amount of affection and

understanding their husbands provide to them; (d) *Type IV* and *Type V* marriages are both

very distressed in all aspects of their marital relationship. Type IV couples report quite

high levels of satisfaction with the way they interact with their children about their

parental roles, whereas type V report low levels of content in that area, too, constituting

the main difference between the two types.

Although empirically derived and process-focused to some extent, this typology

yields too many possible combinations of marital types, namely, 25 couple groupings.

The 25 self-reported marital types represent more of a continuum of

distressed/nondistressed marital relationships than actual distinctive types of marriages.

In this sense, it is not surprising to see that the 25 types are not clearly associated with

specific behavioral patterns of communication. Hence, the two dominant marital

typologies in the marital literature are those of Fitzpatrick (1988) and of Gottman (1994),

which are recurrently introduced in many family communication handbooks when

presenting marital typologies (see LePoire, 2006; Segrin & Flora, 2011; Turner & West,

2006; Vangelisti, 2004). Both typologies are concise, offering clear boundaries in the sense that the types of marriages they portray are both mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Both typologies are also more sensitive to the complex nature of marital dynamics than previous typologies in the field of marriage.

Fitzpatrick's Marital Typology

Fitzpatrick (1988) created her typology of marriage using her own developed Relational Dimensions Instrument (RDI), a self-report instrument to measure three dimensions in marriage: Ideological views of marriage (traditionalism vs. uncertainty), interdependence in marriage (autonomy vs. interdependence), and conflict (avoidance vs. assertiveness). The first dimension, *conventional/nonconventional ideology of marriage*, includes the "beliefs, standards, and values that individuals hold concerning their relationship and family [and] can range from those stressing the importance of stability and predictability to those emphasizing the importance of change and uncertainty" (Fitzpatrick, 1988, pp. 72-73). The two extremes of the ideological dimension are traditionalism (conventional ideology) and uncertainty (nonconventional ideology).

The *autonomy/interdependence* dimension refers to the ways spouses attempt to achieve a satisfying degree of connectedness. The dimension addresses the ways in which each spouse balances his or her desire to be together with their partner with their needs to be apart. The interdependence dimension includes the "amount of sharing and companionship in the marriage as well as the couple's organization of time and space" (Fitzpatrick, 1988, p. 73). The more interdependent the couple is, the more sharing and companionship they have in their relationship, and the more time they spend together.

The interdependent couple also organizes its space to promote togetherness and interaction (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

The third dimension of *conflict engagement/avoidance* refers to the ways spouses collaborate to manage their disagreements. The strategies spouses may use to resolve differences "range from totally avoiding conflict to actively engaging in it" (Fitzpatrick, 1988, pp. 73-74). According to Fitzpatrick, couples vary in their willingness to get involved in conflict and in the degree of assertiveness they demonstrate with one another when communicating disagreement.

By looking at each of Fitzpatrick's dimensions of marital relationships from a responsiveness/control perspective, it is easy to identify the theoretical foundation upon which these three dimensions are based. First, conventional and nonconventional beliefs regarding issues of stability and change in marriage are expressed through communication between spouses. The ideology dimension refers to the invisible rules a couple has regarding each spouse's opportunities for individuality versus the dynamic they believe they should have as a dyadic unit. To achieve stability, spouses may communicate responsiveness to promote closeness. They can, for example, decide that a woman should take her husband's last name when she marries (an item from Fitzpatrick's RDI to measure the ideology dimension) as a way to communicate immaterial evidence for their love and unity. They can also communicate closeness or distance to reflect their perceptions as for whether or not marriage should hold constraints or restrictions on individual freedom (another item from Fitzpatrick's RDI to measure the ideology dimension). To maintain stability over change, spouses can also refer to themselves as a

couple by using the word "we" (as some couples indeed do; Fitzpatrick, 1988) to verbally demonstrate responsiveness to one another to express closeness over distance or individuality. If spouses have disagreements over ideological issues, however, they may need to negotiate them through managing conflict. Recalling the various strategies spouses may employ to manage disagreement, different couples use and demonstrate different communicative patterns during conflict. Conventional and nonconventional beliefs about marriage, then, are expressed, maintained, shaped, and reflected in the communication of responsiveness and the communication of control.

Second, the autonomy/interdependence dimension directly deals with issues of responsiveness and closeness in the marital relationship. In balancing closeness with a partner, each spouse may have different desires with regard to the degree of togetherness they want. In order to achieve togetherness, spouses communicate closeness; in order to achieve autonomy, they may communicate distance. In any case, to negotiate autonomy and interdependence, spouses employ communicative behaviors along the closeness/distance dimension and must be responsive to one another's desires in balancing autonomy and togetherness. Managing autonomy and interdependence in marriage may also spark conflict between spouses whenever the difference between their desires for being together or apart grows. Reflecting aspects of power in their relationship, spouses may negotiate issues of closeness and distance employing a control perspective in their interaction. In this sense, Fitzpatrick's autonomy/interdependence dimension can be interpreted along a conflict or control dimension as well.

Third, whereas the previous dimension mainly corresponds with issues of responsiveness, the dimension of conflict engagement/avoidance directly addresses issues of conflict and control. Under this dimension, couples may demonstrate different communication behaviors to manage conflict. They both can get extremely involved and engaged in conflict, caught up in cycles of negative exchange, for example. On the contrary, one spouse may tend to promote open conflict by expressing concerns regarding relational issues, whereas the other may want to avoid conflict and thus, tends to withdraw from interaction (i.e. the demand/withdraw interaction pattern). Hence, Fitzpatrick's (1988) three dimensions can be interpreted through the responsiveness and control dimensions, promoting one unifying theoretical prism to understand them.

To develop her full typology of marital couples, however, Fitzpatrick looked at possible combinations between the three dimensions just discussed, to yield specific marital types. According to participants' scores on the RDI, three discrete relational definitions were identified: Traditional, Independent, or Separate. Although Fitzpatrick describes each marital type's attitudes and communication behaviors mostly based on the ideological, interdependence, and conflict dimensions, the three types can, again, be characterized in terms of responsiveness and control. Based on Fitzpatrick's (1984, 1988) description of her findings, I highlight the responsiveness and control features that underlie each type's characteristics.

Traditional couples value stability and hold to conventional relational ideologies and customs. In traditional marriages, relational stability is preferred over relational change or uncertainty, and both spouses believe that marriage is a very important,

obligating institution that calls for sacrifices of some personal independence from both spouses. Traditional couples agree about the nature of gender roles, where the male often sees himself as analytical, assertive, and dominant in the marriage, and the female sees herself as warm, expressive, and nurturing. Because they agree on the same values and are committed to conventional gender roles, traditional couples have very little to no power struggles in their conversation (Fitzpatrick, 1988). In terms of conflict and control, then, these couples have very few disagreements and thus, a minimal amount of struggles over control. They are, however, likely to engage in conflict when the issue is significant, though in a cooperative rather than assertive way. In terms of responsiveness, traditional couples exhibit high interdependence in their marriages marked by a high degree of sharing and companionship. Their togetherness is reinforced by the couple's use of time and space, where they spend a lot of time with each other, for example in scheduled meal times and in leisure pursuits. Specifically, traditional couples are engaged in daily joint activities where communication is salient. As described by Fitzpatrick (1988), these couples see verbal openness, being in love, displaying affection, and sharing time, activities, and interests as very important to the marriage, and are thus, willing to communicate these aspects by being responsive to one another to promote closeness.

Independents hold fairly nonconventional values about relational and family life. They believe that romantic relationships, including marriage, should provide psychological benefits to partners that promote satisfaction deriving from the relationship. Independents think that relationships should not constrain an individual's freedom in any way and that each spouse needs to have a strong sense of self, which

should not be lost in favor of the dyadic unit. Independent spouses are highly interdependent in their emotional connection, though they may maintain separate physical spaces and lack the timed routines that characterize traditionals. In this sense, they maintain relationships with other social networks, such as extended family members and friends, and keep their own outside interests (Fitzpatrick, 1988). In terms of closeness, then, although independents may not be spending a lot of time in activities together, nor do they often conduct intimate conversations, they do believe in responsive open communication. They, thus, disclose both positive and negative feelings about each other and they are responsive to one another in close situations. Since they do not believe in the couple being more important than the self, they rarely refer to themselves as one unit by using the word "we," thereby maintaining a sense of independence and distance to keep their autonomy as individuals. In terms of control and power, independents thrive on arguing and managing disagreement. They openly express their views and do not avoid conflict and overt struggles over control. Since gender roles are nonconventional in independent marriages, spouses may find themselves more often engaged in conflict, bargaining, and negotiation regarding roles, rules, and norms for marriage. When they argue, they tend to interrupt each other with questions, allowing the conflict to get to high tones (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Separates espouse ambivalent relational ideologies, often supporting traditional marriage and family values, but simultaneously supporting the individual freedom and ideology of change and uncertainty. Separates' togetherness is a matter of habit and convenience rather than a sign of a real desire to be in each other's company (Fitzpatrick,

1988). In terms of responsiveness, separates have significantly less companionship and sharing in their marriage. For them, marriage constitutes a secure relationship that ties them into the community yet includes very little personal closeness, such as spending time together in joint activities, leisure-wise, household work-wise, or other. Moreover, separates try to keep psychological distance in their relationship to the spouse as they are very careful in their conversations with one another, not disclosing intimate or sensitive information to each other, nor do they openly communicate. In separate marriages, spouses usually show little responsiveness toward one another and little affection to promote closeness in their relationship, as they mostly negotiate their goals for having separate time, activities, and interests, attempting to maintain autonomy through their use of space. In terms of control in the relationship, separates avoid open marital conflicts to express power and control. Given that both spouses have difficulties in predicting how the other sees him- or herself in terms of their roles in the relationship, separates may find themselves struggling with the need to negotiate roles and rules where disagreements arise. When they inevitably do engage in conflict, they tend to demonstrate a demand/withdraw pattern, where one spouse somewhat attacks the other, but the other partner ignores or refuses to confront the initial negative criticism or complaint.

Fitzpatrick indicates that around 60% of the couples in her ongoing study are "pure" types, where both spouses are matched in their marital orientation (i.e. both categorized under the same type). Each marital type is represented similarly within these 60% of couples, at around 20%. Fitzpatrick terms the other 40% of couples as "mixed" couples, where one spouse is characterized differently from the other in his or her marital

orientation. The differences in their marital attitudes and beliefs bring more challenges to mixed couples, as they struggle more often than "pure" couples to resolve fundamental disagreements about their goals, norms, and assumptions regarding the relationship. As they have different expectations from their marriage, they often differ in the degree of responsiveness they demonstrate and the closeness they desire with their spouse, demonstrating different communication behaviors to promote togetherness or autonomy. Facing conflict, mixed couples constantly need to cope with the different styles each spouse may bring to the argumentative episode. For example, an independent spouse may want to openly express his or her concerns and disagreements with their separate spouse, but the latter may go to great lengths in order to avoid conflict, as separates often do. Such patterns may present mixed couples with extra challenges in their communication and, in turn, in their marriage.

Although Fitzpatrick (1988) suggests that each couple type can have a satisfying marriage, the different marital types vary in their use of power, conflict strategies, self-disclosure, expectations, and communication of emotions both verbally and nonverbally. For example, independents tend to disclose to their spouses more than traditionals who, in turn, self-disclose more than separates. In terms of power, traditionals and independents are more likely to engage in competitive, symmetrical transactions than separates. As for communicating emotions, independents show significantly less neutral nonverbal behavior and significantly more negative affect during conflict than traditionals and separates. The marital types differ also in their marital satisfaction, which seems to be highest among traditionals and lowest among separates (Fitzpatrick, 1988).

Thus, the different attitudes, beliefs, and communication behaviors of each marital type

directly correspond with the dimensions of responsiveness and control, which draws clear

theoretical lines connecting the constructs and reveals the conceptual boundaries that

define all of them.

Gottman's Marital Typology

In contrast to Fitzpatrick, who categorized married couples on three dimensions

that include several aspects of marital behaviors and marital perceptions, Gottman (1994)

based his commonly used marital typology on the communication between spouses

during conflict. Gottman's focus on conflict stems from his believing that it constitutes

the most important context to identify marital communicative processes that, in turn, best

predict whether a marriage continues or dissolves (Gottman, 1994). Like Fitzpatrick,

Gottman suggested that each couple type is capable of maintaining a stable satisfying

marriage, but to achieve a relationship climate in which positivity outweighs negativity,

each couple type demonstrates very different strategies during conflict. Gottman

identified three types of couples: Volatile, validating, and conflict avoiding couples.

Gottman (1994) describes the three types according to their characteristics as

reflected in his findings. *Volatile* couples are the most emotionally expressive of the three

types. They highly value openness and honesty in their relationships. Their strong

expressions of both negative and positive emotion prompt them to disagree passionately,

but soon reaffirm their relationship and the other's personality with positive expressions

of affection, humor, or teasing. Keeping a ratio where positive affect outweighs

negativity in their interaction, spouses do not feel hurt by the negative emotional

expressions, and they in fact foster a great deal of romance in the relationship. Disagreements are often interpreted as signs of involvement, caring, closeness, and even responsiveness. Both partners are likely to bring up issues and influence the other early on in discussions and neither partner withdraws. Spouses appreciate the individual expression in their union and see it as the glue that holds them together.

Validating couples are more moderate in their emotional expressions. Though they can become very emotionally expressive, they do so only concerning very important issues. Spouses are careful to initiate their complaints in a softened way. If necessary, they become increasingly expressive as the conversation continues; however, they pride themselves on ending a conversation or influence attempt by solving a problem in a way that benefits the couple as a team. Validating couples view themselves as a team, and they place a premium on companionship and togetherness.

Conflict-Avoiding couples attempt to minimize or even completely avoid conflicts. Rather than spending time disagreeing, they focus on the areas of their relationship that reflect shared beliefs and solidarity. They may compromise or agree to disagree because their primary goal of accepting the other supersedes conflicts. Any form of emotional expressions by the conflict-avoiding couple is usually "low key" and "tempered." It is possible that conflict-avoiding couples are so empathic about their partner and relationship that they take great care to build solidarity and accept their partners as they are.

As described, Gottman (1994) indicates that the couple types differ in the way they exert influence, resolve conflict, and communicate about emotions. Still, Gottman

stresses that each type is capable of having satisfying marriages. Similar to Fitzpatrick's (1988) "mixed" types, Gottman uses the term "mismatches" to describe marriages in which spouses are different types. Gottman suggests that these couples may encounter more difficulties in their marriage since the adjustments they have to make in order to make the marriage work are extreme. Mismatched spouses struggle to overcome disagreements about when and how to exert influence, resolve conflict, and communicate about emotions, which may lead them to engage in negative cycles of communication with poor relational outcomes.

Fitzpatrick's (1988) and Gottman's (1994) typologies of marital couples share some similarities as well as differences. Both are empirically derived and based on rich data, observational or self-reported, focusing primarily on communication processes and outcomes. Both researchers suggest that there is more than one way to conduct a successful marriage or intimate partnership. They both also explain, however, that some communication behaviors, patterns, and perceptions – in contrast to others – promote successful marriages, marked by high levels of satisfaction, commitment, and stability. Whereas Fitzpatrick's typology is very extensive and exhaustive in covering a wide spectrum of behaviors in different relational and individual contexts, Gottman's typology focuses solely on conflict management of couples. This difference between the two typologies nominates Fitzpatrick's marital typology as a stronger theoretical and methodological framework to guide an investigation for mapping a systemic family dynamic than Gottman's typology. Moreover, Fitzpatrick's typology clearly looks at both responsiveness and control, even if not intentionally, whereas Gottman's typology

exclusively deals with conflict. Gottman's typology, then, might be a better fit for an examination of one aspect (i.e. relational control) within the family system but Fitzpatrick's typology better serves an investigation of manifestations of both responsiveness and control in a wide spectrum of situations and contexts in the family.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed the body of research on marital communication. By showing how this literature focuses on communication of responsiveness and communication of control, I attempted to make this literature more accessible, but mostly to create a clear theoretical framework for the extensive work that has been done in this field. Continuing with reviewing the leading marital typologies through responsiveness and control lenses, I offered a further understanding of this literature in terms of these two dimensions. Interpreting Fitzpatrick's marital typology from a responsiveness/control perspective provides a clear conceptual framework to work with in the present study. Though this marital typology has several strengths, Fitzpatrick's marital types offer little scientific explanation as for how and why individuals communicate the way they do in families (see Fitzpatrick, 1988). The current study looks at the *dimensions* explaining marital interaction in Fitzpatrick's typology, rather than using its marital *types*, in order to understand their possible associations with manifestations of warmth and demandingness of spouses and parents. This chapter, then, has laid the foundations to connect marital communication's responsiveness and control to parent-child communication's parallel dimensions of responsiveness and control, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

Parental Communication

For almost a century, researchers have been interested in exploring the possible influences that parents may have on the development of their children's behavioral, emotional, social, and instrumental competence (Darling, 1999). Looking at the ways parents' behaviors shape their children, the unidirectional approach to parent-child interaction suggests that characteristics and communication of the parent directly affect the child's developmental processes in most, if not all, realms of life (Grolnick & Gurland, 2002). The literature that views parent-child interaction as a unidirectional process, where parents mold their child's personality and behavior, has focused on two major parenting dimensions of parental responsiveness or affection and parental control (Grolnick & Gurland, 2002; Segrin & Flora, 2011; Stafford & Bayer, 1993).

Research shows that balancing parental responsiveness and parental control is challenging for parents, and that the ways parents deliver behaviors that communicate responsiveness and control affect child outcomes (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Noller, 1995). Peterson and Hann (1999), for example, found that responsive parenting promotes social competence in children. Others found that parents who help children to learn how to cope with social situations through supportive, attentive, and responsive messages promote better problem solving skills as well as independence in their children (Puntambekar & Hubscher, 2005; Rogoff, 1995; Warwick & Maloch, 2003). One prominent unidirectional perspective on parent-child interaction is attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973), originally suggesting that the ways parents interact with their

child affect personality development (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) and others who followed his theory (e.g., Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Hazan & Shaver, 1987) showed that whereas caregivers' responsiveness and affection in early interaction lead to security and sets the stage for personality development and later attachments, lack of parental warmth and support has aversive consequences for children, which persist across the life span. Similarly, in her longitudinal research, Baumrind (1967, 1971) developed a typology of parenting styles, where she found that messages of parental responsiveness and parental control predict child well-being. Depending on the ways they balance messages of warmth and demandingness, parents can have a significant influence on their children's development.

Although the unidirectional view that emphasizes parents' influence on their children's development remains the dominant paradigm in this literature (Van Egeren & Barratt, 2004), other research in the parent-child field is starting to look at parent-child interaction as situated in the wider family context as a system (e.g., Parke, 2002; Peterson & Hann, 1999). Whereas the unidirectional approach emphasizes the role parents play in child development, the systems view takes into consideration the reciprocal relationship between parents and children and their mutual influences and communication (Parke, 2002). The family systems theoretical approach (Bowen, 1978; Kantor & Lehr, 1975; Minuchin, 1974) sees the family as a system which could only be fully understood in terms of the fluid but predictable processes between members. Systemic models are concerned with the familial and social forces in parent-child relationships to explain their

impact on both parents and children (Belsky, 1981; Cummings & Davis, 2010; Parke, 2002). Segrin and Flora (2011), for instance, explain how when infants are born, they attach to their parents, but at the same time, parents' verbal communication (e.g., baby talk, soothing talk) and nonverbal communication (e.g., touching the infant, hugging them) of affection and love enhance parents' own attachment to the child. Laursen and Collins (2004) point out that conflict between adolescents and their parents, which is not uncommon, promotes closeness in both parents and children in that it stimulates communication about the relationship. According to the systems view, the two-way nature of the communication process constitutes reciprocal actions and reactions from parents and their children during interaction, shaping and reflecting the relationship.

Some studies have also examined the triadic connection among father, mother, and child. These studies indicate that parents act differently when they are alone with the child versus when they are in a triadic interaction (e.g., Buchanan & Waizenhofer, 2001; Doherty & Beaton, 2004; McHale, Lauretti, Kuersten-Hogan, & Rasmussen, 2000); however, this research did not look at specific communication patterns of spouses negotiating their parental communication. I am not aware of any studies that directly explore similarities and dissimilarities in parents' communication of responsiveness and control in their marital interaction. In order to really understand communication in the family as a system, research should look at how family members communicate when they are enacting different family roles (e.g., spouses as parents). In this sense, complete system studies rarely occur because of the complex array of variables that need to be considered in the family system (Peterson & Hann, 1999). Thus, most studies on families

still focus on just a part of the family system (e.g., the spousal subsystem or the parental subsystem) (Segrin & Flora, 2011).

In this chapter, I review the literature on parent-child communication, explaining how it corresponds with the marital communication literature, to examine parallel manifestations of responsiveness and control in both subsystems. The review that follows focuses on the theoretical approaches and the empirical findings of the parent-child literature. Since most of this literature has dealt with the interaction between parents and pre-adult children, this review focuses primarily on this relationship. I start by reviewing the leading unidirectional perspectives on parent-child communication, specifically Bowlby's attachment theory and Baumrind's parenting styles typology, including an exploration of the specific parental behaviors that communicate responsiveness and those that communicate behavioral and psychological control. I continue with a review of systems perspectives on parent-child communication, specifically focusing on the family systems theory (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974) and Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's (1994) family communication typology. I conclude this chapter by highlighting the parallel dimensions that underlie parent-child communication and marital communication, namely, responsiveness and control, to offer a coherent theoretical background to the questions that guide the current study.

Unidirectional Perspectives on Parent-Child Communication

Much research has been published on the role of parental responsiveness and parental control in child development (Aunola & Nurmy, 2005). The unidirectional approach to parent-child interaction, which has been the dominant perspective in the

parent-child literature, focuses on parental communication and its influence on children's outcomes in all domains of life. The unidirectional approach relies on the premise that the parent-child relationship is one of obligation to some extent (Segrin & Flora, 2011). Societal structure, and the fact that infants and children rely on caregivers for nourishment and physical and emotional comfort, obligate parents to care for their child (Van Egeren & Barratt, 2004). Studies show that early interactions between parents and their child, even in the prelinguistic stage, provide the foundation for psychological, emotional, cognitive, and social development (Barratt, 1995). Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), for example, found a strong link between parental responsiveness in early interactions and later mastery of language among children. In another study, Feldman, Greenbaum, Yirmiya, and Mayes (1996) found that prelinguistic communication underlies the development of subsequent linguistic-cognitive processes, as well as self-regulation. Research also suggests that the early communication of parents with their children has an impact on the child's social competence in later childhood (Beckwith & Cohen, 1989), their socialization into cultural rules (Schulze, Harwood, & Schoelmerich, 2001), and their selection of appropriate interaction strategies during interactions with peers (Goldberg, Lojkasek, Gartner, & Corter, 1989). Studies have specifically suggested that the combination of parenting characteristics, namely, parental responsiveness and parental behavioral and psychological control, is crucial to child development (e.g., Baumrind, 1991a; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Galambos, Barker, & Almeida, 2003; Steinberg, 2001). In this section, I explore two leading unidirectional theoretical

perspectives on parent-child communication, Bowlby's (1969, 1973, 1980) attachment theory and Baumrind's (1967, 1971) parenting styles typology.

Attachment Theory

Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980) originally developed his attachment theory to study children's experience of separation from their parents during World War II. Bowlby (1973) argued that human infants are innately driven to seek out and remain in close proximity to their primary caregivers. He explained that attachment, which refers to the positive emotional bond that develops between a child and a particular individual (i.e. the child's caregiver), is based primarily on infants' needs for safety and security (Feldman, 2009). As they develop, infants come to learn that their safety is best provided by a particular individual, typically the mother, and they develop a relationship with the primary caregiver which is qualitatively different from the bonds formed with others (Bowlby, 1973, 1980; Feldman, 2009). Although beginning in infancy, human's innate propensity for forming attachments with others is continuing throughout one's life (Bowlby, 1969, 1973). Thus, parents have a crucial role in shaping children's sense of safety in relational contexts throughout one's life span since early interaction with caregivers leads to security – or insecurity – which sets the stage for personality development and later attachments (Guerrero, 2008).

Attachment theory, then, assumes that early attachment experiences, through interactions between the infant and their parents (usually the mother), become the basis for the child's evaluation of him- or herself as worthy or unworthy of love and support, and of how rewarding or unrewarding he or she perceives relationships to be (Bowlby,

1973). A child's perception of him- or herself as loveable is termed in the attachment theory as the *working model of the self*. A child's perception of his or her relationships with others regarding the way they are expected to treat him or her is termed in the theory as the *working model of others*. Working models are mental representations that summarize and organize one's experiences interacting with others (Guerrero, 2008). Bowlby (1982) posits that the responsiveness of the parent shapes infants' working models which, in turn, help individuals predict the behaviors of others. Whereas the working model of the self reflects the degree to which an individual has a positive versus a negative image of self, the working model of others reflects the benevolence of other people according to their availability, responsiveness, and trustworthiness (Segrin & Flora, 2011). As Bowlby (1973) indicates, the nature of the caregiver's response to the child is the dominant factor that determines the infant's sense of security and shapes the individual's attachment style.

The style of attachment formed with the caregiver depends on the level of parental communication sensitivity in the form of parental responsiveness to an infant's care-seeking behaviors (Bowlby, 1973, 1982). Children whose caregivers are consistently responsive to their signals and to their needs, available, and affectionate, are more likely to develop a *secure attachment* style. Those individuals, experiencing nurturing reliable caregiving, learn to be trusting of others and to perceive themselves as worthy of love and attention. In contrast, children who had early interactions with parents who were cold, unresponsive, and unavailable are likely to develop an *anxious-avoidant* style. Since they have learned that their parents' communicative responsiveness is unreliable, these infants

do not seek comfort in times of need, but instead, they learn to care for, and depend on, themselves. If the primary caregiver was inconsistent and unpredictable in his or her responsiveness to the child, the child is likely to develop an *anxious-ambivalent* attachment style. Anxious-ambivalent infants become carefully attuned to their parents' actions and behaviors because they are uncertain if the parent would be communicatively responsive in times of need. Being anxious about the availability of their caregivers, these children learn that others cannot be trusted, and that they, themselves, may not be worthy of love (Le Poire, 2006; Segrin & Flora, 2011).

Later work on attachment yielded a four-category model of attachment styles, directly based on Bowlby's concept of inner working models. Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) based their model on the different combinations of working models of the self and of others, suggesting that attachment styles during infancy shape a person's specific perceptions of self-worth and trust in others. As in the original three-category model, *secure* individuals have high self-worth and high trust in others, as both their working models of the self and of others are positive. As adults, people with a secure attachment styles feel comfortable with intimacy in their relationships with others, as well as with the level of autonomy they maintain. People who have low self-worth and low trust in others are labeled *fearful* in Bartholomew and Horowitz's model of attachment styles. Fearful individuals tend to avoid relationships because they learned not to trust in other people and to perceive themselves as unworthy of love. They fear intimacy and are socially avoidant. *Preoccupied* adults' working model of others is positive, but their working model of self is negative. As infants, they had to be attentive

to their parents' communicative actions to determine when they would be available and affectionate, so they have come to believe that their value lies within other individuals (Le Poire, 2006). As they depend on other people's impressions of them to determine their worth as a person, they are constantly preoccupied with others to determine their own sense of self-worth (Bartholomew & Horowitz). In contrast to preoccupied, *dismissing* people are likely to have high self-worth and low trust in others. As infants, dismissing individuals learned that their parents' responsiveness is inconsistent; thus, they internalized that others cannot be trusted. In turn, they perceive themselves as unworthy of love and come to rely solely on themselves.

Research shows that people with different attachment styles vary in terms of perceptions, emotional experiences, and communication behaviors (Bartholomew, 1993). In a well-known series of studies on attachment, for example, Ainsworth and her associates (e.g., Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971; Ainsworth et al., 1978) found that infants with different attachment styles behave differently around their mothers. In what Ainsworth and her colleges (1978) called *the strange situation*, where an infant is staying in an unfamiliar room while his or her mother leaves the room for a couple of minutes, they built on Bowlby's attachment theory to develop a widely used experimental technique to measure attachment. Ainsworth found that infants with a secure attachment pattern felt at ease to explore the unfamiliar environment as long as their mother was present. Securely attached children were sometimes upset upon their mother leaving the room, but all of them immediately went to her when she came back, seeking contact (Ainsworth et al., 1978). In contrast, children with an anxious-avoidant attachment style

did not seek proximity to the mother, and after she had left, they often did not seem upset or distressed. When she came back into the room, an avoidant child did not pay attention to their mother, and demonstrated indifference toward her presence and actions. Anxious-ambivalent children showed a mix of positive and negative reactions to their mothers. They were anxious and distressed in the unfamiliar room, unwilling to explore the environment even when their mother was present. When the mother did leave, the ambivalent child showed greater distress, and upon their mother's return to the room, the child reacted ambivalently, seeking physical closeness while hitting and kicking in anger. Ainsworth concluded that parents' communicative behaviors are correlated with their child's sense of security, which constitutes a foundation for children's ability to cope with challenging situations.

The quality of attachment between infants and their caregivers (especially their mothers) has significant consequences for relationships at later stages of life (Feldman, 2009; Le Poire, 2006). Shaver, Collins, and Clark (1996) define attachment styles as coherent and stable patterns of emotion and behavior that individuals consistently demonstrate in their close relationships. An extensive body of research usually supports this assumption. Children who are securely attached as infants, for example, are more socially and emotionally competent later, and others view them more positively compared to children who showed avoidant or ambivalent patterns of attachment as infants (Aviezer, Sagi, & Resnick, 2002; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005; Simpson, Collins, Trans, & Haydon, 2007). Other studies also show that secure individuals are more socially skilled in terms of providing social support and comfort to others (Kunce &

Shaver, 1994; Weger & Polcar, 2002). In contrast to secures, fearful individuals tend to avoid social interaction, dismissive individuals show poor comforting skills, and preoccupied individuals are often viewed as anxious when interacting with others (Guerrero, 2008; Guerrero & Jones, 2005).

Research also suggests that secure individuals strive for communicative interdependence that promotes healthy romantic relationships. For example, secures incorporate more behaviors of self-disclosure in their romantic relationships compared to avoidants and ambivalents (Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). One study found that when discovering that their romantic partner deceived them, secure individuals are likely to seek open communication by talking about the issue, whereas dismissing individuals are most likely to end the relationship (Jang, Smith, & Levine, 2002). Secures also display more intimacy and more nonverbal involvement toward their romantic partners, such as genuine smiles and laughs, facial and vocal pleasantness, expressions of enjoyment, and attentiveness, than dismissing, preoccupied, and fearful individuals (Guerrero, 1996; Guerrero & Burgoon, 1996; Tucker & Anders, 1998). Secure attachment corresponds with less destructive marital conflict patterns than other attachment styles (Cohn, Silver, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992). In turn, those with a secure attachment style also report higher relational and marital satisfaction compared to individuals with other styles of attachment, and perceive parenting as more rewarding (Feeney, 2002; Feeney, Noller, & Roberts, 2000; Meyers & Landsberger, 2002; Vasquez, Durik, & Hyde, 2002).

Although Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980, 1982; Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991) argued that the attachment styles formed in childhood are stable across situations and throughout

one's life, this has been a point of debate among researchers (e.g., Coyne, 1999; Le Poire, Haynes, Driscoll, Driver, Wheelis, Hyde, Prochaska, & Ramos, 1997). Some research suggests that attachment styles change over time and by relationship and are influenced by one's experiences throughout life (Le Poire et al., 1997; Le Poire, 2006). For example, in one study where attachment style was measured categorically (i.e. secure, dismissive, preoccupied, and fearful), approximately one quarter of respondents showed a change in their attachment style over the 4 year course of the study (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Other studies show that individuals' experiences during early childhood and during adulthood can potentially affect one's attachment styles and change it over time (e.g., Le Poire et al., 1997; Le Poire, Shepard, & Duggan, 1999). According to other research, people may modify the style of attachment they had as children when they form a romantic relationship, being influenced by their partner and the ways he or she is attached to them (Le Poire, 2006). Le Poire and her associates (1997, 1999) argue that the final form of one's attachment style is a function of the interaction between how a person is attached to his or her parents and how this person's partner is attached to him or to her. Whereas a couple of two secure individuals show low abandonment fears, low intimacy fears, and reciprocity of involvement, an individual who is securely attached to his or her parents, for example, but their partner's style of attachment is preoccupied, would hold modified experiences of attachment. In this case, that individual would show low abandonment fears like the secure person with a secure partner, but they will have moderate intimacy fears and compensation of involvement (Le Poire, 2006; Le Poire et al., 1997, 1999). Both the parental and the partner attachment styles are important in predicting varying

experiences of attachment and, in turn, manifestations of verbal and nonverbal

communication, in realms of kinetic and vocal involvement, expressiveness, and

communication of avoidance and proximity (Le Poire et al., 1997, 1999). This body of

research implies that attachment characteristics, and internal working models, may

change over time because they are influenced by the dynamic nature of one's life.

In this sense, attachment theory, at least originally, may lack the theoretical and

practical flexibility to allow researchers to use it as a sensitive, dynamic framework to

understand specific parental communication in different stages in life. If attachment style

changes during one's life and is shaped and reshaped by events and relationships, the

significance of parental communication in determining a person's attachment style is

questionable. Even if we do accept the idea that early parental practices affect children's

development, by looking only at one dimension – parental responsiveness – attachment

theory may overlook other aspects of parental behaviors that probably contribute to one's

self image and perceptions of others. One major theoretical dimension that is neglected

by attachment theory is that of parental control. Although parental responsiveness has

been at the core of the unidirectional literature on parent-child interaction, parental

control (or demandingness) has been equally under the focus of this body of research

(Barber, 1996; Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1995; Grolnick & Gurland, 2002).

Baumrind's Typology of Parenting Styles

The key assumption behind the idea that parental communication affects

children's development is that the ways parents balance different dimensions in their

parenting mold their children's adjustment to the social world throughout their life span

(Aunola & Nurmi, 2005). As suggested by attachment theory, parental responsiveness is one such dimension. The other dimension that has been at the core of this theoretical assumption is parental control (often referred to as "demandingness"). One of the most robust and frequently used approaches to study parent-child relationships as a unidirectional process is Baumrind's typology of parenting styles, which is based on these two parental dimensions (Darling, 1999). In order to better understand parental responsiveness and parental control conceptually, I will now briefly discuss the ways in which they are conceptualized and operationalized in the parental communication literature.

Conceptually, *parental responsiveness* refers to "the extent to which parents intentionally foster individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion by being attuned, supportive, and acquiescent to children's special needs and demands" (Baumrind, 1991a, p. 62). Peterson and Hann (1999) add that this is done through verbal and nonverbal messages that make the child feel cared for, supported, loved, and accepted. *Parental control* refers to "the claims parents make on children to become integrated into the family whole, by their maturity demands, supervision, disciplinary efforts and willingness to confront the child who disobeys" (Baumrind, 1991a, pp. 61-62). Parental control refers both to a *behavioral control*, which is the regulation of the child's behavior through firm and consistent discipline, behavioral monitoring, and limit setting (Barber, 1996; Galambos, Barker, & Almeida, 2003), and to a *psychological control*, which is the parents' control over the emotions and behavior of their child through psychological means (Aunola & Nurmi, 2005; Barber, 1996). Behavioral control may include directive

declarative statements, negative acknowledgments, and physical punishments (Baumrind, 1995; Krcmar, 1996; Wilson & Whipple, 2001). Psychological control may include expressions of disappointment, love withdrawal, guilt and shame induction, and parental intrusiveness (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997; Miller-Day & Lee, 2001).

Baumrind (1967, 1971) assessed parental responsiveness and parental control in one of the earliest and most cited series of longitudinal studies on parent-child relationships. Baumrind obtained data by closely observing children in their nursery school setting and parental behavior during home visits. She also employed structured interviews with the parents. To assess responsiveness and demandingness in parents' communication, the scores for parental behavior were calculated and analyzed. The children's behavioral data were employed to assess children's development for examining associations between parenting behaviors and their possible outcomes (i.e. children's social competence and development). To evaluate the different dimensions in parental behavior with their preschooler children, Baumrind (1967, 1971) used Parent Behavior Rating (PBR) scales, assessing fifteen hypothetical constructs (e.g., expect vs. do not expect participation in household chores, discourage vs. encourage emotional dependency on parents, firm vs. lax enforcement policy). These were then composited to create more general parent behavior clusters (e.g., firm enforcement, encouragement of independence and individuality, rejecting). These final clusters were then used in order to assess warmth/affection, behavioral control, and psychological control.

Since her first studies on parenting communication strategies, Baumrind (e.g., 1973, 1991b) and others (e.g., Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991;

Roberts, Block, & Block, 1984) have developed other methodologies and

operationalizations to measure and assess the different parental dimensions. For example,

Aunola & Nurmi (2005) used questionnaires and interviews to assess the three

dimensions. They operationalized *affection* to include items reflecting a positive

relationship between the parent and the child (e.g., "I often tell my child that I appreciate

what he/she tries out or achieves"); *behavioral control* to include items showing that

misbehavior would have clear consequences and parental willingness to confront a child

who disobeys (e.g., "My child should learn that we have rules in our family"); and

psychological control to include items that reflect parental attitudes appealing to guilt and

expressing disappointment (e.g., "I believe a child should be aware of how much I have

done for him/her"). In another case, Cohn et al. (1992) observed parent-child interactions

in a laboratory where they assessed two parental behavior dimensions, *warmth*

(responsiveness) and *structure* (control) using different items to measure these realms.

One main difference that emerges from looking at the somewhat different

operationalizations of these dimensions is that some used self-report measures of parental

behavior (e.g., Karavasilis, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2003; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996),

whereas others relied mostly or only on observations and sometimes (e.g., Baumrind,

1967, 1971; Cohn et al., 1992) employed interviews. Although different in practice, the

results from the vast majority of these studies yielded similar findings about parenting

communication behaviors and their correlates.

Parental behaviors that communicate responsiveness. Responsive parental

communication includes verbal and nonverbal practices of supportive, warm, and

sensitive child-rearing (Peterson & Hann, 1999). *Nonverbal communication behaviors* involve infant-directed speech, gaze, and touch. *Infant-directed speech* refers to parents' unconscious modification of their language in such a way that it engages the infant's attention (Brousseau et al., 1996). Infant-directed speech is a way for parents to signal they are involved with and care about the child (Segrin & Flora, 2011) and is assumed to form the first step toward the learning of words and syntactic structure (Van Egeren & Barratt, 2004). Research suggests that this communication is a function of high levels of emotional expressiveness which benefits the child (e.g., Trainor, Austin, & Desjardins, 2000).

Gaze involves an ongoing eye contact between the parent and his or her child. Across cultures, infants produce more positive vocalizations during periods of mutual gaze (Keller, Schoelmerich, & Eibl Eibesfeldt, 1988) suggesting that gaze may constitute a responsive communication behavior that produces positive feelings in a child. Empirical evidence suggests that more mutual gaze between parents and their child during the first two years of the child's life is positively correlated to rapid acquirement of language (e.g., Blake & Dolgoy, 1993; Deak, Flom, & Pick, 2000).

Research also suggests that *touch* has soothing qualities in the parent-child communication context. Stack and Muir (1990) found that compared with infants whose mothers were looking at them without touching them, infants whose mothers were both looking at them and touching them smiled more and grimaced less. Consistent with Stern's (1977/2002) research, Hertenstein (2002) indicates that infants, and later children,

learn that certain types of touch are related to emotional states and reactions, thus interpreting touch that comes from their caregivers as comforting.

Verbal communication behaviors also play a significant role in parent-child interaction as consistent and genuine messages of responsiveness, support, and involvement. Responsive verbal behaviors contribute to a positive self-esteem in children and adolescents (Noller, 1995). Research also suggests that the typical fears and anxieties that accompany children's developmental stages (e.g.,, separation anxiety in infants, fear of the dark in toddlers, and fear of bodily harm or death in young children) are mitigated by consistent, explicit, verbal expressions of assurance (Segrin & Flora, 2011). When using words and clear pauses between segments of speech in their infant-directed speech, parents also help the child to learn the turn taking system that is socially accepted in their culture (Van Egeren & Barratt, 2004).

Very often, verbal and nonverbal messages co-occur (Van Egeren & Barratt, 2004); however, when messages of verbal support are inconsistent with nonverbal behavior, children experience hollow warmth messages from parents (Seligman, 1995). These messages involve unconditional positive praise that is not contingent on anything the child does, which can lead to two negative outcomes for children. First, the child may become passive, knowing praise will come no matter what they do. Second, no real sense of success may ever be achieved by these children, since they may have trouble appreciating true achievement; thus, their self-esteem becomes lower (Seligman, 1995).

In sum, the relationship between parents' and children's expressiveness begins in infancy and continues as children age and throughout adulthood (Halberstadt, 1991;

Segrin & Flora, 2011). Research suggests that children benefit from verbal and nonverbal messages of warmth and support when those are administered in consistent and genuine ways. Overall, there is considerable theoretical and empirical support for the notion that parents' responsiveness to signals from their children, at all ages, is a crucial aspect of the communication between them and generally is critical to children's development in all aspects and realms of life. Understanding the role of responsiveness in parent-child interaction promotes our knowledge of its significance within this relational context.

Parental behaviors that communicate control. As indicated earlier, control has been treated in the parent-child literature as comprised of psychological control and behavioral control. *Psychological control* refers to means with which parents attempt to alter perceived child misbehavior. Research points to love withdrawal, disappointment, and intrusiveness as such means.

Love withdrawal is a process of psychological control in which parents threaten to withdraw love and attention as a form of punishment through direct expression of anger or disapproval of the child, such as by ignoring the child, isolating them, or threatening to leave the child (Hoffman, 1980). The parent can turn his or her back to the child or refuse to talk to the child in order to capitalize on feelings of dependency and fear (Segrin & Flora, 2011). This often induces guilt in children, discouraging their autonomy (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Studies suggest that parental love withdrawal promotes low self-esteem in children, feelings of blame and guilt, and difficulties in trusting other people (Grolnick & Gurland, 2002). Wilson and Whipple (2001) indicate that love withdrawal, in its most

extreme form, is prominent among abusive parents. These parents often tend to place blame for their own problems on their child.

Disappointment capitalizes on children who seek to please their parents (Segrin & Flora, 2011). Parents have several ways to communicate disappointment, such as directly or indirectly, or by avoidance (Miller-Day & Lee, 2001). Most young adults perceive that their parents express disappointment directly more than indirectly, but mothers are more likely than fathers to rely on nonverbal expressions of disappointment more than verbal expressions (Miller-Day & Lee, 2001). Seligman (1995) indicates that messages of disappointment can be especially hurtful for children each time they take the form of global destructive criticism, where the parent blames the child's character or ability instead of focusing on the specific act or behavior that he or she thinks needs to be altered.

Parental intrusiveness is marked by anxious parental over-involvement and over-protectiveness (Barber & Harmon, 2002). Through intrusiveness, the parent manipulates the child's emotional experiences and impairs the individuation process (Peterson & Hann, 1999). In most cases, parental intrusiveness leads to blurred boundaries between the parent and the child that may, in turn, promote unrealistic expectations of the child with regard to his or her appropriate roles (Stroufe, 2002). Parental over-involvement, in the form of intrusiveness, makes children feel that external forces are responsible for any success they may have, which may give rise to feelings of incompetence (Grolnick & Gurland, 2002; Pomerantz & Ruble, 1998). Roberts and Steinberg (1999) found that adolescents whose parents were intrusive showed strong abilities for self-control, but did

not develop skills to cope with various social and emotional situations apart from their parents. Parental intrusiveness, then, may hinder children in developing the appropriate skills to deal with social and relational situations because their parents take care of these issues for them (Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1997).

Parents try to gain *behavioral control* mainly through employing directive declarative statements or the use of physical punishments. In *directive declarative statements*, parents issue commands relying on their higher status on the parent-child familial hierarchy. Such statements can be "go to your room" or "stop crying". When parents frequently issue commands accompanied by threats and promises, but not with reason, their communication with the child becomes coercive (Baumrind, 1995). In other words, by focusing the child's attention on their powerful status rather than on the logical (often harmful) consequences of the act they wish to correct, parents satisfy their need for control in the form of demandingness rather than being responsive to the child. Not surprisingly, Krcmar (1996) found that as children get older, they are less likely to be responsive or obedient to directive statements. Similarly, Baumrind (1991a, 1995) found negative associations between parental use of directive declarative statements and children's internalization of problem behavior. Thus, directive declarative statements may facilitate parental control over the child in the immediate, short term, but not in the long term.

Physical punishment, which may include hitting, grabbing an arm, slapping, or spanking the child, has been rejected by scholars as having "no corrective purpose" and "pathogenic" (Baumrind, 1995, p. 67). Physical punishment, in its different forms, has

been found to correspond with several negative effects on children and adolescents. One consistent correlate of physical punishment has been aggressiveness performed by the children themselves: Larzelere, Klein, Schumm, and Alibrando (1989) found that high levels of spanking accompanied by low levels of reasoning prompt children to use more aggression toward their peers and parents. Gottman et al. (1997) found a similar finding in their study, and also revealed a negative correlation between frequency of spanking by parents and the child's self-esteem. In addition, Garbarino and Gillam (1980) list several effects of more extreme parental physical punishment on their children, including poor social relationships, lack of empathy, and involvement in problem behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse, delinquency, and suicide. Physical punishment, then, seems to particularly have negative impact on children, especially when it is delivered in an arbitrary, inconsistent, unstructured manner (Baumrind, 1995).

The line between psychological and behavioral control may seem blurred, or at least fine, as coercive communication behaviors, whether verbal or nonverbal, are extreme forms of psychological *and* behavioral control. With that said, the literature on parent-child communication still consistently differentiates between the two facets of control, both conceptually and operationally (see Aunola & Nurmi, 2005). The next section explores Baumrind's (1967, 1971, 1991a) categorization of the ways parents balance responsiveness and control in the communication with their child and her typology of parenting styles, which is based on these communication patterns.

Baumrind's parenting styles. Although scholars that have studied parental communication behaviors attempted to provide labels for parenting styles (see Wilson &

Morgan, 2004), the most influential typology has been Baumrind's taxonomy of

parenting styles. As often is the case with typologies in general, Baumrind aspired to

organize types of parenting into categories according to their strategies when

communicating with their children. Her categorization is based on the two dimensions

discussed earlier, responsiveness and control (Baumrind, 1991a; Macobby & Martin,

1983). With this work, Baumrind wanted to advance the understanding of the complex

relationship between parental communication and children's developmental outcomes.

To examine the possible effects of responsiveness and control on child development,

Baumrind (1967, 1971, 1991; Macobby & Martin, 1983) developed a taxonomy of

parenting styles which has been the leading taxonomy in this field of research (Feldman,

2009; Segrin & Flora, 2011; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). Initially, Baumrind (1967, 1971)

highlighted three distinct parenting styles, authoritative, permissive, and authoritarian,

adding a fourth rejecting-neglecting style later (Baumrind, 1991a; Macobby & Martin,

1983). Each of the four parenting styles reflects different naturally occurring patterns of

parental behaviors, values, and practices, constitutes different characteristics, and

suggests different relationships between the parent(s) and the child (Baumrind, 1991a;

Darling, 1999; Feldman, 2009). Research has found that parenting style predicts child

well-being in the domains of social competence, academic performance, psychosocial

development, emotional development, and exhibition of internalizing and externalizing

problem behavior (Darling, 1999; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996).

  Authoritative parents are high in both responsiveness and control. They balance

high nurturance with firm control and age-appropriate demands (Baumrind, 1995). They

are relatively strict but show emotional support to their child and encourage them to be independent (Baumrind, 1971). Authoritative parents use more positive reinforcement than punishment, and employ useful negotiation in their communication with their children by communicating the rationale for any punishment they may impose (Baumrind, 1995; Feldman, 2009; Segrin & Flora, 2011). In general, Baumrind (1968, 1971, 1973, 1991a, 1995) found that the authoritative parenting style is the most effective for molding competent and content children. Specifically, Baumrind, as well as others (e.g., Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderma, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Miller, Cowan, Cowan, & Hetherington, 1993; Sandstorm, 2007; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994; Trice, 2002), found that children of authoritative parents performed better scholastically, exhibited fewer problem behaviors, and were more pro-social and more self-reliant than any other children. Children of authoritative parents were also found to be independent, self-assertive, self-reliant, and successful in regulating their behavior effectively, including their emotions and their relationships (Domitrovich & Bierman, 2001; Mize, & Petit, 1997; Segrin & Flora, 2011).

   Permissive parents are high in responsiveness but low in control. They offer moderate amounts of nurturance and exercise little control, placing practically no limits on their children's behavior (Baumrind, 1995; Querido, Warner, & Eyberg, 2002). These parents present themselves as resources for the child to use as he/she wishes (Baumrind, 1971). They often give in to their child's complaining or pleading and tend to avoid confrontation (Darling, 1999; Stafford & Bayer, 1993). Children of permissive parents have low self-control and self-reliance, are low in social skills, and are also more likely to

be involved in problem behavior (Feldman, 2009; Segrin & Flora, 2011). These children are more self-centered and have difficulties controlling their impulses (Bornstein, 2002). Since their parents are low in demandingness and control, these children perform less well in school (Vosk, Forehand, Parker, & Rickard, 1982). They have, however, relatively high self-esteem and low levels of depression (Darling, 1999).

Authoritarian parents are low in responsiveness and high in control. They are obedience- and status oriented, providing their children well-ordered and structured environments with clearly stated rules (Baumrind, 1991a). Authoritarians are unresponsive to their child's needs, discourage verbal responses, do not tolerate expressions of disagreement, favor punitive measures to control the child's will, and express the lowest levels of affection, empathy, and support for their children (Baumrind, 1971; Baumrind, 1995; Feldman, 2009; Segrin & Flora, 2011; Stafford & Bayer, 1993). Children of authoritarian parents tend to be especially dependent on their parents and passively hostile. They also tend to be withdrawn, vulnerable to stress, have high levels of depression, and show little sociability (Barber, 2000; Baumrind, 1971; Darling, 1999; Feldman, 2009; Segrin & Flora, 2011). As high demandingness was found to be positively associated with instrumental competence, these children tend to perform moderately well in school (Darling, 1999).

Neglecting parents are low in both responsiveness and control. They are emotionally detached, show little or no interest in their children, and display indifferent, rejecting behavior (Baumrind, 1971; Feldman, 2009). In its extreme form, this parenting style results in neglect, but in less extreme cases, these parents can be said to be

uninvolved, or unengaged, seeing their role as only providing basic needs, such as food and clothes, for their child, and ignoring emotional and social roles they may have as parents (Baumrind, 1971; Darling, 1999; Feldman, 2009; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). Children of neglecting or uninvolved parents perform most poorly in all developmental, behavioral, emotional, and social domains (Darling, 1999; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). These children are less sociable, less aggressive, less disruptive, and less interactive than their average status peers (Hymel, Valliancourt, McDougall, & Renshaw, 2002). They feel emotionally detached, and in some cases, their physical and cognitive development may be impeded as well (Feldman, 2009).

Since this is a typology, rather than a linear combination of responsiveness and control, each parenting style is more than, and different from, the sum of its parts (Baumrind, 1991a). Moreover, most parents can be inconsistent, switching from their dominant mode to one of the others in different situations (Holden & Miller, 1999). Still, research suggests that parents do exhibit one dominant parenting style in their relationship and communication with their children. Although there are exceptions (e.g., Collett, Gimpel, Greenson, & Gunderson, 2001; Simons & Conger, 2007), the consistent results of the associations between parenting styles and child development suggest that the different ways that parents employ and perform discipline for their children usually produce differences in children's behaviors and competencies. Moreover, the effects of parenting styles, especially those of the authoritative parenting style, on child outcomes show consistent patterns across family contexts, including gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family structure, education, and time (Amato & Fowler, 2002;

Darling, 1999; Segrin & Flora, 2011; Steinberg et al., 1994; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996).

This large body of empirical evidence suggests that Baumrind's typology of parenting

styles is a very useful framework for understanding the dynamics between parents and

their children.

<center>**Systems Perspectives on Parent-Child Communication**</center>

The dominant program of research in the parent-child communication literature

views parental communication as exclusively molding children's personality,

perceptions, and behavior through a unidirectional process (Van Egeren & Barratt, 2004).

Although a systems approach to parent-child communication has generated much less

research than the unidirectional approach, the strength of studies that have employed such

a viewpoint lies in their consideration of a broad array of variables that shape parents'

and children's interaction (Segrin & Flora, 2011). According to this research, the nature

of the ongoing interaction among family members creates a family climate where

members influence and are influences by each other's behaviors (Broderick, 1993).

Studies employing the systems perspective have looked at parent-child interaction within

the larger family system. Most of this research focuses on how the marital system affects

children through the implications that children draw for their own functioning as a result

of exposure to conflict, and by altering parenting practices in interaction with their

children (e.g., Cummings et al., 2001; Harold & Colger, 1997; Harold, Shelton, Goeke-

Morey, & Cummings, 2004; Leinonen et al., 2003). In this sense, that research examines

the effect of the family system, particularly the marital unit, on child well-being. In the

final part of the present chapter, I describe the family systems theory (Bowen, 1978;

Minuchin, 1974) as a general framework for understanding family communication,

followed by introducing the Family Communication Patterns typology (Fitzpatrick &

Ritchie, 1994; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, 2004) as a specific attempt to explore

communication in families as systems.

Family Systems Theory

The view of the family as a system where members' lives are intertwined and

interdependent through interacting with one another is not new. Researchers have argued

that the family is a system which could only be fully understood in terms of the fluid but

predictable processes between members (e.g., Bowen, 1978; Kerr, 1981; Kantor & Lehr,

1975; Minuchin, 1974). The theoretical approach for family systems assumes every

family has a structure, which is an "invisible set of functional demands that organizes the

ways in which family members interact" (Minuchin, 1974, p. 51). This structure consists

of the family subsystems, which are smaller units of the system as a whole.

Historically, family systems theory was derived from *general systems theory*, a

theoretical perspective developed in the fields of biology and engineering for exploring

how elements of a system work together to produce outputs from different inputs they are

given (Bertalanffy, 1968, 1975; Wiener, 1948). The main assumption of the general

systems theory is that a system is a set of elements that have interrelations among

themselves and with the environment (Bertalanffy, 1975). General systems theory argues

that systems must be understood as a whole, and that the sum of a whole is greater than

the individual parts (Hall & Fagan, 1968). This fundamental concept of wholeness is

referred to as *holism* in the general systems theory. When applied to families, holism

highlights the idea that families can be understood not through individual members' experiences, but rather through the dynamics and overall climate achieved in a family, considering all elements and how they relate to each other (Le Poire, 2006; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

Family systems theory assumes *interdependence*, referring to the intricate interrelationships and mutual influence of family members. Interdependence emphasizes the idea that the actions of every family member influence the actions of other family members, and that family members rely on one another to promote the functioning of the family and its goals (Broderick, 1993). Family goals, such as social and emotional well-being and family satisfaction, are achieved when at least some degree of predictability is present in the family life. Broderick (1993) opines that all families seek some level of predictability which promotes smoother functioning of the family. In this sense, families are self-regulatory systems, seeking regularity, stability, and balance, to allow the system to pursue its goals. The tendency to seek stability is called *morphostasis* whereas the desire for balance is called *homeostasis*. To secure stability and balance within the family system, members use communication to establish and negotiate routines, roles, and rules. A total lack of stability brings chaos to the family system, where family roles are unclear and family members act unpredictably (Segrin & Flora, 2011). The concept of balance also implies, however, that families need to negotiate at least some degree of flexibility and change alongside stability to promote a healthy environment.

As most systems, families are dynamic and have the tendency to evolve and change over time (Broderick, 1993; Minuchin, 1974). This tendency is termed in family

systems theory as *morphogenesis*. In order to stay emotionally and psychologically healthy, family members need to adjust to change through reorganizing roles, values, and rules. The self-reflexive nature of families helps them to deal with change. By examining their behavior, families attempt to correct it in order to achieve goals. The process of self-correcting is done through *feedback loops*, where a family initiates corrective action upon awareness of a deviation from some standard (*a negative feedback*) or when family members enhance changes from a set point to further encourage these changes (*a positive feedback*) (Broderick, 1993; Segrin & Flora, 2011). Feedback is often used among family members as individuals, or as subsystems.

In the family systems theory, *subsystems* are smaller units of the family system as a whole (Gladding, 2007). Subsystems are formed when family members join together to perform various functions and achieve goals. The two significant subsystems in families are the spousal/marital and parental (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981). The *spousal subsystem* is made up of the marriage partners and is said to have a great influence on how the whole family is structured and functions (Simon, 2004). The *parental subsystem* is composed of the individuals who are responsible for the protection, care, and socialization of the children in the family. Clearly, the spousal and the parental subsystems are often constituted of the same individuals, but under different roles. Thus, when examining the spousal subsystem, scholars look at the relationship between the married partners, and when studying the parental subsystem, the focus is on the dynamics that take place between parents and their children. Subsystems may be best understood by the boundaries that define them (Gladding, 2007).

Boundaries are the physical and psychological factors that separate individuals from one another and that organize them within the family (Minuchin, 1974). According to Minuchin, the clearer the boundaries within a family, the better the family functioning in terms of stability and well-being. Boundaries can be clear, rigid, or diffuse. In *clear* boundaries, rules and routines allow family members to manage their relationships and to address family issues through open communication. Families with clear boundaries adjust to change well since members can successfully and openly negotiate the change. The clear yet somewhat flexible nature of the boundaries between subsystems helps family members to also maintain the stability of the family. With clear boundaries, family members have clear expectations with regard to their family roles (i.e. as a spouse, as a parent, as a child) which help them to balance a sense of belonging with a healthy level of individuation. *Rigid* boundaries are inflexible and keep family members clearly separated from each other. In other words, communication between family members is not open and intimate information exchange is rare. Lack of intimate interaction in such families promotes emotional distance among family members and between subsystems. In families with *diffused* boundaries, there is not enough separation between members. Diffused boundaries reflect and shape blurred expectations with regard to family roles, making it hard for family members to maintain stability as well as to adjust to change. In these families, instead of encouraging autonomy and independence within individuals, unclear diffused boundaries enhance dependence (Boss, 1988; Bowen, 1978; Gladding, 2007; McKenry & Price, 1994; Minuchin, 1974).

Although family systems theory is a dominant paradigm in family science (Broderick, 1993; Whitchurch & Dickson, 1999), it lacks some fundamental characteristics of a true theory. Based on the ideas of several independent-minded theorists who come from different theoretical and professional backgrounds (see Broderick, 1993), the family systems perspective presents various theoretical concepts with no clear processes, relationships between variables, or axioms. In this sense, it is hard to generate concrete, testable hypotheses from this theory (see also Klein & White, 1996). Another shortcoming in the family systems theory has to do with manifestations of its concepts, or, in other words, with the operation of the theory. Whereas the theory suggests concepts such as interdependence, homeostasis, and boundaries, it is unclear what these processes look like and how communication, in particular, portrays these dynamics. When focusing on parent-child communication, family systems theory offers very little in terms of both conceptual and operational framework to examine the dynamics that go on between parents and their children. Finally, by always looking at all family members and the ways experiences influence the family as a whole, family systems theory is susceptible to overlook other delicate processes within subsystems that are more relevant to specific individuals in the family and not to others (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). When dealing with parent-child communication, looking at the family as a whole can provide important information regarding the mutual influences between parents and their children, but it may also leave out the investigation of specific processes in each subsystem that are important to better understand communication and relational aspects within the spousal and the parental units separately. Thus, family

systems may be better described as a paradigm, or a world-view (Whitchurch & Dickson, 1999), but a clearer, more testable theoretical model of communication in families can better advance our understanding of communication behaviors and relational processes in these systems.

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's Family Communication Typology

A clear theoretical description for explaining communication within family subsystems and in the family as a whole would highlight the processes that contribute to the interrelationships between family members and among the practices they employ in the family. Such a theory can shed light on specific dimensions that underlie communicative processes in parent-child relationships. Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2002) argue, however, that there are no theories of family communication *per se*, albeit a growing body of theoretically driven research on various topics in this arena (see also Fitzpatrick & Vangelisti, 1995). In order to address this gap in the family communication literature, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1993, 1994; Ritchie, 1991, 1997; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990) made a first step in trying to understand a family communication climate by identifying general attitudes toward communication and family structure of family members. By exploring the interrelationships between marital communication and parent-child communication, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie also proposed relational and developmental outcomes for both parents and children. In their work, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie developed a family typology to describe family communication patterns.

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) based their work on McLeod and Chaffee's (1972, 1973) model of family communication patterns. McLeod and Chaffee focused on how

parents socialize their children to process information that comes from outside the family, specifically, messages from mass media. They proposed that families use two different communication strategies to process information contained in media messages, which shape the way children interpret messages: (a) *socio-orientation*, where children learn to focus on other members' evaluations of a message to adopt this interpretation; and (b) *concept-orientation*, where children discuss with their parents or peers about the meaning and interpretation of a message, achieving a shared perception of the object. Thus, children of families that use socio-orientation tend to rely on others to interpret the meaning of media messages for them, whereas children of families that use concept-orientation explore the ideas and concepts in media messages to determine their meanings. McLeod and Chaffee opine that the processes families use to share social reality (i.e. interpreting media messages within the family) reflect and shape their communication behaviors and practices. Based on this realization, the two scholars developed the Family Communication Pattern (FCP) measurement tool, a behavioral instrument of the underlying strategies families use for information processing. Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1993, 1994) refined and reconceptualized McLeod and Chaffee's FCP instrument to create their Revised Family Communication Patterns (RFCP) instrument to measure family communication patterns more generally.

To focus more on the communication nature of the processes described by McLeod and Chaffee, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1993, 1994) reconceptualized socio-orientation as *conformity orientation* and concept-orientation as *conversation orientation*. These two dimensions of family communication characterize different climates within

families where conformity orientation highlights elements of family control and conversation orientation highlights elements of family responsiveness. *Conformity oriented* families stress a climate of homogeneity of attitudes, values, and beliefs. Families that are high in conformity orientation are characterized by interactions that emphasize a uniformity of beliefs and attitudes. The focus of interactions is typically on family harmony, interdependence of family members, and conflict avoidance within the family (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006). Such families often believe in a traditional hierarchical family structure, and family members are expected to always favor their family relationships and plans over relationships and activities that are external to the family. Parents in high conformity orientation families expect to make all family decisions and children are expected to act according to their parents' decisions (Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). In contrast, families who are low in conformity orientation believe in less cohesive and hierarchically organized families. Such families stress the importance of heterogeneous opinions and beliefs in their interactions, and of the individuality of family members. In such families, parent-child communication reflects the equality of all family members, so children are often engaged in discussing family issues and take part in family decision making processes. As they believe in the independence of family members, these families encourage personal space and favor personal interests over family interests (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006; Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994).

Conversation oriented families create a climate in which all family members are encouraged to participate in open interaction about a wide array of topics. Families that are high in conversation orientation encourage free, frequent, and open interactions

between family members with little to no limitations regarding the topic discussed. In such families, members share personal information and private thoughts and feelings with each other, and discuss family plans together. Families with high conversation orientation believe that open spontaneous communication is crucial for healthy family functioning, and thus, value frequent honest communication between parents and children (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006). Conversely, families low in conversation orientation demonstrate less frequent interactions between members with only a few topics usually discussed. Only seldom do family members exchange intimate thoughts and feelings, and family activities are rarely discussed. Families at the low end of the conversation orientation dimension do not view open communication as important or necessary for the functioning of the family or the children's well-being (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006).

According to Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1993, 1994; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990), the two dimensions of conformity orientation and conversation orientation in families are dependent on one another. The two dimensions interact with one another, demonstrating that the impact of conformity orientation on family outcomes is moderated by the degree of conversation orientation of the family, and vice versa (see also Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2004; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2006). Thus, since conversation orientation and conformity orientation interact with one another, they yield a typology of four family types with different characteristics: *consensual*, *pluralistic*, *protective*, and *laissez-fair*.

Consensual families are high in both conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Their communication is characterized by a tension between pressure to agree and the desire to preserve the existing hierarchy of the family on the one hand, and the

belief that open communication and exploring change within the family are welcome on the other hand (Fitzpatrcik & Koerner, 2006). Parents in such families are interested and invested in their children, but also believe that they have the responsibility for making decisions for the family and for the children. Parents resolve this tension by spending much time interacting with their children, explaining their reasons for actions, and listening to the child, while at the same time keep the right to have the final word. Children in consensual families learn to value open communication with the tendency to internalize their parents' views. In terms of conflict, consensual families perceive conflicts as a threat to the family structure and relationships, but views unresolved conflict as even a bigger threat, thus, encouraging problem solving and conflict resolution (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997; 2002).

Pluralistic families are high in conversation orientation but low in conformity orientation. Pluralistic families are characterized by having an open spontaneous communication among all family members, and all family members are encouraged to engage in discussions about a wide range of themes. Parents in pluralistic families do not make decisions for their children nor for the rest of the family, but rather promote family discussions in which opinions are evaluated based on the merit of arguments in their support rather than on which family members express them (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006). Thus, children in pluralistic families grow up to believe in free exchange of ideas within the family, learn to value family conversations, and strive to be independent at the same time. Their sense of autonomy contributes to their confidence in their ability to make their own decisions (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Since pluralistic families

encourage open family discussions and do not believe in conformity to mutual family values or attitudes, these families openly address their conflicts with one another, engage in constructive conflict management, and more often than not find resolutions for the conflicts that emerge (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002; Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006).

Protective families are low in conversation orientation and high in conformity orientation. Communication in protective families is characterized by an emphasis on obedience to parental authority and by little concern for any manifestation of open interaction within the family. Parents in such families believe that they are expected to make decisions for the family and for their children, and do not agree with the idea that they need to explain their decisions to their children or to reason with them (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006). Children in protective families learn that there is no value in family conversations and learn to rely on others to make decisions for them. Since these families place a great emphasis on hierarchy and obedience, they negatively perceive conflicts within the family. Furthermore, family members are expected to not have conflicts with one another and to conform according to the family's interests. When conflict does emerge, family members lack the necessary communication skills to address it constructively (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990).

Finally, *laissez-fair* families are low in both conversation orientation and conformity orientation. Communication in laissez-fair families is dull, with minimal amount of interactions among family members take place, and mostly involves a limited number of topics. Parents in such families believe that each member is responsible for

their own life and for their own decisions, but unlike parents in pluralistic families, laissez-fair parents have little to no interest in their children's decisions and therefore do not discuss these decisions with the child (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006). Due to the nature of rare parent-child interaction, children in laissez-fair families learn that there is no value in family conversations, and that they need to make their own decisions alone. Since they rarely receive parental support, these children grow to constantly doubt their ability to make decisions (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Conflicts are also rare in laissez-fair families since only little communication among family members takes place. As they do not believe in conformity nor in conversation, family members do not experience their families as constraining their individual interests, and incidents of colliding interests that may generate conflict rarely happen (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2006).

In their work, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) wanted to understand family communication patterns in light of the possible interrelationships between the communicative strategies within the marital subsystem and the parental subsystem. The authors argued that both marital couple types, as reflected in Fitzpatrick's (1988) work, and the views of parent-child communication, as reflected in Ritchie's (1991) work, are directly related, underlying one family communication schemata. By family communication schemata, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) refer to the "knowledge structures that represent the external world of the family and provide a basis for interpreting what other family members say or do" (p. 276). In other words, family communication schemata are cognitive frameworks that guide family members in their understanding of their relationships. As they had anticipated, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie

found that a family's communication schemata underline mutual beliefs with regard to marriage and parenting shared by both parents. Specific aspects of the marital typology and family communication patterns were interrelated constituting three factors that summarize individuals' perceptions of family relationships: expressiveness, structural traditionalism, and avoidance.

Expressiveness consists of items that tapped sharing in marriage and conversation orientation in parent-child relationships (i.e. family member's perceptions on the extent to which children should be encouraged to openly express their thoughts and feelings with their parents). *Structural traditionalism* is composed of items pertaining to conventional beliefs about marriage and conformity orientation in parent-child relationships (i.e. family member's beliefs of the extent to which parents should practice control over their children to conform to the family structure and rules). *Avoidance* is comprised of items about conflict avoidance in marriage and in parent-child dynamics (Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994). Based on these results, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie introduced their new Family Communication Environment Instrument (FCEI) to assess family communication schemata, measuring the three dimensions shared by parents and their children. In sum, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994; and later, Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997; Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2004) found initial correlations between perceptions of family communication across family roles (spouses and parents) that support their notion of a general family climate that is determined by family type, which itself is determined by the interaction between the two dimensions of conversation orientation and conformity orientation.

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) suggest promising results in the sense that they highlight links between marital and parental dynamics. Their typology also promotes a theoretical framework to examine communication within the family as a system. There are, however, several gaps in this work. First, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie examined *perceptions* of individuals with regard to family norms and relationships. They did not look at the actual communication that goes on between spouses and between them and their children, but rather delved into the cognitive world of individuals, identifying beliefs people have about how communication in families should look like. It is unclear whether or not the perceptions expressed by individuals with regard to family communication are reflected in the communication they actually enact with family members. There might be differences between people's cognition and their behavior, between what they believe and the ways they act (see Rogge & Bradbury, 1999).

Second, as indicated by Caughlin (2003), Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's (1994) family communication schemata are conceptually broad in that they refer to general orientations toward family communication. Following the previous claim that Fitzpatrick and Ritchie did not focus on communication *per se* but rather on perceptions of communication, an examination of the FCPI measurements reveals items which address not only beliefs about the communication that takes place within a participant's family, but also individuals' general assessments of, and attitudes toward, the manifestation of such communication (e.g., "I can tell my parents almost anything" from the Expressiveness subscale; "a woman should take her husband's last name when she marries" from the

Structural Traditionalism subscale; "some issues will disappear if two people can just avoid arguing about them" from the Avoidance subscale).

Third, although it is clear that Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) did find associations among individuals' perceptions of marital and parental norms, they did not uncover whether a person demonstrates similar or different manifestations of communication in their interaction under different roles. In other words, the authors did not explore the idea of whether a spouse communicates similarly or differently as a parent. Although this investigation proposes that individuals perceive communication across family subsystems (i.e. marital and parental) to be similar in terms of expressiveness, traditional structure, and conflict avoidance, the piece regarding how spouses communicate these and other aspects in their relationships as parents remains missing.

Conclusion

In summary, although Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) reported some crucial findings for the family communication literature, it has remained the only investigation which employed an approach that links communication perceptions in different family subsystems. Most of the literature has continued to focus on each family unit (i.e. the married couple *or* the parent-child dyad) or on outcomes of marital conflicts on children. Although some work has employed the family communication patterns typology (e.g., Koerner & Cvancara, 2002; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997, 2002; Ritchie, 1997), this work has mainly attempted to advance this typology into a more cohesive family communication theory, focusing on cognitive processes that are determined by family relationship schemas. As important as this work might be, much of what we might learn

about manifestations of communication across family subsystems is waiting to be uncovered. The theoretical and operational gaps in Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's work call for further examination of this complex dynamic.

The present parent-child communication literature review reveals parallel conceptual dimensions across parental and marital interaction. Dominant theoretical approaches and models of parent-child interaction, such as Bowlby's attachment theory, Baumrind's parenting style typology, and Fitzpatrick and Ritchie's family typology, all nominate communicative responsiveness and communicative control as the conceptual dimensions that underlie communication in families. As demonstrated in the marital review in the previous chapter, parallel dimensions of marital responsiveness and marital control constitute the theoretical foundations of the marital literature. Employing a general family systems view, by specifically looking at family communication of responsiveness and control, the present study offers a new prism to evaluate communication behaviors within and across family subsystems. In the next chapter, I present the research questions and the hypotheses that guide the current investigation on family communication. Based on the reviewed research on marital and parental communication, this study aspires to find mutual associations and influences among marital and parental communication in order to promote further understanding of marital relationships, parenting strategies, and their possible links within the family system.

Chapter Four

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Up to this point, I have summarized the literature on marital and parental communication. This review has identified two dimensions that characterize interpersonal communication in both marital and parental family subsystems: responsiveness and control. The review of the marital and the parental literatures, however, also revealed several shortcomings in both. First, numerous studies have employed the family systems theory to examine marital and parental interaction. Although the family systems perspective advocates a holistic view of the family and its members, it does not provide researchers with a clear theoretical framework to guide them in investigating family processes. Systems theory is often criticized for failing to produce concrete, testable hypotheses, and for a lack of operationalization of the theory's concepts (Klein & White, 1996). In this sense, the family literature on marital and parental communication often lacks a testable theory to guide its research of the family as a system.

Second, most studies that have employed a family systems perspective have focused on the marital and the parental subsystems separately, failing to integrate those subsystems into a cohesive portrayal of the family system. Most research on family communication has focused on features of parent-child communication, but few studies have directly explored how the dimensions of parental communication may be mirrored in marital communication. An investigation of the similarities and dissimilarities in parents' and spouses' communication would promote an extensive understanding of communication processes across family subsystems.

Third, scholars have suggested both marital and parental typologies (e.g., Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1991a; Fitzpatrick, 1988), but these typologies are descriptive in nature. As such, these taxonomies provide little information about correlates of the communication styles they describe and offer little scientific explanation to suggest causes or reasons for communication in marriage and between parents and their children. A focus on the dimensions of marital and parental communication, rather than specific types of couples or families, would allow a more nuanced examination of the overlap in communication between these subsystems and the variety of antecedents and consequences of these behaviors.

Fourth, studies in the marital and the parental literatures have focused either on perceptions of communication of family members (e.g., Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994) or actual communication as observed in the family (e.g., Gottman, 1999; Gottman et al., 2001), separately. There is no evidence to show whether or not perceptions of communication and observed communication in the family correlate. It is possible that people's perceived communication and observed communication differ (see, for example, Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Knobloch, Solomon, & Theiss, 2006). Studies that examined perceptions of communication give information on how family members see their interaction within the family, whereas studies that based their findings on observational data provide knowledge on how outside coders evaluate the communication in families. Examining both perceived and observed communication triangulates the data and provides a more comprehensive look at family communication behaviors.

The current study aims to address these shortcomings in the family communication literature. In this study, I examine and interpret interactions in the marital and parental subsystems within the conceptual dimensions of responsiveness and control. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of Fitzpatrick's (1988) and Baumrind's (1967, 1971, 1991a) typologies, and guided by assumptions of family systems theory (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974), the current investigation examines how communication behaviors are similar and/or different within and across family subsystems. Exploring manifestations of responsiveness and control in both marital and parental communication will highlight important processes in the family as a system. Moreover, looking at the dimensions that underlie family communication rather than at typologies will produce a more sensitive investigation of the possible associations between communication behaviors within and across family subsystems. Finally, by being attentive to the possible differences between perceptions of communication and observed communication behavior, the current study examines to what extent perceived communication in the family is consistent or inconsistent with observed communication in family interaction. In this chapter, I present the research questions and hypotheses that are derived from the reviewed literature on marriage and parenting. Specifically, these questions and assumptions guide this project to understand family dynamics through a close examination of communication within the family system.

Associating Marital and Parental Communication

Fitzpatrick's (1988) marital typology identifies three dimensions in marriage: ideological views of marriage (traditionalism vs. uncertainty), interdependence in

marriage (autonomy vs. interdependence), and conflict (avoidance vs. assertiveness). Recall that Fitzpatrick's dimensions of marital relationships reflect underlying assumptions about the communication of responsiveness and of control between spouses. First, the ideology dimension refers to conventional and nonconventional beliefs couples have regarding issues of stability and change in marriage. Spouses' beliefs about issues of individuality versus traditionalism are expressed and reflected in the dynamic of responsiveness and closeness and of control and conflict between the partners. To maintain stability, spouses often employ responsiveness to express closeness and intimacy (e.g., use the word "we" to indicate their togetherness), whereas to negotiate differences over ideological issues, they should manage their disagreements through communication of control. Second, the autonomy/interdependence dimension refers to spouses' need to balance closeness and distance with a partner. To negotiate autonomy and interdependence, spouses need to be responsive to one another and to communicate the level of closeness they desire, which may sometimes generate conflict when spouses have different views about balancing this dialectical tension. Finally, the conflict dimension deals with issues of marital power management, which directly refers to the conceptual dimension of control in marriage.

Baumrind's (1967, 1971, 1991a) parenting styles typology is based on the conceptual dimensions of parental responsiveness and parental control. Remember that parental responsiveness refers to verbal and nonverbal messages that make the child feel cared for, supported, loved, and accepted, whereas parental control refers to both psychological and behavioral means used by parents to discipline their child. Based on

parental responsiveness and parental control, Baumrind's typology characterizes four parenting communication strategies parents demonstrate when interacting with their child: authoritative parents who balance high responsiveness to the child with firm control and age-appropriate demands; permissive parents who are high in responsiveness but low in control, offering some nurturance and placing almost no limits on their children's behavior; authoritarian parents who demonstrate low responsiveness and high levels of control to integrate their child into the family through creating a structured environment with clearly stated rules; and neglecting parents who show low levels of both responsiveness and control with their child, displaying indifferent, rejecting behavior.

Both Fitzpatrcik's marital typology and Baumrind's parental typology directly or implicitly highlight responsiveness and control as the forces that explain and shape family relationships. This parallel view of family relationships lays a theoretical foundation to identify similarities and differences in specific manifestations of responsiveness and control within marital and parental subsystems. Although Fitzpatrick's marital typology and Baumrind's parenting styles typologies have clearly been the leading typologies in the family literature, there has been no examination of the interrelationships between the spousal and parental family subsystems. Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1994) did identify associations between perceived marital and parental communication, but their work is lacking a coherent theoretical framework (see Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). In addition, Fitzpatrick and Ritchie did not employ Baumrind's leading typology to guide their study on parental communication, overlooking conceptual

similarities of her typology and Fitzpatrick's marital typology. Examining associations between the dimensions of the two leading typologies in the family literature will provide information on how an individual communicates under different family roles with different family members (i.e. with their spouse versus with their child).

Communication behaviors of responsiveness and control may or may not be correlated across marital and parental subsystems. With regard to responsiveness, it is possible that individuals with high interpersonal cognitive complexity (Burleson & Rack, 2008) are able to understand close relationships sensitively and attentively and thus, employ responsive communication in all of their family interactions. In this sense, responsiveness is a trait-based reflection of communication skill and perspective-taking ability, implying that people should be equally responsive in both marital and parental contexts. On the other hand, given that children are highly dependent, parents might promote more responsiveness in that role than individuals would demonstrate with spouses who are more independent. In addition, if responsiveness is a reflection of closeness and intimacy, spouses in distressed marriages may enact less responsiveness with their spouse than they do with their children. In terms of control, provided that parents are the caretakers and disciplinarians for their children, it might be reasonable to expect more controlling communication on the part of parents than between spouses who are expected to have a more equitable relationship. Power dynamics in the marriage or conditions of serial conflict, however, may create conditions where spouses are equally controlling with each other as they are with their children. Thus, the first two research questions in this study are:

RQ1: To what extent is marital responsiveness associated with parental responsiveness?

RQ2: To what extent is marital control associated with parental control?

Inter-Parental Similarity in Responsiveness and Control

To further understand the relationship between marriage and parenting in the family, it is useful to learn about the relationship between husbands and wives by looking at the ways they are co-parenting together. As suggested by family systems theory, members in the family are interdependent, mutually influencing one another's interaction. Although some research indicates that co-parenting dynamics have effects on child development and adjustment (see Cumming & Davies, 2010; Doherty & Beaton, 2004), less is known about how mothers' and fathers' parenting styles may interact to impact family functioning (McHale, Khazan, Erera, Rotman, DeCourcey, & McConnell, 2002). Recall Fitzpatrick's (1988) work on marital types, suggesting there are pure and mixed couple types. In the same manner, there may also be pure and mixed parents in regard to the ways each spouse balances parental responsiveness and parental control. Pure parents would be spouses who demonstrate the same patterns of parental responsiveness and parental control whereas mixed parents would be spouses who show dissimilar behaviors of responsiveness and control as parents.

We know of only two studies that have directly investigated similarities and differences in parenting styles between mothers and fathers in recent years. Winsler, Madigan, and Aqulino (2005), using self-report data, found that permissive parents are most likely to be similar across mothers and fathers, followed by authoritarian parents.

Winsler and his associates found no cross-informant association for authoritative

parenting (they did not include the neglecting parenting style). Simons and Conger

(2007) found mixed results examining children's reports of their parents' behavior and

observed parent-child interaction. According to the children's reports, the most common

family parenting style consisted of two permissive parents, followed by two neglecting

parents, and no families had two authoritarian parents; however, observational data

pointed to families with two authoritative parents as most common. Findings from the

two studies, then, show inconsistent results regarding similarity and difference in

parenting styles among spouses.

One explanation for the inconsistent results is the different methodologies used

(i.e. self-report versus observations). As Rogge and Bradbury (1999) have suggested,

self-reports may not reliably correlate with observational data. Studies have supported

this claim, suggesting that individuals do not always perceive their communication in

ways that are consistent with the way outsiders would characterize their behavior (e.g.,,

Knobloch et al., 2006; Sanford, 2012; Verhofstadt, Buysse, & Ickes, 2007). Thus,

individuals may perceive that they enact certain communication behaviors with their

child that are consistent or inconsistent with their observed communication behavior.

Self-reports coupled with observational data would provide a more complete

characterization of co-parenting practices. Another explanation for the inconsistent

results in previous studies is the conceptualization of parenting styles employed in that

research. Whereas Winsler et al. (2005) and Simons and Conger (2007) used the

typological approach to identify specific types of parents, focusing on the dimensions

underlying the various parenting styles may produce more consistent findings. The dimensions of parental responsiveness and parental control may reveal associations between spouses that can be correlated with a variety of other family characteristics (Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Thus, the next goal of this study is to examine whether mothers and fathers perceive and enact similar or different parenting behaviors in terms of responsiveness and control.

Parents may or may not demonstrate inter-parental similarity in beliefs and behavior. Drawing on the logic that like attracts like, spouses may share similar attitudes and communication strategies in their parenting. On the other hand, if opposites attract, spouses may hold different views on parenting and enact dissimilar parental communication. Specifically, parents might be similar in responsiveness with their children because it is a shared belief that children require nurturing and support. They might, however, be different if they espouse more traditional gender roles calling for women to be the nurturing parent (McKinney & Renk, 2008). Similarly, parents with traditional gender roles might expect the father to be more controlling than the mother, but to the extent that spouses communicate about their expectations for control and discipline, they are likely to share similar views on and to enact similar levels of control with their children. Accordingly, we advance the following research questions:

RQ3: To what extent is (a) perceived and (b) observed parental responsiveness similar or different for mothers and fathers?

RQ4: To what extent is (a) perceived and (b) observed parental control similar or different for mothers and fathers?

Factors that Influence the Marital Relationship

Looking at the family from a systems perspective promotes a consideration of the impact of co-parenting on both the child and the marital unit. Research on co-parenting suggests that parents may differ in their parental perceptions and in the ways they convey messages to the child. Such a difference often promotes disagreement and conflict between spouses (Cummings et al., 2001). McHale (1997) talks about *covert* co-parenting where a parent makes disparaging comments to the child about the other parent without the latter being aware of these remarks (i.e. the parent is absent during that interaction). McHale et al. (2002) indicate that in distressed marriages, parenting is more inconsistent, such that parents exhibit more differences in their parenting strategies. In such families, parents also display more inconsistencies when alone with the child versus when with the other parent and child together. Such findings about spouses' conflict sparked by child-related issues suggest that in the family system, co-parenting can be challenging and that spouses are likely to evaluate one another in terms of the appropriateness or effectiveness of one another's parenting behavior. There are two factors that are likely to influence those appraisals: similarity of parenting style and relational power.

Similarity of parenting style. Similarity of parenting styles may have an impact on how spouses evaluate one another's specific parenting behaviors. Prior research shows that partners who share similar psychological attributes, demographic characteristics, and child-rearing attitudes are more supportive in their co-parenting relationship and evaluate it more positively than spouses who do not share similar characteristics (Belsky, Crnic, & Gable, 1995). Since the co-parenting relationship is characterized by the extent to which

spouses either support or undermine one another's parenting behaviors (Aydintug, 1995),

positive associations between similarity of personal characteristics and co-parenting may

reflect spouses' approval of their partner's parenting behavior. Thus, I predict that

spouses who share similar beliefs about and use of parental responsiveness and control

evaluate each other's parenting practices more positively than spouses with different

parenting styles. Accordingly, the first two hypotheses in this study state that:

H1:   Spouses will evaluate their partner's parenting behavior more positively

when it is similar to their own (a) perceived and (b) observed parental

responsiveness.

H2:   Spouses will evaluate their partner's parenting behavior more positively

when it is similar to their own (a) perceived and (b) observed parental

control.

Research has also found evidence to support what has been termed as the

spillover effect (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Erel and Burman, 1995). According to the

spillover hypothesis, parents who have a satisfying and supportive relationship with one

another are more available to respond sensitively and consistently to their child's needs

(i.e. a positive spillover). On the other hand, parents who are experiencing distress and

conflict in their relationship tend to be irritable and emotionally drained and therefore

less attentive, sensitive, and involved with their children, displaying equivocal and

inconsistent parental communication with their child (i.e. a negative spillover).

Cummings et al. (2001) found that a negative spillover is especially evident in couples

who have a high amount of conflict about child-related themes (i.e., co-parenting). One

consequence of frequent marital conflict over co-parenting is that parents may blame their children for their poor marital relationship (see Goodman, Barfoot, Frye, & Belli, 1999). Previous research shows that higher levels of hostile-competitive co-parenting and an imbalance of mother and father parental involvement are associated with increased marital distress (McHale, 1997). In addition, high levels of conflict about child-related issues are linked to more distress in marital relationships and in parent-child relationships (i.e. a negative spillover effect). By extension, whereas differences in parenting practices promote more disagreement and conflict (see Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001), similar parenting behaviors, along the dimensions of responsiveness and control, may promote more balance in the marital relationship. Thus, I advance the following two hypotheses:

H3:   Similarity in (a) perceived and (b) observed parental responsiveness is
       positively associated with marital satisfaction.

H4:   Similarity in (a) perceived and (b) observed parental control is positively
       associated with marital satisfaction.

Relational power. The degree of relational power that each spouse has in their marital and parental relationship may also influence their appraisals of a partner's parenting and their satisfaction with their marriage. Relational power is often defined in the family literature as "the ability to win contested decisions" (Broderick, 1993, p. 164), or as the ability to achieve desired goals or outcomes (Levine & Boster, 2001). As Klinetob and Smith (1996) showed, the spouse who has more dominance with regard to specific relational issues is often more willing to discuss the issue and more likely to have control over the interaction. If that spouse, however, feels that their partner is not on the

same page with regard to that issue, they may become frustrated with the interaction and in turn, may have less satisfaction with their relationship.

Prior research has found that husbands and wives report less marital satisfaction when they perceive imbalances in relational power in the context of decision making processes (Cook, Tyson, White, Rushe, Gottman, & Murray, 1995; Steil, 1997). This finding is not surprising, considering that power is inherent in conflict about relational issues (Solomon, Knobloch, & Fitzpatrick, 2004). In this sense, Sillars (1980, 1985; Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000) explains that since relational conflict involves the perception of interference with one's goals, partners tend to ascribe blame for a relationship problem to their partner. In other words, if an individual feels that their spouse does not cooperate with them on a relational issue and stands on their way to achieve a goal, cognitive processes about conflict will amplify their tendency to blame their spouse for negative outcomes (see also Cloven and Roloff, 1991), one of which can be manifested as low marital satisfaction (Cook et al., 1995; Steil, 1997). Other studies show that marital satisfaction is negatively associated with relational control and is positively associated with egalitarian expectations for marital roles and practices, as well as with interactions that confirm equality between spouses (Craddock, 1988; Vanlear & Zietlow, 1990). Combined together, and applied to the context of parenting behavior, this evidence suggests that perceived relational power will predict negative marital outcomes, decreasing spouses' both marital satisfaction and their evaluations of their spouse's parenting behavior. Formally articulated:

H5: Relational power is associated with more negative appraisals of a spouse's parenting behavior.

H6: Relational power is negatively associated with marital satisfaction.

Perceived Communication versus Observed Communication

Another main goal of the present study is to understand the associations between perceived and observed patterns of communication behavior in families. Although an extensive body of research has looked at specific communication behaviors between married partners and between parents and children, this research includes both studies that used self-report measures (e.g., Gottman, 1993; Karavasilis et al., 2003), as well as studies that used direct observations (e.g., Ditzen, Schaer, Gabriel, Bodenmann, Ehlert, & Heinrichs, 2009; Goeke-Morey, Cummings, Harold, & Shelton, 2003; Melby, Ge, Conger, & Warner, 1995). Employing observational and self-report methodologies independently has produced knowledge on perceptions of communication and on observed communication separately. Less is known about whether or not perceptions of communication behavior and observed communication behavior are correlated. Studies suggest that individuals do not always perceive their communication in ways that are consistent with the way outsiders would characterize their behavior. For example, Knobloch, Solomon, and Theiss (2006) revealed that dating partners who lacked intimacy evaluated their relationship talk more negatively than did outside observers. Similarly, individuals may perceive that they enact certain communication behaviors with their spouse or their child that are consistent or inconsistent with their observed communication behavior. For example, do spouses who demonstrate a demand/withdraw

pattern during interaction also perceive their conflict management this way? Do mothers and fathers who sustain long eye contact with their infant perceive their communication with the child as responsive? Such differences between perceived communication and actual observed interaction can be crucial in understanding family processes because family members might not be aware of behavioral patterns they perform and that promote certain relational outcomes. Thus, the next two research questions address this issue with regard to both marital and parent-child communication:

RQ5: How are individuals' perceptions of their marital communication associated with observed marital communication patterns?

RQ6: How are individuals' attitudes about parenting associated with observed parent-child communication patterns?

Inconsistencies in Perceived and Observed Communication and Marital Satisfaction

Understanding the potential gap between perceived and observed communication behavior may also have implications for relational outcomes (i.e. marital satisfaction). The link between people's perceptions or cognition and their communication behavior is well documented (see Solomon & Theiss, 2007). Interpersonal communication both shapes and reflects the way people view their relationships. In other words, the ways people communicate in close relationships may shape their perceptions of that relationship; but cognitive perceptions of the relationship also have an impact on how people evaluate their relationships. Recall that perceived responsive communication that promotes closeness between spouses is positively associated with marital satisfaction. Caughlin and Petronio (2004), for example, found that both the perceived amount and the

perceived quality of self-disclosure over the course of marriage is a pivotal predictor of marital satisfaction. Others have found that perceived positive communication, which includes expression of positive emotions to a spouse such as empathy and support, is positively associated with perceived marital happiness (Cordova et al., 2005; Mirgain & Cordova, 2007). Yet other studies have shown that when spouses report high satisfaction with physical intimacy, which includes reports of touching while watching television together, initiating hugs and kisses, kissing a partner before leaving the house, and their sexual relationship, they report high levels of marital satisfaction (Dainton et al., 1994; Tolstedt and Stokes, 1983). Taken together, these studies imply that responsive communication behaviors correspond with increased satisfaction. Notably, however, most of these studies have employed self-report measures to evaluate people's perceptions of their communication, rather than their actual communication. By extension, people who perceive more responsiveness in their marriage than they actually enact in interaction will report increased relationship satisfaction. Thus, I predict that:

> H7: Marital satisfaction is increased when perceived marital responsiveness is higher than observed marital responsiveness.

In addition, recall that perceived communication of control about conflict-laden topics is associated with marital dissatisfaction. Fincham (2004) explains how couples who perceive more negative than positive conflict management techniques also tend to perceive their marital relationship more negatively. Others found that when spouses perceive a demand-withdraw interaction pattern in their relationship, they both report low levels of marital satisfaction (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Christensen & Shenk, 1991).

Finally, some studies indicated that perceived unfairness in marriage (e.g., unequal division of household labor, challenges in balancing time dedicated to one's spouse and to one's career) is negatively correlated with marital satisfaction (Davidson & Moore, 1992; Grote & Clark, 2001). Taken together, this research suggests that perceptions of negative communication between spouses have a significant impact on individuals' perceptions of their marital relationship. In fact, people's perceptions of their communication may be more influential than their observed communication. By extension, I assume that spouses who perceive communication with their partner as including less control struggles and conflict than is evaluated by outside observers will probably view their marriage positively. In other words:

H8: Marital satisfaction is increased when perceived marital control is lower than observed marital conflict.

In the current chapter, I presented the questions and hypotheses that guide the present study. The research questions and hypotheses are derived from the marital and parental communication literature, drawing on assumptions from family systems theory, and aim to identify associations across and within the two family subsystems and to understand the role of both perceived and observed communication in shaping and reflecting family processes. In the chapter that follows, I describe the methods that were employed to examine the research questions and hypotheses of this study.

Chapter Five

Methodology

This study aims to identify husbands' and wives' communication behaviors of responsiveness and control to document similarities and differences within and across family subsystems. Another goal of this study is to explore the factors that influence spouses' perceptions of their co-parenting and marital relationship, specifically similarity of parental responsiveness and parental control and relational power. The final goal of this study is to explore associations between perceived and observed patterns of communication behavior in families and possible consequences such relationships have for spouses. To investigate these goals, I conducted a study in which married couples and their 3-6 year old child completed a series of self-report measures and interaction tasks at the Communication Interaction Lab located in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University. All aspects of this study were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey (protocol #11-667Mc).

Sample

Participants in this study were 51 heterosexual couples and their first biological, 3-6 year old child who all lived together in the same household. Parents ranged in age from 23 to 52 years old ($M = 35.15$, $SD = 5.67$), whereas children ranged in age from 3 to 6 years old ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.89$) with 24 boys and 27 girls participating in the study. Couples were married for an average of 6.17 years (range 10 months-14 years) and had on average 1.65 children (range 1 child to 3 children: 37.3% had 1 child, 58.8% had 2

children, and 3.9% of the couples had 3 children). In terms of education, 14.7% of the parents who participated in the study were high school graduates, 48% graduated from college with a 2- or 4-year college degree, 29.4% held a Masters degree, and 7.8% had a doctoral-level degree. Participants reported their annual household income, with 13.4% of the families making $50,000 or less, 65% making $50,001 to $125,000 a year, and 21.6% reported an annual household income higher than $125,001. The majority of participants (67.6%) were Caucasian, 10.8% were African American, 9.8% were Hispanic, 7.8% were Asian/Pacific Islander, 4.9% were Indian, 2% were Middle Eastern, and 2.9% reported Other (the percentages for ethnicity sum to more than 100% because participants were instructed to check all ethnicities that applied).

Procedure

Flyers with a general description of the study were distributed in preschools and daycares in central and northern New Jersey, calling for mothers, fathers, and their 3-6 year old child to participate in the study. The flyers contained contact information for the researcher. In addition, undergraduate students enrolled in communication classes at Rutgers University were given extra course credit for recruiting eligible couples to participate in the study. Families interested in participating were instructed to email the researcher to set up an appointment when they were able to come to the interaction lab in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University to complete all study elements. Each family that took part in the study received $80 for their participation (each spouse received $40).

Upon arrival at the research laboratory, each spouse was asked to provide consent to participate in the study. Following Rutgers' Institutional Review Board's protocol, as the child's legally authorized representatives, the parents were also asked to sign a written informed consent form for the child's participation in this study. After providing their consent, the parents completed a questionnaire (from hereon, the pre-interaction questionnaire) with closed-ended items about their marital relationship, their beliefs about marriage, and their attitudes about parenting (see Appendix A). During the time when parents were completing the written survey, a research assistant supervised and engaged the child (and any younger siblings who may have attended) in activities to keep him or her occupied.

After the spouses completed the survey, the family was asked to participate in a series of structured and unstructured tasks. In this part of the procedure, parents were asked to work individually with their child on two tasks that were challenging for their child, and were told that they could help the child in whatever ways they felt were appropriate. The structured tasks (based on Cohn, Cowan, Cowan, & Pearson, 1992) included finding matching pairs in a memory game and completing a puzzle. Whereas the memory game was the same for all children of all ages, puzzles varied according to the child's age: children who were 3 years old were given a 24-piece puzzle; children from 4 to 5 years old were given a 50- or a 60-piece puzzle; and children who were 6 years old were given a 100-piece puzzle. Two parallel versions of puzzles were used for each parent-child interaction for each family. Participants were given 7.5 minutes to complete each task (i.e. the memory game and the puzzle), for a total of 15 minutes.

While one parent and the child worked on the tasks in an interaction room, the other parent watched the parent-child interaction on a television from a different room in the laboratory. The observing parent evaluated his/her spouse's parenting strategies during the interaction using a variety of closed-ended survey items about his or her partner's parental responsiveness and control (from hereon, the appraisal questionnaire) (see Appendix B). After the first spouse had completed the tasks with the child the spouses switched roles, such that the spouse who was evaluating the parent-child interaction would work on a similar series of tasks with their child while the other spouse observed the interaction from a separate room and evaluated the spouse's parenting behavior. The families were randomly assigned to have either the father or the mother engage in the tasks with the child to avoid ordering effects. Both spouses were made aware that their partner would be observing and evaluating their interaction prior to beginning the parent-child interactions. The interactions were videotaped to be coded later for manifestations of responsiveness and control between the family members.

When the 15-minute interaction allocated to the second parent and the child was over, the child left the room and the parents engaged in a 15–minute, video-taped conversation about their thoughts on the interactions with the child and their general evaluations of one another's parenting behaviors. The length of a 15-minute discussion was found to be adequate in previous research (Gottman, 1979; Webster-Straton & Hammond, 1999). During the time the spouses were discussing, the child was supervised by a research assistant in a separate room in the laboratory where he or she was unable to hear or see their parents interacting. After their marital interaction, the partners completed

another questionnaire (from hereon, the post-interaction questionnaire) to evaluate their

perceptions of their marital interaction (see Appendix C). Upon completion of the final

questionnaire, participants were given compensation for their participation, contact

information for the researcher, and contact information for counseling services should

they encounter any relational strain upon leaving the study. The family was debriefed and

offered light refreshments before leaving the laboratory.

Measures

A variety of closed-ended Likert questions were used to operationalize the

variables used in this study to identify perceived communication patterns of families.

Confirmatory factor analyses were conducted on all multi-item scales to ensure that they

met the criteria of face validity, internal consistency, and parallelism (Hunter & Gerbing,

1982). The criteria for a good fitting factor structure were set at χ^2/df < 3.0, confirmatory

fit index (CFI) > .90, and root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) < .10

(Kline, 1998). After confirming the unidimensionality of the scales, composite scores

were constructed by averaging responses across items.

Perceived marital responsiveness and marital control. To identify individuals'

beliefs about marital roles and communication patterns, participants completed a

shortened version of Fitzpatrick's (1988) Relational Dimensions Instrument (RDI). The

RDI consists of three dimensions: conventional/nonconventional ideology of marriage,

autonomy/interdependence, and conflict avoidance. Since participants had to complete a

rather long questionnaire, a shortened version of the instrument was used. This version

included the three highest loading items from each of the six scales in Fitzpatrick's

original instrument grouped in terms of underlying the dimensions of responsiveness and control. Participants were asked to rate their level of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree,* 7 = *strongly agree*) with a set of statements. The *marital responsiveness* subscale consisted of four items: (a) we joke around and have more fun than most couples; (b) my spouse reassures and comforts me when I'm feeling low; (c) we tell each other how much we love and care about each other; (d) we can go for long periods of time without spending much time together as a couple (reverse coded) (M = 4.98; SD = .93; α = .67; χ^2/df = 1.24; CFI = .99; and RMSEA = .05). The *marital control* subscale also included four items: (a) we rarely express anger with each other (reverse coded) (b) my spouse forces me to do things I don't want to do; (c) we are likely to argue in front of friends or in public spaces; (d) after fighting, we will spend time separately (M = 3.25; SD = 1.13; α = .64; χ^2/df = 1.05; CFI = .99; and RMSEA = .04).

Observed marital responsiveness and marital control. Video-taped interactions were coded by a team of four trained coders who were blind to the research questions and hypotheses, to identify manifestations of responsiveness and control in the marital interactions. Coders were given coding schemes (see Appendix D) to evaluate the levels of responsiveness and control in the spousal interactions. Coders were given the following instructions: "For each one-minute interval of the conversation, please rate the interaction on a five-point scale with regard to the husband's/wife's responsiveness/control in his/her interaction with the spouse". The instructions then provided a five-point Likert scale for each of the message features which ranged from 1 (*Not At All Responsive/Controlling*) to 5 (*Completely Responsive/Controlling*).

Reliability of the coders was determined using Cronbach's Alpha. An acceptable

reliability was set at α = .70. Coders were reliable across the dimensions of marital

responsiveness and control: observed marital responsiveness (*males*: α = .71; M = 4.09;

SD = 0.42; *females*: α = .73; M = 4.15; *SD* = 0.44), and observed marital control (*males*:

α = .71; M = 2.03; *SD* = 0.53; *females*: α = .73; M = 2.14; *SD* = 0.53).

  Perceived parental responsiveness and parental control. Participants

completed a scale to evaluate their perceived enactment of parental responsiveness and

control. To capture participants' perceptions of their interactions with their child (and not,

for example, their beliefs with regard to family structure or to child's abilities), the scales

included only items that addressed parental communication. Since there are no scales

known to the author that measure only parental communication of responsiveness and

control, the questionnaire consisted of items from Aunola and Nurmi's (2004) Parenting

Style Questionnaire (PSQ) and items from Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, and Hart's (2001)

Parenting Style and Dimension Questionnaire (PSDQ), all referring to parental

communicative behaviors of responsiveness and control. Following Aunola & Nurmi and

Robinson et al., each parent was asked to rate their level of agreement (1 = *strongly*

disagree, 7 = *strongly agree*) with a set of statements for parental responsiveness and a

set of statements for parental control.

  Ten items measured *parental responsiveness*: (a) I am easygoing and relaxed

around my child; (b) I talk it over and reason with my child when he/she misbehaves; (c)

I explain to my child why I act the way I do when he/she misbehaves; (d) I take my

child's preferences into account when making plans for the family; (e) I encourage my

child to talk about trouble he/she experiences; (f) I often encourage my child to talk about his/her troubles; (g) I tend to be responsive to my child's feelings or needs; (h) I have intimate times together with my child; (i) I believe that punishment is more effective than praise (reverse coded); (j) I express my affection by hugging and holding my child ($M = 6.1$; $SD = .57$; $\alpha = .75$; χ^2/df $= 1.53$; CFI $= .92$; and RMSEA $= .07$). Eight items measured *parental control*: (a) it is important for me to show other people how well behaved my child is; (b) my child must learn that there are rules in our family; (c) when my child is crying, it is best if I don't rush to comfort him/her; (d) I have great expectations from my child; (e) my child should be aware of how much I sacrifice for him/her; (f) my child should be aware of how much I have done for him/her; (g) I let my child see how disappointed I am if he/she misbehaves; (h) I expect my child to be grateful and appreciate all the advantages he/she has ($M = 4.23$; $SD = .87$; $\alpha = .75$; χ^2/df $= 1.57$; CFI $= .95$; and RMSEA $= .08$).

Observed parental responsiveness and parental control. Video-taped interactions were coded by the four trained coders to identify manifestations of responsiveness and control in the parent-child interactions. Coders were given coding schemes (see Appendix E) to evaluate the levels of responsiveness and control in the mother-child and father-child interactions. Coders were given the following instructions: "For each one-minute interval of the conversation, please rate the interaction on a five-point scale with regard to the father's/mother's responsiveness/control in his/her interaction with the child". The instructions then provided a five-point Likert scale for each of the message features with ranged from 1 (*Not At All Responsive/Controlling*) to 5

(*Completely Responsive/Controlling*). Reliability of the coders was determined using

Cronbach's Alpha. An acceptable reliability was set at α = .70. Coders were reliable

across the dimensions of parental responsiveness and control: observed parental

responsiveness (*fathers*: α = .73; M = 4.17; *SD* = 0.50; *mothers*: α = .80; M =4.76; *SD* =

0.29) and observed parental control (*fathers*: α = .81; M = 2.40; *SD* = 0.68; *mothers*: α =

.81; M = 2.25; *SD* = 0.44).

Similarity of parental responsiveness and parental control. To calculate the

similarity of parental responsiveness and control I computed four new variables, two for

perceived parental communication and two for observed parental communication,

subtracting the wife's score on each variable from the husband's score. This procedure

yielded computed variables with the potential to range from -7 to +7, where 0 represented

complete similarity between the spouses (i.e. no difference), a positive value indicated

that the husband had a higher score than the wife, and a negative value indicated that the

wife had a higher score than her husband. Then, I took the absolute value of the

differences, but made the absolute value negative, so that the resulting variable had the

potential to range from -7 (spouses are completely different) to 0 (spouses are completely

similar). The resulting variable for the similarity in perceived parental responsiveness

ranged from -1.60 to 0 (*M* = -.61; *SD* = 0.42); the variable for the similarity in observed

parental responsiveness ranged from -1.96 to -.01 (*M* = -.60; *SD* = 0.49); the variable for

the similarity in perceived parental control ranged from -2.89 to 0 (*M* = -.65; *SD* = 0.62);

and the variable for the similarity in observed parental control ranged from -1.64 to -.01

(*M* = -.57; *SD* = 0.45).

Perceived relational power. I developed a seven-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly*

disagree, 7 = *strongly agree*) to measure the extent to which spouses believed they or

their partner had more power in decision-making regarding their child. Four items

measured perceived relational power: (a) I am usually the one who makes the decisions

about our child's schedule and routine; (b) I know better than my partner what our child

likes and dislikes; (c) I am the one who sets the rules regarding discipline for our child;

(d) when our child misbehaves, I am the one who is responsible for dealing with the

situation ($M = 3.89$; $SD = 1.46$; $\alpha = .84$; $\chi^2/df = 2.79$; CFI = .98; and RMSEA = .10).

Marital satisfaction. Based on items developed by Fletcher, Simpson, and

Thomas (2000) to measure relational satisfaction in marriage, participants used a seven-

point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all,* 7 = *extremely*) to indicate their response to seven

items: (a) How satisfied are you with your relationship?; (b) How intimate is your

relationship?; (c) How much do you love your partner?; (d) How content are you with

your relationship?; (e) How close is your relationship?; (f) How happy are you with your

relationship?; and (g) How connected are you to your partner? ($M = 3.25$; $SD = 1.13$; $\alpha =$

.95; $\chi^2/df = 2.81$; CFI = .97; and RMSEA = .01).

Appraisals of a partner's parenting. While watching their spouse interacting

with the child each parent evaluated their partner's parenting strategies during that

interaction. I developed a seven-point Likert scale asking participants to indicate how

much they agreed (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*) with a series of statements

regarding their partner's parenting behavior in the interaction. Participants completed the

scale twice, once following the memory task and once following the puzzle task. The

following items assessed the spouse's appraisals of his/her partner's parenting: (a) my spouse is being responsive to our child's needs; (b) my spouse does not really understand how to help our child to complete this task (reverse coded); (c) my spouse's reactions to our child limit the child's ability to complete this task (reverse coded); (d) my spouse could use some advice in how to really listen to what our child is saying (reverse coded); (e) my spouse is very skilled at helping our child; (f) I would probably act the same way as my spouse in doing this task with our child; (g) I think my spouse is handling this task very well; (h) I would be more effective in helping our child complete this task (reverse coded) ($M = 5.83$; $SD = .83$; $\alpha = .82$; $\chi^2/df = 1.35$; CFI = .97; and RMSEA = .06). The composite variable was computed by taking the average across all items from both tasks.

Difference in Perceived and Observed Marital Communication. To capture the difference between participants' perceived and observed marital responsiveness and perceived and observed marital control, I subtracted the value of the observed variable from the value of the perceived variable, creating variables that showed the difference between perceived and observed behaviors. Since the hypotheses explored positive and negative biases in participants' evaluations of their responsiveness and control, it was important to compute variables that would reflect the full range (i.e. both positive and negative values) around zero. This procedure yielded computed variables with the potential to range from -7 to +7, where 0 means no difference between perceived and observed behaviors, a positive value means that perceived communication was higher than observed communication, and a negative value means that perceived communication was lower than observed communication. The computed variable for the difference in

perceived and observed marital responsiveness ranged from -2.59 to 3.46 ($M = .35$; $SD = 1.23$) and the computed variable for the difference in perceived and observed marital control ranged from -4.64 to 2.90 ($M = .63$; $SD = 1.20$).

     Appraisals of marital interaction. Based on Reis' (2003) responsiveness measure, participants rated the extent to which (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*) their partner was responsive during the marital interaction. Thus, the *appraisals of marital responsiveness* scale included four items that followed the stem, "During our conversation, I felt that": (a) my partner understood me; (b) my partner made me feel like he/she valued my abilities and opinions; (c) my partner made me feel cared for; and (d) my spouse requested that we talk about things that I did not want to talk about (reverse coded) ($M = 6.16$; $SD = 1.1$; $\alpha = .82$; $\chi^2/df = 2$; CFI = .99; and RMSEA = .10). The *appraisals of marital control* followed Christensen and Heavey's (1990) measure and requested that participants rated their agreement (*1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree*) with the following items concerning their marital interaction and follow the stem, "during our conversation, my spouse": (a) often blamed me; (b) often accused me; (c) often made sarcastic remarks about me; (d) put pressure on me ($M = 1.72$; $SD = 1.16$; $\alpha = .83$; $\chi^2/df = 1.11$; CFI = .99; and RMSEA = .03).

Chapter Six

Results

Preliminary Analyses

As a starting point, I conducted paired-samples t-tests to identify any differences in marital and parental communication. Results showed significant statistical differences between perceived marital control and perceived parental control ($t_{(101)} = -3.80$, $p < .001$), such that perceived marital control ($M = 4.23$) was lower than perceived parental control ($M = 4.99$), but no significant differences were found between perceived marital responsiveness and perceived parental responsiveness. Then, I conducted paired-samples t-tests to evaluate each of the variables in the study for sex differences. Although statistical significant differences were not found between husbands and wives in terms of marital responsiveness and marital control (both perceived and observed), significant statistical differences were found for perceived parental responsiveness ($t_{(50)} = -2.13$, $p < .05$), such that fathers ($M = 6.0$) perceived that they were less responsive in their parenting than mothers ($M = 6.21$); in observed parental responsiveness ($t_{(50)} = -8.6$, $p < .001$), such that fathers ($M = 4.17$) were less responsive in their observed parenting than mothers ($M = 4.76$); and in perceived relational power ($t_{(50)} = -6.25$, $p < .001$), such that husbands ($M = 3.08$) perceived having less relational power than wives ($M = 4.69$).

Finally, I conducted paired sample t-tests to identify mean differences between respondents' perceived and observed communication. Results indicated significant differences in participants' perceived and observed marital responsiveness ($t_{(101)} = 9.38$, $p < .001$), such that participants ($M = 4.98$) reported more responsiveness in their marriage

than coders saw in the interactions ($M = 4.12$), and in participants' perceived and observed marital control ($t_{(101)} = 19.19$, $p < .001$), such that participants ($M = 3.25$) reported more communication of marital control than coders saw in the interactions ($M = 2.09$). In addition, significant differences emerged in participants' perceived and observed parental responsiveness ($t_{(101)} = 24.86$, $p < .001$), such that participants ($M = 6.10$) reported more parental responsiveness than coders saw in the interactions ($M = 4.46$), and significant differences in participants' perceived and observed parental control ($t_{(101)} = 19.83$, $p < .001$), such that participants ($M = 4.23$) reported less parental control than coders saw in the interactions ($M = 2.32$).

Next, I assessed the bivariate correlations among all of the variables in the study, which in some cases provided initial evidence to address the research questions. Recall that the first set of research questions queried the extent to which marital and parental responsiveness (*RQ1*) and marital and parental control (*RQ2*) were related. Bivariate correlations indicated that perceived marital responsiveness was positively associated with perceived parental responsiveness ($r = .40$, $p < .001$). In contrast, perceived marital control was not significantly associated with perceived parental control ($r = .06$, $p = .55$). These results, taken together with the paired sample t-tests, provide evidence that there is similarity across marital and parental subsystems for responsiveness (*RQ1*), but not for control (*RQ2*).

Then, I evaluated the correlations between husbands and wives in terms of perceived and observed responsiveness and control to assess the degree to which they are similar in parenting style. These results provide insight for *RQ3* and *RQ4*. Results

revealed positive associations between husbands and wives in terms of observed parental

responsiveness ($r = .30$, $p < .05$) and both perceived parental control ($r = .41$, $p < .001$)

and observed parental control ($r = .26$, $p < .05$), but husbands and wives were not

significantly correlated in terms of perceived parental responsiveness ($r = .18$, $p = .22$).

Taken together, the paired sample t-tests and the bivariate correlations provide mixed

results for addressing the research questions. Regarding *RQ3*, paired sample t-tests

suggest that husbands and wives perceive and enact different levels of parental

responsiveness; however, the correlations indicate that husbands and wives are positively

associated in their observed parental responsiveness and, although the effect was

nonsignificant, the association between husbands and wives for perceived parental

responsiveness was also positive. Results for *RQ4* were more consistent, such that paired

sample t-tests revealed no mean differences between husbands and wives in their

perceived or observed parental control and correlations between parents were positive.

Thus, whereas husbands and wives appear to be on the same page in terms of the amount

of control they perceive and enact in their co-parenting relationship, the results are less

clear regarding responsiveness, but seem to imply more differences between spouses.

Next, I evaluated the bivariate correlations among the factors that predict marital

outcomes and marital satisfaction and appraisals of a partner's parenting (see Table 1).

Results revealed that similarity of observed parental responsiveness, similarity of

perceived parental control, and similarity of observed parental control were all positively

associated with marital satisfaction. In addition, similarity of observed parental

responsiveness and similarity of observed parental control were each positively

associated with positive appraisals of a partner's parenting, and relational power was negatively associated with both positive appraisals of a partner's parenting and marital satisfaction. Finally, in terms of the consistency in perceived and observed marital communication (*RQ5*) and parental communication (*RQ6*), whereas perceived marital responsiveness was positively associated with observed marital responsiveness and perceived marital control was positively associated with observed marital control, perceived parental responsiveness was not significantly associated with observed parental responsiveness and perceived parental control was not significantly associated with observed parental control (see Table 2). Recall that for *RQ5*, paired sample t-tests revealed significant mean differences between perceived and observed marital communication. Bivariate correlations, however, indicated that spouses' perceptions of their marital communication are associated with how outside coders evaluate their marital interaction. For *RQ6*, the correlation results are more consistent with the paired-sample t-tests and suggest that parents' perceptions of their parental communication differ from the parenting behaviors that were observed in their parent-child interactions. In addition, a positive difference between perceived marital responsiveness and observed marital responsiveness was positively associated with marital satisfaction, and a negative difference between perceived marital communication of control and observed marital communication of control was negatively associated with marital satisfaction.

Substantive Analyses

The data were analyzed using hierarchical linear modeling 6.08 (HLM) software, which is designed to accommodate nonindependent or nested data (Bryk & Raudenbush,

1992). I evaluated my research questions and hypotheses using a full maximum likelihood, 2-level model with individual characteristics (e.g. self-reported and observed variables) at Level 1 and dyadic characteristics (e.g. length of marriage and number of children) at Level 2. In the models that follow, the subscript i refers to the individual level data (level 1) and the subscript j refers to the dyadic level data (level 2). Predictors were entered into the model as grand mean-centered variables (i.e., centered around the sample mean) or group-mean centered variables (i.e., centered around the mean for the dyad). All slopes were estimated as fixed effects and the intercept was estimated as a random effect. Hypotheses were evaluated using one-tailed tests.

Associations between Marital and Parental Communication

Recall that *RQ1* queried the extent to which responsiveness and control in marital subsystems are associated with responsiveness and control in parental subsystems. The bivariate correlations and t-tests provide initial results to speak to this inquiry. To further investigate the associations between perceived marital and parental communication, I constructed a model where the marital communication variable was the predictor of the parental communication variable (i.e. marital responsiveness predicted parental responsiveness and marital control predicted parental control). The marital variable was entered in each model as a grand-mean centered predictor on Level 1. Length of marriage and number of children were entered as grand-mean centered covariates on the Level 2 intercept. The following equation represents the model when marital responsiveness was the substantive predictor and parental responsiveness was the outcome variable. A similar model was constructed for marital control and parental control.

Model 1: Association between Marital and Parental Responsiveness

Level-1 Equation

$$Y_{(ij)} = \pi_{oj} + \pi_{1j}*(\text{MARITAL RESPONSIVENESS}_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

Level-2 Equation

$$\pi_{oj} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}*(\text{MARRIAGE LENGTH}_{.j}) + \beta_{02}*(\text{\# OF CHILDREN}_{.j}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\pi_{1j} = \beta_{10}$$

In the Level 1 equation, π_o represents the intercept for the model, π_1 represents the slope for marital responsiveness, and r represents the random effect. In the Level 2 equation for the intercept, β_{01} represents the between-groups differences in the intercept based on years a couple has been married, and β_{02} represents between-groups differences in the intercept based on the number of children a couple has.

Results of this analysis indicated that length of marriage and number of children did not significantly alter the value of the intercept for the models (see Table 3). In terms of the associations between marital and parental communication, results indicated that marital responsiveness was positively associated with parental responsiveness. Marital control also showed a positive, but not significant, association with parental control. Thus, with regard to *RQ1* and *RQ2*, bivariate correlations, paired sample t-tests, and multi-level modeling all converge to indicate that responsiveness is correlated across marital and parental subsystems, but control is not.

Associations between Husbands and Wives in Parental Communication

Recall that *RQ3* and *RQ4* queried the extent to which spouses' perceived and observed parenting behaviors are intercorrelated. With regard to *RQ3*, which inquired

about the degree of similarity or difference between spouses' parental responsiveness, recall that results were mixed. Paired sample t-tests revealed significant differences between fathers and mothers in both perceived and observed parental responsiveness, but correlations revealed that observed parental responsiveness was positively associated across spouses. With regard to *RQ4*, which inquired about the degree of similarity or difference between spouses' parental control, paired sample t-tests and bivariate correlations were consistent in documenting similarity between spouses in terms of both perceived and observed parental control. To evaluate to what extent a father's responsiveness and control are predicted by a mother's responsiveness and control, I conducted multiple regression analyses. Length of marriage and number of children were entered on the first step, mother's communication of responsiveness and control were entered on the second step (in separate models), and the dependent variable was the father's corresponding communication of responsiveness and control, respectively. Results showed that for all models, both length of marriage and number of children do not predict paternal communication. In addition, results for the perceived responsiveness model indicated that mothers' perceived responsiveness did not explain a significant portion of the variance in fathers' perceived responsiveness ($R^2 = .05$, $F = .79$, $p = .51$) and did not predict fathers' perceived responsiveness ($\beta = .14$, $SE = .18$, $p = .35$). Results for the observed responsiveness model revealed that mothers' communication of responsiveness explained a significant portion of the variance in fathers' communication of responsiveness ($R^2 = .16$, $F = 2.84$, $p < .05$), and that mothers' control behavior was positively associated with fathers' observed responsiveness ($\beta = .37$, $SE = .24$, $p < .01$).

In terms of perceived control, mothers' perceived control explained a significant portion of the variance in fathers' perceived control ($R^2 = .21$, $F = 4.13$, $p = .01$), and the parents' reports of parental control were positively associated ($\beta = .35$, $SE = .13$, $p = .01$). Finally, the model for observed parental control revealed that mothers' observed control explained a significant portion of the variance in fathers' observed parental control ($R^2 = .11$, $F = 1.91$, $p < .05$) and that the parents were positively associated in terms of outside observers' ratings of their parental control ($\beta = .28$, $SE = .21$, $p < .05$). Thus, results of these analyses showed that, with the exception of perceived parental responsiveness, spouses were positively correlated in terms of their observed parental responsiveness and both their perceived and observed parental control.

Factors that Influence the Marital Relationship

The next set of analyses investigated the influence of spousal similarity in parenting on appraisals of a partner's parenting behavior (*H1* and *H2)* and marital satisfaction (*H3* and *H4*). Recall that four variables, namely, similarity of perceived and observed parental responsiveness and perceived and observed parental control were computed by subtracting the wife's score from the husband's score. Taking the absolute value of the difference but making it negative, each of the variables could range from -7 to 0, where -7 means that spouses were completely different and 0 means a complete similarity between the spouses. To test *H1* and *H2*, I constructed four models where the similarity of perceived and observed parental responsiveness and control were each entered separately as predictors of appraisals of a partner's parenting behavior. Similarity of perceived and observed responsiveness and control were entered in separate models as

a grand-mean centered predictors on Level 1. Length of marriage and number of children were entered as grand-mean centered covariates on the Level 2 intercept. Model 2 represents the equation when similarity of perceived parental responsiveness was the substantive predictor and appraisals of a partner's parenting behavior was the outcome variable. A similar model was constructed for each of the predictors, namely, similarity of observed parental responsiveness, similarity of perceived parental control, and similarity of observed parental control with appraisals of a partner's parenting behavior as the outcome variable.

Model 2: Similarity of Parenting Dimensions Predicting Appraisals of A Partner's Parenting

Level-1 Equation

$$Y_{(ij)} = \pi_{oj} + \pi_{1j}*(\text{SIMILARITY OF PER PARENTAL RESPONSIVENESS}_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

Level-2 Equation

$$\pi_{oj} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}*(\text{MARRIAGE LENGTH.}_j) + \beta_{02}*(\text{\# OF CHILDREN.}_j) + u_{0j}$$

$$\pi_{1j} = \beta_{10}$$

Results of this analysis indicated that length of marriage and the number of children did not significantly alter the value of the intercepts in the four models (see Table 4). Turning to the slopes for the models, similarity of perceived parental responsiveness and similarity of perceived parental control were not significantly associated with the evaluation of a partner's parenting, but similarity of observed parental responsiveness and similarity of observed parental control were positively associated with more positive appraisals of a spouse's parenting behavior. The residuals indicated

that there was no significant variability left to be explained in the intercept. Thus, *H1* and *H2* were supported for the observed parenting behaviors, but not for the perceived parenting behaviors.

The next hypotheses predicted that spouses would evaluate their marital relationship more positively when they are similar in terms of parental responsiveness and parental control (*H3* and *H4*). Four models identical to Model 1 were constructed where marital satisfaction was the outcome variable and similarity of perceived and observed parental responsiveness and control were each entered as predictors in separate models. Model 3 represents the equation when similarity of perceived parental responsiveness was the substantive predictor and marital satisfaction was the outcome variable. A similar model was constructed for each of the predictors, namely, similarity of observed parental responsiveness, similarity of perceived parental control, and similarity of observed parental control with marital satisfaction as the outcome variable.

Model 3: Similarity of Parenting Dimensions Predicting Marital Satisfaction

Level-1 Equation

$Y_{(ij)} = \pi_{oj} + \pi_{1j}*(\text{SIMILARITY OF PARENTAL RESPONSIVENESS}_{ij}) + r_{ij}$

Level-2 Equation

$\pi_{oj} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}*(\text{MARRIAGE LENGTH}_{.j}) + \beta_{02}*(\text{\# OF CHILDREN}_{.j}) + u_{0j}$

$\pi_{1j} = \beta_{10}$

Results indicated that the length of marriage and the number of children did not significantly alter the value of the intercept (see Table 5). As for *H3*, similarity of perceived parental responsiveness was not significantly associated with marital

satisfaction, but similarity of observed parental responsiveness was positively associated

with marital satisfaction. As for *H4*, similarity of perceived parental control and

similarity of observed parental control were both positively associated with marital

satisfaction. Thus, *H3* was partially supported and *H4* was fully supported.

In addition, perceived relational power in the context of co-parenting was

nominated as a predictor of appraisals of a partner's parenting (*H5*) and marital

satisfaction (*H6*). Two separate models similar to Model 1 were constructed with the

current variables to test the hypotheses. Model 4 represents the equation when relational

power was the substantive predictor and appraisals of a partner's parenting was the

outcome variable. A similar model was constructed with marital satisfaction as the

outcome variable.

Model 4: Relational Power Predicting Appraisals of A Partner's Parenting

Level-1 Equation

$$Y_{(ij)} = \pi_{oj} + \pi_{1j} * (\text{REL POWER}_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

Level-2 Equation

$$\pi_{oj} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01} * (\text{MARRIAGE LENGTH}_{.j}) + \beta_{02} * (\text{\# OF CHILDREN}_{.j}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\pi_{1j} = \beta_{10}$$

Results indicated that both length of marriage and the number of children did not

significantly alter the value of the intercept in the two models (see Table 6). As for the

hypotheses, relational power was negatively associated with positive appraisals of a

partner's parenting, such that partners who had more power to influence decisions

regarding their children evaluated their partner's parenting behavior more negatively, and

negatively associated with marital satisfaction, such that partners who had more power in co-parenting reported lower relationship satisfaction. Thus, *H5* and *H6* were supported.

Associations between Perceived and Observed Communication

Recall that *RQ5* queried whether spouses' perceptions of their marital communication were associated with their observed marital communication patterns and that *RQ6* explored whether parents' perceptions of their parental communication were associated with their observed parental communication patterns. Recall that paired-sample t-tests revealed significant differences in participants' perceived and observed marital and parental communication but bivariate correlations showed significant associations between perceived and observed marital responsiveness and perceived and observed marital control. To further examine the two research questions, I constructed models identical to Model 1. In each model, the predictor variable was one's perceived communication behavior and the outcome variable was the observed communication behavior. In Model 5, the outcome variable is observed marital responsiveness and the predictor variable is perceived marital responsiveness. As in all models, I included length of marriage and number of children on the Level 2 equation for the intercept. A similar model was constructed for each of the predicted associations, namely, perceived and observed marital control, perceived and observed parental responsiveness, and perceived and observed parental control.

Model 5: Association between Perceived and Observed Marital

Responsiveness

Level-1 Equation

$$Y_{(ij)} = \pi_{oj} + \pi_{1j}*(\text{PERCEIVED MARITAL RESPONSIVENESS}_{ij}) + r_{ij}$$

Level-2 Equation

$$\pi_{oj} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}*(\text{MARRIAGE LENGTH}_{.j}) + \beta_{02}*(\text{\# OF CHILDREN}_{.j}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\pi_{1j} = \beta_{10}$$

With regard to *RQ5*, results indicated that in terms of marital responsiveness, neither length of marriage nor number of children altered the value of the intercept (see Table 7). Turning to the slopes, perceived marital responsiveness was positively associated with observed marital responsiveness. With regard to marital control, neither length of marriage nor number of children were significantly associated with observed marital control. Perceived marital control was positively associated with observed marital control. Thus, despite the fact that paired sample t-tests revealed significant mean differences between perceived and observed marital communication, the multi-level modeling results indicate that spouses' perceptions of their marital communication are predictive of the ratings of independent outside coders.

With regard to *RQ6,* neither length of marriage nor number of children altered the value of the intercept for parental responsiveness or control (see Table 7). The slopes indicated that neither perceived parental responsiveness, nor perceived parental control, were significantly associated with their corresponding observed variables. These results are consistent with the paired sample t-tests and suggest that parents' perceptions of their parental communication differ from the parenting behaviors that were observed in their interactions with their child.

Perceived and Observed Communication and Marital Satisfaction

The last two hypotheses in this study predicted that marital satisfaction would increase when perceived marital responsiveness is higher than observed marital responsiveness (*H7*) and when perceived marital control is lower than observed marital control (*H8*). First, I computed variables to capture the differences between perceived and observed marital responsiveness and perceived and observed marital control. The variables were calculated by subtracting the observed variable from the perceived variable. The variables could be negative or positive, where a positive value reflects that the participant reported more responsiveness and more control in his or her own communication than the coders, and a negative value reflects that the participant underestimates the amount of responsiveness and/or control he or she employs in their communication comparing to coders' evaluations. Two models identical to Model 1 were constructed with the difference variables each separately entered as a predictor of marital satisfaction in each of the models. In Model 6, the outcome variable is marital satisfaction and the predictor variable is the difference between perceived and observed marital responsiveness. As in the previous models, length of marriage and number of children were included on the Level 2 equation for the intercept. A similar model was constructed for the difference between perceived and observed marital control.

Model 6: A Difference in Perceived and Observed Marital Responsiveness

Predicting Marital Satisfaction

Level-1 Equation

$Y_{(ij)} = \pi_{oj} + \pi_{1j} * (\text{DIFFERENCE IN MARITAL RESPONSIVENESS}_{ij}) + r_{ij}$

Level-2 Equation

$$\pi_{oj} = \beta_{00} + \beta_{01}*(\text{MARRIAGE LENGTH}_{.j}) + \beta_{02}*(\text{\# OF CHILDREN}_{.j}) + u_{0j}$$

$$\pi_{1j} = \beta_{10}$$

Results indicated that neither length of marriage nor number of children altered the value of the intercept (see Table 8). With regard to the slopes for the first model, as predicted (*H7*), a positive difference between perceived marital communication of responsiveness and observed marital communication of responsiveness was positively associated with marital satisfaction. As for the second model (*H8*), the slopes revealed that a positive difference between perceived marital communication of control and observed marital communication of control was negatively associated with marital satisfaction. Or, according to the hypothesis, marital satisfaction is increased when perceived marital control is lower than observed marital control. Thus, both *H7* and *H8* were fully supported.

Chapter Seven

Discussion

This dissertation explored manifestations of responsiveness and control in husbands' and wives' marital and parental communication. Four goals guided the current study. First, drawing on the theoretical foundations of Fitzpatrick's (1988) marital typology and Baumrind's (1967, 1971, 1991a) parenting styles typology, this study examined the associations between communication behaviors of responsiveness and control within and across family subsystems. Second, I explored associations between co-parenting and marital relationships to further understand how similarities and differences in parenting among spouses explain perceptions of relational satisfaction and a partner's parenting behavior. The third goal of this study was to examine to what extent perceived communication behaviors of responsiveness and control in the family are similar or different from observed communicative manifestations of these dimensions in family interaction. Finally, I aimed to examine how biases between perceived and observed communication behaviors predict relational satisfaction. In this chapter, I discuss these findings in terms of their implications for the family studies literature and for expanding theory on family systems, as well as the practical implications for enhancing the co-parenting and marital relationship between spouses.

Implications of Results for Family Studies

Recall that the vast majority of studies that have examined the family from a systems perspective have looked at the marital and the parental subsystems separately, failing to integrate those subsystems into a cohesive portrayal of the family system. Such

information on marital interaction and parental dynamics has produced important

information on how spouses manage their relationship with one another and on how

parents communicate with their children, but in order to understand the family climate

there is a need to start looking at similar communication behaviors that members enact

under different roles. To closely explore the interplay between the dynamics of the

marital and parental subsystems, this study has drawn on the existing family literature to

employ responsiveness and control as two conceptual dimensions that characterize

interpersonal processes within and across family subsystems. By employing a

dimensional approach, rather than a typological approach, I was able to highlight

responsiveness and control as two equivalent dimensions across marriage and parenting

and to conduct a clear theoretical and operational investigation of the interplay between

the two subsystems.

Responsiveness and Control in Marital and Parental Communication

Recall that the parallel view of family relationships identified in the literature on

marriage and parenting in general, and in Fitzpatrick's (1988) and Baumrind's (1967,

1971, 1991a) typologies in particular, highlights manifestations of responsiveness and

control as vital to both marital and parental subsystems. As a starting point for this

dissertation, then, I looked at how participants' marital and parental communication of

responsiveness and control are correlated (*RQ1* and *RQ2*). The findings pointed to

similarities in one's marital and parental responsiveness, such that the more responsive a

husband or a wife is with their spouse, the more responsive they are in their interaction

with their child. In terms of control, however, results showed no significant association between one's communication with their spouse and their child.

One possible explanation for the divergent associations of communication of responsiveness and control across family subsystems may stem from members' perceptions of family roles and structure, specifically with regard to family hierarchy. Family hierarchy is closely connected to members' perceptions of their family roles (Broderick, 1993; Minuchin, 1974). Thus, whereas spouses may have expectations for equity in their marital relationship, which would render bids for control inappropriate in that context, husbands and wives are more likely to view control as central to their roles and responsibilities as parents, because they have a higher status in the family hierarchy than their children. As suggested by Baumrind (1991a, 1995), parents often rely on their higher status on the parent-child familial hierarchy to discipline their child rather than being responsive to them. Thus, whereas hierarchy is often perceived as inherent to parent-child relationships, it is less so to spousal relationships. Consequently, control is more likely to be enacted in the parent-child relationship than it is in the marital relationship. Responsiveness, on the other hand, is unrelated to hierarchy and expected in the context of all close loving relationships.

Responsiveness, which was associated across the two subsystems, seems to play, then, a different role in family relationships. In contrast to control, which is inherently linked to power and family hierarchy (Gottman & Notarius, 2000, 2002; LePoire, 2006), communication of responsiveness promotes closeness and connectedness in families (Eldridge and Christensen, 2002; Puntambekar & Hubscher, 2005). Thus, responsiveness

may have less to do with reflecting and shaping family hierarchy, but rather it constitutes a mechanism for maintaining family relationships with all members. In other words, it may be that individual differences in the ability to communicate responsiveness and warmth are likely to be pervasive in interactions across family subsystems. Thus, responsiveness may be a communicative skill that stems from cognitive characteristics rather than perceptions of family roles and hierarchy. Mirroring this view, Burleson and Rack (2008), drawing on constructivism (Delia, 1977), employ a cognitive approach to explain individual differences in producing and processing messages (see also O'keefe & McCornack, 1987). Specifically with regard to relational contexts, such cognitive explanation suggests that people who are high in interpersonal cognitive complexity are also high in producing person-centered messages. Person-centered messages address emotional and relational aspects of communicative contexts, showing responsiveness and attentiveness to recipients (Applegate, 1990). Cognitively complex individuals, then, have higher ability to attend to relationship concerns (Burleson & Rack, 2008) which seems to apply to both the marital and parental realms.

Thus, the findings suggest that balancing control may vary across subsystems, depending on family roles. Responsiveness, on the other hand, may serve a similar function in both marital and parent-child relationships. Moreover, whereas communication of control may be more family role-oriented and depends on family context, communication of responsiveness reflects an individual's overall interpersonal cognitive complexity, which is highlighted in the similar pattern of responsive behavior across the two subsystems.

Inter-Parental Similarity in Responsiveness and Control

The next two research questions in this dissertation also highlighted similarities and dissimilarities in responsiveness and control, but within the parental subsystem rather than across subsystems. Drawing on family systems theory's assumptions of holism and interdependence (Bowen, 1978; Minuchin, 1974), I examined to what extent husbands' and wives' dimensions of parental responsiveness and control are correlated (*RQ3* and *RQ4*). The results provide insight into the ways that mothers and fathers co-parent within the family system, further highlighting similarities and dissimilarities in family members' communication of responsiveness and control.

Beyond the exploration of inter-parental similarity, these research questions were driven by a general lack of information about fathers' parenting style in the family literature. Recall that previous studies looked only at mothers' parenting style (see Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000) or excluded families from analysis if parents showed different styles (e.g., Baumrind, 1971, 1973). The current findings were mixed with regard to inter-parental similarity in responsiveness (*RQ3*), but less so with regard to inter-parental similarity in control (*RQ4*). With regard to *RQ3*, recall that paired sample t-tests revealed significant differences between fathers and mothers in both perceived and observed parental responsiveness, but bivariate correlations and multiple regression analyses revealed that spouses were correlated in terms of observed parental responsiveness. With regard to *RQ4*, paired sample t-tests, bivariate correlations, and multiple regression analyses were all consistent in documenting similarity between spouses in terms of both perceived and observed parental control. The degree of

similarity across spouses on the dimension of control is consistent with previous findings showing similar parenting styles between mothers and fathers (e.g., Simons & Conger, 2007; Winsler et al., 2005). This similarity suggests that spouses may exert mutual influence in terms of their parenting behavior. As Rotolo and Wilson (2006) explained, there is a tendency toward similarity of behavior in married couples due to social cohesion. The findings from the present study that indicate similarity in control between husbands and wives support the social cohesion theory (Kenny, 1998), which posits that individuals are strongly influenced by others with whom they are intimate and have frequent contact, such as their spouse.

Whereas spouses in this study were correlated in terms of perceived parental control, there was no correlation between spouses in terms of perceived parental responsiveness. Why are spouses correlated on perceived control but not perceived responsiveness? I identify two possible explanations for this divergent effect. First, these results may imply different expectations for responsiveness and control in the context of parenting. As explained earlier, parents are likely to view control as central to their role as parents in terms of enforcing punishment and discipline for their children (Baumrind, 1991a), as well as socializing their child into appropriate behavior in the family and society (Baumrind, 1995, 1996). Consequently, expectations for parental control may be more explicitly negotiated between parents to ensure consistency in discipline and punishment. In contrast, expectations for responsiveness may be more implicit, since it generally goes without saying that parents should nurture and support their children in a variety of ways. Thus, to the extent that parents communicate more explicitly about their

expectations for control than for responsiveness, they are likely to demonstrate similar attitudes and behaviors in parental control. Second, perceptions of parental responsiveness may be different for husbands and wives due to sex role stereotypes that tend to portray mothers as more nurturing and responsive than fathers (McKinney & Renk, 2008). Consequently, fathers may be less inclined to indicate that they engage in responsive behaviors due to the perception that responsiveness is a more feminine trait. Given these sex role stereotypes, men may not see responsiveness as part of their parental responsibility or they may be reluctant to admit responsiveness in self-report items for fear of appearing unmasculine.

The present findings also showed divergent results between self-report and observational data, such that observed parental responsiveness was correlated across spouses, but perceived parental responsiveness was not. I will discuss this gap between perceived and observed communication in greater length later on in the chapter, but for now, these results suggest a disconnect between how parents believe they behave with their children and how outside observers evaluate their behaviors during interaction, at least in terms of responsiveness. Such a difference between self-report and observational data suggests that each method yields different information with regard to family communication behaviors. On one hand, individuals' reports have allowed me to capture the way family members believe they interact responsiveness with their child. On the other hand, coding based on observations has yielded what can be considered to be a more objective assessment of parental responsiveness. Taken together, these mixed-method findings have produced a more complete picture of family communication

practices than previous research has suggesting a gap between how individuals believe they enact parental responsiveness and how independent coders evaluate that behavior.

Co-Parenting and Marital Outcomes

In addition to exploring the relationship between partners' attitudes of parental responsiveness and control, this dissertation also aimed to examine the influence that similar and dissimilar parenting styles have on marital characteristics, such as appraisals of a partner's parenting (*H1* and *H2*) and relationship satisfaction (*H3* and *H4*). I also explored the associations of perceived relational power in the context of parenting with appraisals of a partner's parenting (*H5*) and marital satisfaction (*H6*). This set of hypotheses was motivated by my interest in developing a more holistic understanding of the family system, highlighting how parenting and marital relationships are interrelated.

Although prior research has suggested that agreement on parenting style is associated with children's well-being (e.g., Simons & Conger, 2007; Harvey, 2000; Lindsey & Mize, 2001), less is known about the impact that similarity in parental responsiveness and control has for the marital relationship. My dissertation's results supported *H1* and *H2* for the observed variables, but not for the perceived variables, showing that whereas both observed similarity of parental responsiveness and control were positively associated with more positive evaluations of a partner's parenting behavior, similarity of perceived parental responsiveness and control were not significantly associated with such appraisals. With regard to inter-parental similarity and relationship satisfaction, the results partially supported *H3* showing that similarity of observed parental responsiveness was positively correlated with marital satisfaction but

similarity of perceived parental responsiveness was not. In addition, similarity of both

perceived and observed parental control was each positively correlated with marital

satisfaction, thus fully supported *H4*.

The current findings pointed to different effects for perceived and observed

parenting behavior in terms of predicting positive appraisals of a partner's parenting

behavior. The results showed that similarity of observed parental responsiveness and

similarity of observed parental control each contributes to more positive appraisals of a

partner's parenting behavior, but similarity of perceived responsiveness and control do

not. One reason for these divergent effects is that partners can see, and therefore evaluate,

one another's parenting behavior, but partners may be less aware of their partner's

attitudes about parenting. Thus, spouses can see if their partner demonstrates parenting

behavior that is similar to their own communication, which contributes to more positive

appraisals of the partner's behavior. Another explanation for these results has to do with

the different levels of operationalization. Whereas the similarity of parenting perceptions

reflected participants' general beliefs about appropriate parenting behavior, the spousal

appraisal was based on observations of specific behaviors in an actual problem solving

interaction between parent and child. Thus, the results may reflect a discrepancy between

general beliefs and specific observed behaviors, though I speculate that these evaluations

were probably guided, or framed, by one's general perceptions of their partner's

parenting.

The current findings also show that similarity in parental responsiveness and

similarity in parental control do not have equal influence on marital quality. Why does

similarity in perceived control contribute to more marital satisfaction, whereas similarity in perceived responsiveness does not? One explanation for this discrepancy may stem from gender role stereotypes. If mothers are stereotypically expected to be more responsive than fathers (McKinney & Renk, 2008), then spouses may come to anticipate different levels of responsiveness in their parental communication and may not be phased by dissimilar parenting styles. Similarity in terms of parental control, on the other hand, appears to be a more significant factor in predicting marital satisfaction. Given that a common source of marital discord is disagreements about child-rearing and discipline (e.g., Cummings & Davies, 2010; Mahoney, Jouriles, & Scavone., 1997), one explanation for this effect is that the increased conflict arising from different beliefs about parental control makes for a less satisfying marriage. Another possibility is that spouses may grow weary of their parental roles when they do not reinforce one another. In other words, enacting different levels of control may leave one spouse feeling undermined by the more relaxed parenting style of his or her partner, or vice versa. These explanations are speculative at this point, and additional research is required to understand why similarity in parental control and parental responsiveness diverge in their associations with marital satisfaction.

I also found that similarity of perceived and observed parenting behavior produced different associations with marital satisfaction, particularly with regard to parental responsiveness. Whereas similarity in observed parental responsiveness was associated with marital satisfaction, perceived parental responsiveness was not. Again, the relationship between perceived and observed communication will be discussed later,

but these results suggest that spouses may not be aware of the fact that they hold similar

or dissimilar attitudes about responsiveness, but they can easily see when their spouse

enacts parenting behaviors that are similar or different to their own. Thus, spouses may

not need to have the same beliefs about responsiveness to be satisfied, but consistency in

practice is an important contributor to marital quality. This logic is consistent with social

cohesion theory (Kenny, 1998), which suggests that spouses mutually influence each

other in how they behave in relational contexts. In this case, spouses seem to influence

each other's behavior in the context of parenting, but they may have less influence on

each other in terms of their attitudes about parenting.

Relational Power and Marital Outcomes

This dissertation also explored the association between perceived relational power

in the context of co-parenting and marital outcomes in the form of evaluations of the

parenting behavior of one's partner (*H5*) and relationship satisfaction (*H6*). As predicted

by *H5*, results pointed to a negative correlation between the variables, such that perceived

relational power predicted more negative appraisals of a spouse's parenting behavior.

Results also supported *H6* showing that perceived relational power is negatively

associated with marital satisfaction. These findings are consistent with previous research

that showed that marital outcomes, such as relational satisfaction, are negatively

associated with relational control (e.g., Craddock, 1988; Vanlear & Zietlow, 1990). It

extends the literature to consider marital outcomes that are directly associated with co-

parenting dynamics where issues of marital power are correlated with matters of spouses'

parenting together.

Supporting the idea that perceived relational power is negatively associated with one's appraisals of their partner's parenting behavior, the current findings reflect the idea that relational power is the ability to achieve desired goals or outcomes (Levine & Boster, 2001). In this sense, Sillars (1980, 1985; Sillars, Roberts, Leonard, & Dun, 2000) suggested that relational power is linked with interference with one's goals. Thus, individuals who have more power in the realm of parenting may be frustrated when their partner enacts different parenting behaviors than they would because it is perceived as undermining their desired parenting outcomes. Thus, while watching their spouse guiding their child to accomplish a task in a problem-solving interaction, an individual who perceives him- or herself to have more dominance in parent-child interaction would negatively evaluate their partner's parenting behavior during that interaction.

Results also revealed that perceived relational power in co-parenting is negatively associated with relationship satisfaction (*H6*). This finding adds further support to the existing body of research that has identified negative associations between levels of influence in relational issues and marital satisfaction (e.g., Cook et al., 1995; Steil, 1997). It extends the current literature by highlighting the role perceived relational power plays in the specific context of co-parenting. Recall that prior research shows that child-related issues constitute a common topic for marital conflict (Cummings et al., 2001; McHale et al., 2001). Given that power is so inherent in conflict about any relational issue (Solomon et al., 2004), the current findings suggest that a spouse who perceives him- or herself to have more power in the context of parenting would feel frustrated with their less dominating partner during marital conflicts around child-rearing topics which may be

manifested in negative relational outcomes such as decreased relationship satisfaction. Also recall that Craddock (1988) has found that the higher the marital equality, the higher the marital satisfaction. By extension, in less equal co-parenting relationships, spouses with perceived power are less satisfied with their marital relationship than spouses in more equal marriages.

Although these findings point to associations between perceptions of marital power and both appraisals of a partner's parenting and marital satisfaction, future studies should examine the relationship between observed (actual) power in marital interaction and marital outcomes. Provided that the previous findings in this dissertation highlighted that perceived and observed inter-parental similarity in responsiveness and control diverged in how they are associated with some marital outcomes, it may be that perceived and observed relational power also diverge in how they are associated with appraisals of a partner's parenting and with marital satisfaction. In addition, since this dissertation did not look at whether spouses were in agreement about who has power, more inquiries are needed to understand the nature of the relationship between marital power in co-parenting and consequences for the marital subsystem.

Associations between Perceived and Observed Family Communication

The findings from this study are also helpful in understanding how perceived communication and observed communication are associated. Prior research (e.g., Solomon & Theiss, 2006) has suggested that there is a difference between the cognitive level and the behavioral level of communication in close relationships, such that individuals perceive their communication behaviors differently than outside coders would

characterize their behavior. The current findings suggest that whereas perceived and observed marital communication are correlated, perceived and observed parental communication are not. These results suggest that family contexts and family roles play a role in this matter and that individuals perceive their communication with other members in ways that are consistent or inconsistent with how independent raters evaluate that communication depending on the family subsystem. Thus, cognitive and behavioral manifestations of family communication are correlated in the marital but not in the parental subsystem.

Why are individuals' marital communication evaluations consistent with those of outside coders whereas their evaluations of parental communication are not? I believe that a possible explanation is due to a social desirability bias in individuals' self-reported parenting behavior. Whereas communication in marital relationships is not typically evaluated by social conventions related to responsiveness and control, parents are often confronted with cultural expectations for parenting behavior that encourages high amounts of love and responsiveness and demonstrates appropriate control and discipline of one's children. Thus, spouses may perceive their communication with their partner more accurately, but when it comes to their role as parents, individuals may under- or overestimate the ways they interact with their children since they hold clear expectations with regard to how a parent is "supposed to communicate" with his or her child.

On one hand, findings that reveal correlations between perceived and observed marital communication are encouraging in at least one way. As suggested by Segrin et al. (2009), observed accuracy between the cognitive and the behavioral levels of

communication provide substantial evidence for the validity of self-reports of marital and parental communication behaviors. Recall that an extensive body of research has looked at communication in the marital and the parental subsystems employing either self-report measures (e.g. Fitzpatrick & Ritchie, 1994; Gottman, 1993; Karavasilis et al., 2003; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002, 2004) or direct observations (e.g. Ditzen et al., 2009; Goeke-Morey et al., 2003; Gottman et al., 2001; Melby et al., 1995). Research has lacked evidence related to whether or not perceived communication is actually mirrored in observed communication. The present study has used both self-report and observational tools to yield a clearer, more complete picture of how the two levels interact.

On the other hand, revealing differences in perceived and observed parental communication, the current findings demonstrate that in certain family contexts or roles, such as parenting, individuals may be biased in how they evaluate their communication. In this sense, the current study sheds light on the complex relationship between the cognitive and behavioral levels of communication highlighting the benefit of employing mix-methods. Using both self-reported and observational data has allowed me to capitalize on their strengths while evaluating their differences. As for self-reported data, scholars have argued that spouses have the opportunity to observe each other's behavior in a variety of situations, contexts, and settings, which makes them more informed in their reports on family dynamics (Hahlweg, Kaiser, & Christensen, 2000). On the other hand, self-report measure is often biased, influenced by spouses' appraisals of the dyadic and family climate (Knobloch et al., 2006). Observational data enable trained observers to code family interaction with a high degree of objectivity and to identify interactional

patterns among spouses more clearly (Gottman & Notarius, 2002; Mattson, Frame, & Johnson, 2011), but coded measure may be less sensitive to the nuances that are meaningful to spouses and give access to a more narrow set of exchanges between family members (Simons & Conger, 2006; Knobloch et al., 2006). The differences between the findings from each method also helped in understanding the inconsistent results from previous studies on inter-parental similarity of parenting styles (i.e. Simons & Conger, 2007; Winsler et al., 2005).

Perceived and Observed Communication and Marital Satisfaction

The relationship between perceived and observed communication is also important in terms of marital outcomes. Recall that the last two hypotheses examined the impact of biases in perceptions of communication between spouses on individuals' evaluation of their marital quality. Results showed that when individuals perceive their marital communication as more responsive than observers do, they report high levels of marital satisfaction (*H6*). Increased marital satisfaction was also associated with higher levels of perceived rather than observed marital control (*H7*).

The findings from this dissertation highlight the powerful role perceptions of marital communication play in determining one's marital quality. Specifically, a positive bias in people's perceptions of marital interaction predicts more satisfaction, whereas a negative bias predicts less satisfaction. The present findings provide evidence, then, for how perceptions influence assessments of the marital relationship more than objective evaluations of communication patterns and behaviors in marriage. One explanation for why what people perceive is more important in predicting relationship satisfaction than

how they actually communicate is that individuals in committed relationships (e.g., marriage) tend to frame certain communication behaviors of their partner with accordance to their feelings toward the partner and the relationship. Prior studies show, for example, that when faced with a transgression from their partner, individuals who are committed to their relationship frame that transgression in the most positive light possible (Roloff, Soule, & Carey, 2001). Along these lines, Kross, Ayduk, & Mischel (2005) highlight the mechanism of self-distancing, explaining how people process negative experiences by employing a third-person perspective (see also Libby & Eibach, 2002). Looking at a difficult communication event from a distance helps to reduce the negative arousal that often occurs during the experience itself. In the context of marital communication and relationship satisfaction, the current findings suggest that individuals who perceive their marital communication positively tend to be influenced by this perception rather than by a specific actual conversation in reporting relationship satisfaction. They may also experience a self-distance process where they portray the actual interaction more positively or more negatively than it actually was which, in turn, is reflected in their evaluation of their marital quality.

Implications of Results for Expanding Theory on Family Systems

This study has several implications for the family systems literature in general and for the research on communication in marriage and parenting as interdependent subsystems in particular. First, this dissertation directly explores links between marital and parental dynamics in the family system. Whereas most of the research on marriage and parenting has focused on either the marital or the parental subsystem separately, the

current study highlights similarities and dissimilarities across the two family contexts. In this sense, this study expands the literature on family communication to consider the complicated interdependence that exists within and across subsystems. Second, whereas the family communication literature often lacks a clear theoretical framework to guide its research (Fitzpatrick & Koerner, 2002), the current study explores the dynamics of marital and parental communication by employing a cohesive theoretical framework that draws on assumptions from family systems theory. This theoretical framework applies similar dimensions of responsiveness and control to understand interpersonal processes across family subsystems. In terms of family systems theory, this framework allows for a more direct exploration of the holistic nature of families and the communication in family systems.

Third, the holistic nature of family dynamics was examined in this dissertation by employing a dimensional approach, rather than a typological approach, to marital and parenting communication. Drawing on existing marital and parental typologies (i.e. Baumrind, 1967, 1971, 1991a; Fitzpatrick, 1988) I was able to identify the dimensions that underlie both marital and parental communication (i.e. responsiveness and control) rather than examining types of marital relationships and parenting styles. Identifying responsiveness and control as two equivalent dimensions across marriage and parenting has created a clear theoretical and operational investigation of the interplay between the two subsystems, highlighting the holistic nature of the family system. Looking at dimensions (continuous variables) rather than at types (discrete variables) of family roles has also allowed a nuanced examination of possible antecedents and consequences of

communication behaviors of responsiveness and control to identify factors that explain marital and parenting characteristics and outcomes. By exploring the associations between these family dimensions and marital outcomes, my work highlights the interdependence and holism that exist in family systems.

Practical Implications of the Results

The findings from this dissertation also have practical implications for enhancing the marital and co-parenting relationships between spouses. In terms of marital relationships, recall that researchers have long tried to understand what makes a satisfying marriage and what distinguishes it from dissatisfying marriage. Research on marriage has identified dyadic interaction patterns that are associated with satisfying marital relationships as well as those dyadic communication strategies that contribute to less satisfying marital relationships. Rather than focus on specific communication behaviors and patterns, the current study yielded findings that showed how similarities in spouses' parental responsiveness and parental control are a factor that predicts marital outcomes. In this sense, marriage and family counselors can help couples to pay more attention to their shared or different attitudes and behaviors of parenting to establish common goals and heighten relational satisfaction.

Furthermore, given that this study suggests that perceptions of marital communication play a more important role than actual marital behavior in predicting marital satisfaction, family practitioners are encouraged to assist couples in developing more constructive perceptions of their marital interaction. In some ways, the results of this study suggest that behavioral therapy, which encourages couples to enact more

constructive communication behaviors, may be less effective for promoting marital satisfaction than encouraging more positive perceptions of the marital interaction.

In terms of co-parenting, the results of this study shed light on the role that inter-parental agreement about the enactment of responsiveness and control plays in how partners evaluate their spouse's parenting behavior. Findings showed that when spouses are correlated in the way that they perform parental behaviors they appraise their partner's parenting more positively than when they demonstrate different parenting strategies. This finding suggests that when spouses observe their partner interacting with their child, they may be looking for parental behaviors that resonate with their own parenting strategies. Counselors can help parents negotiating discipline-related issues to enhance spousal agreement about which strategies and practices to employ in their interaction with their child and develop supportive communication behaviors in the context of co-parenting.

This study also highlights the role of relational power in the context of co-parenting, suggesting that a partner who perceives themselves as having more power in that realm evaluates their partner's parenting more negatively. Marital and family practitioners can illuminate this issue for couples and draw attention to the fact that an imbalance in co-parenting promotes negative outcomes for the marital and the co-parenting relationships. By discussing spouses' perceptions about who does what and how in the context of their shared parenting, power may be equalized and both partners may achieve more realistic expectations with regard to how they can best parent together.

Strengths and Limitations

This research study has some significant theoretical, operational, and practical strengths, but also a few limitations that should be recognized. The first contribution of this study to the family literature lies in its incorporation of a clear cohesive theoretical framework that was applied throughout the investigation to both the marital and parental subsystems. This study has juxtaposed Fitzpatrick's and Baumrind's dimensions of responsiveness and control and assumptions of family systems theory (Bowen, 1976; Minuchin, 1974) to examine the interdependence that exists between marital and parental subsystems in the family. In this sense, the present study offers a theoretical framework to investigate how marital and parental roles are integrated. Offering a theory-driven examination of family communication dynamics is especially important since it has been suggested that the literature on family communication often lacks a coherent theoretical framework (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Second, this dissertation has focused on marital and parenting dimensions rather than on types of couples and parents. This dimensional approach has allowed me to portray a more nuanced picture of the communication in the family system and of co-parenting interaction, as well as to draw associations between each dimension and marital characteristics. The application of marital and parenting dimensions to the context of co-parenting should promote the development of more holistic models of family communication.

Operationally, I employed both self-report and observational methods which yielded a clearer, more complete picture of family dynamics in terms of beliefs and actual behavior. By employing both self-report and observational instruments, I was able to look at both the cognitive and behavioral levels of the communication family members

demonstrate under different roles. Such rich data enabled me to identify within-person

biases and to correlate those biases to marital outcomes for the first time. Taken together,

the present findings revealed both similarities and dissimilarities across methods,

highlighting the idea that each method pertains to distinct psychological constructs and

therefore provide unique and useful information (see also Verhofstadt et al., 2007). In

addition, whereas prior research that employed only one method or the other has

produced inconsistent results with regard to similarity of parenting styles (i.e. Simons &

Conger, 2007; Winsler et al., 2005), the use of mixed methods in the current investigation

has allowed me to clarify how similar attitudes versus similar behaviors correspond with

the nature of co-parenting and with marital outcomes. Pragmatically, this study provides

evidence to help parents of young children to manage their relationship better. Marriage

and family counselors can help couples by encouraging them to pay more attention to

their attitudes about parental responsiveness and control to promote common goals and

improve both marital satisfaction and co-parenting relationship.

Although this study contributes greatly to the family communication literature,

there are also a few limitations. First, the sample size was limited to 51 families due to

the limited availability of resources. Although this is an adequate number of participants

for conducting a multi-level model, the sample may have lacked sufficient power to

detect small and medium effects. Second, the results of this study are limited in terms of

their generalizability. The study was limited to include only heterosexual couples who

were biological parents to their pre-school aged children. I did not include same-sex

couples or parents to adopted children who may have shown different patterns of

communication behaviors of responsiveness and control. Finally, I looked only at the communication processes of parents and their first (or only) child. It may be that as parents gain experience in their roles as mothers and fathers they might demonstrate different patterns of communication with different children, an aspect that was not looked at in the current study.

Future Directions

In light of this study's findings, future research should continue to incorporate a holistic view when examining family communication dynamics. Along these lines, future studies should consider employing a dimensional approach (i.e. responsiveness and control) rather than a typological approach to explore the nature of family communication and its associations with family characteristics, family functioning, and family outcomes. In addition, considering that parenting as well as marital relationships are dynamic and ever-changing, future research should find ways to look at the interdependence in families over time to highlight possible changes in these dynamics (e.g., with preschoolers versus adolescents). In this sense, longitudinal research on family communication of responsiveness and control is needed.

Future research should also investigate the research questions and hypotheses that were investigated in the current study in more diverse family settings, such as same-sex families, single-parent families, and step- or blended families in order to understand how similarities and dissimilarities of responsiveness and control across and within family subsystems are associated with relational and family outcomes in these contexts. As families become increasingly diverse, it is important to explore communication behaviors

and patterns in all family types. The significance of family structure suggests that future studies should also consider constellation family variables (Teti, 2002), which address issues with regard to the order of birth in a family, to capture possible variations in parental communication with different children in the family and its possible associations with marital characteristics.

Finally, given the practical nature of the findings of this dissertation, educational and intervention programs for couples, children, and families should be developed based on the results and future findings. By characterizing marital and parental communication practices under specific dimensions of responsiveness and control, such programs will aim to help marital and family practitioners, counselors, therapists, and educators who work with couples and parents to assist family members to understand their behaviors and attitudes about marriage and parenting within these contexts. Specifically, programs will provide practitioners with tools that would help couples to establish common goals and heighten relational, parental, and children's positive outcomes by encouraging them to pay more attention to their attitudes about and enactment of marital and parental responsiveness and control. Such programs will also contribute greatly to policymaking that involves couples, children, and families by highlighting the role of communication in shaping family outcomes and functioning. Policymakers can develop communication-based programs for families to promote positive outcomes for families and family members.

Conclusion

The current study has examined manifestations of responsiveness and control in husbands' and wives' marital and parental communication to portray a holistic picture of the family system. By doing so, this research has advanced the family communication literature in three ways. First, it has identified theoretical links of similar dimensions

across and within the marital and parental family subsystems. Second, it has highlighted possible outcomes of co-parenting dynamics for the marital relationship. Lastly, this study has found and discussed the associations between perceived and observed communication in family members' behaviors to reflect the interplay between the cognitive and behavioral levels of communication in families.

By looking at individuals' manifestations of responsiveness and control under different family roles, I was able to identify the different functions of each dimension in the family. The close examination of similarities and dissimilarities of responsiveness and control within and across the marital and parental subsystems has revealed the direct link between communication of control and family structure. Specifically, the findings of this study explain how expectations about marital and parental control differ, reflecting dissimilar perceived manifestations of control as spouse and as parent. With regard to responsiveness, this study suggests that it may be more of a characteristic of individuals that reflects their cognitive complexity levels with regard to high person-centered messages. The cohesive theoretical view employed in this investigation lays initial foundations to promote holistic theoretical models of family communication.

Beyond their theoretical utility, the findings of this study also provide useful practical insights for family counselors and therapists who work with married couples and with parents of young children. Specifically, identifying associations between co-parenting characteristics and marital outcomes sheds light on how parents can negotiate their expectations to create a positive family environment. Suggesting that parental control may be at the core of marital disagreement over child rearing issues, the current

study stresses the important role manifestations of control in parent-child communication play in affecting marital relationship. Furthermore, issues of relational power, which also links directly to the dimension of control in families, explain how partners appraise each other's parenting behavior and their marital relationship.

Finally, this was the first study to directly examine the associations between one's perceived and observed communication in the family. Providing evidence that point to associations of perceived and observed marital communication but not parental communication, this dissertation advances the literature on interpersonal communication in families by highlighting how cognitive and behavioral manifestations of communication interact and are context-dependent. The results are promising in that they have theoretical, operational, and practical implications for the research on family communication.

Table 1

Bivariate Correlations between Similarity of Parenting Styles and Relational Power and Marital Outcomes

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Similarity of Perceived Parental Resp.						
2. Similarity of Perceived Parental Control	.16					
3. Similarity of Observed Parental Resp.	.21	.11				
4. Similarity of Observed Parental Control	.20	.01	.14			
5. Relational Power	.21	-.01	-15	-.01		
6. Marital Satisfaction	.15	.28*	.26***	.13*	-.27*	
7. Appraisals of Spouse's Parenting	.10	.11	.23*	.17*	-.14*	.40***

Note. *N* = 102

* p < .05. *** p < .001.

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations between Perceived and Observed Family Communication

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Perceived Marital Responsiveness										
2. Perceived Marital Control	.52***									
3. Observed Marital Responsiveness	.24***	.27***								
4. Observed Marital Control	-.21*	.28***	-.25**							
5. Perceived Parental Responsiveness	.40***	.35***	.22*	-.19*						
6. Perceived Parental Control	.13	.06	-.20	.01	.01					
7. Observed Parental Responsiveness	-.03	.19	.34*	-.06	.02	-.23*				
8. Observed Parental Control	-.13	-.06	-.06	.06	-.28**	.15	-.21*			
9. Diff. perceived/observed mar. res.	.62***	.20*	-.61***	.03	.15	.20*	-.16	-.06		
10. Diff. perceived/observed mar. cont.	-.24***	-.50***	.01	-.60***	-.12	-.02	-.10	-.18	-.20*	
11. Marital Satisfaction	.74***	-.46***	.24***	-.19*	.42***	.14	-.05	-.01	.40***	-.28**

Note. *N* = 102

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

Table 3

Associations Between Marital and Parental Communication

	Parental Responsiveness	Parental Control
Intercept	6.06***	4.17***
Length of Marriage	.02	.02
Number of Children	-.11	.03
Slope		
Marital Responsiveness	.25***	
Marital Control		.02
Residuals		
Intercept	.00	.00

Note. The dependent variables are parental responsiveness and parental control. Coefficients are unstandardized. Cell entries in the intercept category are the change in the intercept attributable to the within person mean, which represents the between-person effect on that variable. The cell entries in the slopes category represent the within-person slope over the course of the study. The cell entries in the residuals category represent the remaining unexplained variation in the intercept. Hypotheses were evaluated using one-tailed tests.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Similarity of Parental Responsiveness and Control Predicting Appraisals of A Partner's Parenting Behavior

	Similarity of Perceived Responsiveness	Similarity of Perceived Control	Similarity of Observed Responsiveness	Similarity of Observed Control
Intercept	5.48***	5.90***	5.82***	5.82***
Length of Marriage	-.05	-.04	-.03	-.04
Number of Children	.36	.20	.21	.20
Slope				
Similarity of Perceived Resp.	.24			
Similarity of Perceived Control		.02		
Similarity of Observed Responsiveness			.37*	
Similarity of Observed Control				.26*
Residuals				
Intercept	.00	.00	.00	.00

_____

Note. The dependent variable is appraisals of a partner's parenting behavior. Coefficients are unstandardized. Cell entries in the

intercept category are the change in the intercept attributable to the within person mean, which represents the between-person effect on

that variable. The cell entries in the slopes category represent the within-person slope over the course of the study. The cell entries in

the residuals category represent the remaining unexplained variation in the intercept. Hypotheses were evaluated using one-tailed tests.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Similarity of Parental Responsiveness and Control Predicting Marital Satisfaction

	Similarity of Perceived Responsiveness	Similarity of Perceived Control	Similarity of Observed Responsiveness	Similarity of Observed Control
Intercept	6.19***	6.20***	5.99***	5.99***
Length of Marriage	-.01	-.01	-.05	.07
Number of Children	.10	.09	.03	.03
Slope				
Similarity of Perceived Resp.	.22			
Similarity of Perceived Control		.24*		
Similarity of Observed Responsiveness			.46*	
Similarity of Observed Control				.33*
Residuals				
Intercept	.00	.00	.00	.00

Note. The dependent variable is marital satisfaction. Coefficients are unstandardized. Cell entries in the intercept category are the change in the intercept attributable to the within person mean, which represents the between-person effect on that variable. The cell entries in the slopes category represent the within-person slope over the course of the study. The cell entries in the residuals category represent the remaining unexplained variation in the intercept. Hypotheses were evaluated using one-tailed tests.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 6

Relational Power Predicting Appraisals of A Partner's Parenting and Marital Satisfaction

	Appraisals Of a Partner's Parenting	Marital Satisfaction
Intercept	5.90***	5.99***
Length of Marriage	-.03	-.07
Number of Children	.19	.04
Slope		
Relational Power	-.15*	-.17**
Residuals		
Intercept	.00	

Note. Coefficients are unstandardized. Cell entries in the intercept category are the change in the intercept attributable to the within person mean, which represents the between-person effect on that variable. The cell entries in the slopes category represent the within-person slope over the course of the study. The cell entries in the residuals category represent the remaining unexplained variation in the intercept. Hypotheses were evaluated using one-tailed tests.

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

Table 7

Associations Between Perceived and Observed Family Communication

_____

	Observed Marital Responsiveness	Observed Marital Control	Observed Parental Responsiveness	Observed Parental Control
Intercept	4.12***	2.09***	4.46***	2.31***
Length of Marriage	.04	.01	.01	.01
Number of Children	.16	-.11	-.04	.15
Slope				
Perceived Marital Responsiveness	.08*			
Perceived Marital Control		.13**		
Perceived Parental Responsiveness			.02	
Perceived Parental Control				.14
Residuals				
Intercept	.00	.00	.00	.00

Note. The dependent variables are observed marital and parental responsiveness and control. Coefficients are unstandardized. Cell entries in the intercept category are the change in the intercept attributable to the within person mean, which represents the between-person effect on that variable. The cell entries in the slopes category represent the within-person slope over the course of the study. The cell entries in the residuals category represent the remaining unexplained variation in the intercept. Hypotheses were evaluated using one-tailed tests.

* p < .05. *** p < .001.

Table 8

A Bias in Perceived Marital Communication Predicting Marital Satisfaction

	Positive Bias	Negative Bias
Intercept	6.21***	6.21***
Length of Marriage	-.05	-.08
Number of Children	.03	-.02
Slope		
Positive Bias	.24***	
Negative Bias		-.25**
Residuals		
Intercept	.00	.00

Note. The dependent variable is marital satisfaction. Coefficients are unstandardized. Cell entries in the intercept category are the

change in the intercept attributable to the within person mean, which represents the between-person effect on that variable. The cell

entries in the slopes category represent the within-person slope over the course of the study. The cell entries in the residuals category

represent the remaining unexplained variation in the intercept. Hypotheses were evaluated using one-tailed tests.

* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

Appendix A

STUDY OF MARITAL AND PARENTAL COMMUNICATION

PRE-INTERACTION QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to assess your thoughts and feelings about marriage and parenting. You will be asked a number of questions about how you think and feel about your relationship with your spouse and with your child.

As you complete the questions in this survey, keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. Just try to answer the questions as honestly as possible. Think carefully about each question for a moment, and then answer it to the best of your ability. If you have any questions or difficulties, please let the researcher know.

YOUR ANSWERS ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE ARE STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

NEITHER YOUR SPOUSE NOR YOUR CHILD WILL SEE YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

To begin, we would like to obtain some background information and learn more about your family history. Please answer the following questions to best of your ability.

1. What is your sex? *Please mark one:*   Male_____   Female_____

2. What was your age on your last birthday in years?   _____

3. What is your ethnicity? *Please mark all that apply:*

____ African American   ____ Asian / Pacific Islander
____ Caucasian / White   ____ Hispanic
____ Indian   ____ Native American
____ Middle Eastern   ____ Other _____

4. What is your highest level of education? *Please mark one:*

____ Less than high school   ____ 4-year college degree
____ High school   ____ Master-level degree (MS, MA, etc.)
____ Some college (no degree)   ____ Doctorate-level degree (Ph. D)
____ 2-year college degree

5. What is your annual household income? *Please mark one:*

____ Less than $25,000   ____ $100,001-$125,000
____ $25,001-$50,000   ____ $125,001-$150,000
____ $50,001-$75,000   ____ $150,001-$175,000
____ $75,001-$100,000   ____ more than $175,000

6. How many years have you and your spouse been married? _____ Years

7. How many biological children do you and your spouse have together?
   _____

8. Please list all of your biological children in the table below and indicate their sex and age:

Child's Name	Child's Sex	Child's Age

9. Do you have any children from a previous relationship? *Please mark one:* ___ Yes   ___No

   If yes, how many? _____

10. Does your spouse have children from previous relationship? *Please mark one:* ___Yes ___No

    If yes, how many? _____

For each of the following statements, please circle the number that best indicates your level of agreement with the statement as a characterization of your beliefs about your marriage.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

STRONGLY
DISAGREE

STRONGLY
AGREE

1. Our wedding ceremony was very important to us   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. We joke around and have more fun than most couples   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. We rarely express anger with each other   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. A woman should take her husband's last name when she marries 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. My spouse reassures and comforts me when I'm feeling low 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. If I can avoid arguing about some problems, they will disappear 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. Our society as we see it needs to regain faith in the law and in
    our institutions   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. We tell each other how much we love and care about each other 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. It is more important to share good feelings with each other than to share
    bad feelings   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. Relationships should not interfere with each person's pursuit to discover
    his / her own potential   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I have taken separate vacations from my spouse even if only
    for a day or two   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. My spouse forces me to do things I don't want to do   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. The ideal relationship is one which is marked by novelty, humor,
    and spontaneity   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I think it is important for one to have some private space which is all
    his/her own and separate from one's spouse   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. We are likely to argue in front of friends or in public spaces 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. In marriage / close relationships, there should be no constraints
    or restrictions on individual freedom   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. We can go for long periods of time without spending much time together
    as a couple   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. After fighting, we will spend time separately   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please mark the number to indicate your response.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

STRONGLY   STRONGLY
DISAGREE   AGREE

1. How satisfied are you with your relationship?...................…….......…..1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. How committed are you to your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. How intimate is your relationship? ....………1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. How much do you love your partner?...............…...……………… 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. How content are you with your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. How dedicated are you to your relationship?...............……………. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. How close is your relationship? ....………... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. How much do you adore your partner?...............…......………... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. How happy are you with your relationship? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. How devoted are you to your relationship?...............…...……….....1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. How connected are you to your partner? ....…..1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. How much do you cherish your partner?...............………………… 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please circle the number that best indicates your level of agreement with the statement provided as a characterization of your parenting behavior.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

STRONGLY
DISAGREE

STRONGLY
AGREE

1. I am easygoing and relaxed around my child 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. It is important to me to show other people how well behaved

    my child is 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. When my child is crying it is best if I don't rush to comfort

    him/her 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. I have great expectations for my child 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I talk it over and reason with my child when he/she misbehaves 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. I explain to my child why I react the way I do when

    he/she misbehaves 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I take my child's preferences into account when making plans

    for the family 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. I encourage my child to talk about trouble he/she experiences 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. My child must learn that there are rules in our family 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. My child should be aware of how much I sacrifice for him/her 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I expect my child to be grateful and to appreciate all the advantages

    he/she has 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. I often encourage my child to talk about his/her troubles 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I punish my child by taking privileges away from him/her
    with little if any explanations 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. I tend to be responsive to my child's feelings or needs 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. I can sometimes explode in anger toward my child 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. I use threats as punishment 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17. I have intimate times together with my child 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18. I will yell or shout when my child misbehaves 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19. My child should be aware of how much I have done for him / her 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

20. I believe that punishment is more effective than praise   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

21. If my child misbehaves, I usually punish him/her   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

22. I let my child see how disappointed I am if he/she misbehaves   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

23. I don't usually talk it over and reasoning with my child
     when he/she misbehaves   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

24. I believe scolding may be helpful to get my child to behave better   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

25. My child should be aware of how much I sacrifice for him/her   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

26. I express my affection by hugging and holding my child   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

27. It is important that children obey their parents   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

28. I expect my child to be grateful and appreciate all the advantages

     he/she has   1   2   3   4   5   6   7

For each of the following questions, please circle the number that best indicates your level of agreement with the statement provided.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

STRONGLY
DISAGREE

STRONGLY
AGREE

1. I am usually the one who makes the decisions about our child's schedule and routine 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. I know better than my partner what our child likes and dislikes 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I am the one who sets the rules regarding discipline for our child 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. when our child misbehaves, I am the one who is responsible for dealing with the situation...1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. my child listens to my partner more than he / she listens to me 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. my partner knows better than me what is best for our child..............1 2 3 4 5 6 7

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS SURVEY!

PLEASE SEE THE RESEARCHER FOR INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE NEXT STEP IN THE STUDY.

Appendix B

STUDY OF MARITAL AND PARENTAL COMMUNICATION

APPRAISALS OF PARENTING QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to assess your thoughts and feelings about your partner's parenting strategies during their interaction with your child.

As you watch your spouse interacting with your child and complete the questions in this survey, keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. Just try to answer the questions as honestly as possible. Think carefully about each question for a moment, and then answer it to the best of your ability. If you have any questions or difficulties, please let the researcher know.

YOUR ANSWERS ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE ARE STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

NEITHER YOUR SPOUSE NOR YOUR CHILD WILL SEE YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

You will now be watching your spouse interacting with your child in the other room. Following the completion of each task, please circle the number that best indicates your level of agreement with the statement provided. Please complete the following **TWO** *scales (one for each of the tasks).*

*How do you feel about your spouse's interaction with your child during the **first** task?*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

STRONGLY
DISAGREE

STRONGLY
AGREE

1. My spouse is being responsive to our child's needs   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. My spouse is trying to control our child   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. My spouse does not really understand how to help our child
    to complete this task……   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. My spouse is really listening to what our child wants   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. My spouse's reactions to our child limit the child's ability to complete
    this task   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. My spouse could use some advice in how to really listen to what
    our child is saying   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. My spouse is guiding our child differently than I would   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. My spouse is behaving in a way that he/she typically would at

    home   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. My spouse is very skilled at helping our child   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. My spouse is making too many demands on our child   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I would probably act the same way as my spouse in doing this task
    with our child   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. I think my spouse is handling this task very well   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I would be more effective in helping our child complete this task 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. My spouse is treating our child as he/she normally would   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

*How do you feel about your spouse's interaction with your child during the **second** task?*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

STRONGLY DISAGREE   STRONGLY AGREE

1. My spouse is being responsive to our child's needs   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. My spouse is trying to control our child   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. My spouse does not really understand how to help our child
   to complete this task……   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. My spouse is really listening to what our child wants   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. My spouse's reactions to our child limit the child's ability to complete
   this task   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. My spouse could use some advice in how to really listen to what
   our child is saying   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. My spouse is guiding our child differently than I would   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. My spouse is behaving in a way that he/she typically would at

   home   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. My spouse is very skilled at helping our child   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. My spouse is making too many demands on our child   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I would probably act the same way as my spouse in doing this task
    with our child   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. I think my spouse is handling this task very well   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. I would be more effective in helping our child complete this task 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. My spouse is treating our child as he/she normally would 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix C

STUDY OF MARITAL AND PARENTAL COMMUNICATION

POST-INTERACTION QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is designed to assess your thoughts and feelings about the conversation you just had with your spouse. You will be asked a number of questions about how you thought and felt during that interaction.

As you complete the questions in this survey, keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers. Just try to answer the questions as honestly as possible. Think carefully about each question for a moment, and then answer it to the best of your ability. If you have any questions or difficulties, please let the researcher know.

YOUR ANSWERS ON THIS QUESTIONNAIRE ARE STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL.

NEITHER YOUR SPOUSE NOR YOUR CHILD WILL SEE YOUR RESPONSES TO THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

We would like you to reflect back on the conversation you just had with your spouse. Keeping this conversation in mind, please circle the number that best indicates your level of agreement with the statement provided.

During our conversation...

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

STRONGLY   STRONGLY
DISAGREE   AGREE

1. I felt that my partner understood me   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. My spouse often blamed me   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. I felt that my spouse took control of the discussion   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. My spouse often refused to discuss the topic   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. I felt that my partner made me feel like he/she valued my abilities
    and opinions   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. My spouse often accused me   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I felt that my spouse tried to show he/she knows more than I do 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. My spouse often disengaged from the discussion   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. I felt that my partner made me feel cared for   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. My spouse often made sarcastic remarks about me   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. I felt that my spouse initiated most of the topics   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. My spouse often became silent   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. My spouse requested that we talk about things that I did not want
    to talk about   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. My spouse often changed the topic of the discussion   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. My spouse put pressure on me   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16. I felt that my spouse gave me few opportunities to talk   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please CIRCLE the number that best corresponds with the extent to which you DISAGREE OR AGREE with each of the following statements as a description of how you perceived this interaction.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7

STRONGLY   STRONGLY
DISAGREE   AGREE

MY PARTNER . . .

1. was intensely involved in the conversation..............…….....… 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. communicated coldness rather than warmth.............……..……. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. acted like we were close ....….… 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. was very honest in communicating with me................................ 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. felt very tense talking with me................................……. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. made the interaction very formal...........................……. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. tried to persuade me....................................………..... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

8. considered us equals.......................……...……………… 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. found the conversation stimulating......……................... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. was interested in talking to me ……...................…….. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. seemed to desire further communication...................................... 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. was willing to listen to me ……...........................……… 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13. felt very relaxed talking to me ………….....................……… 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14. wanted the discussion to be causal...………......................… 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15. tried to dominate me ………........…………........……….1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix D

RESPONSIVENESS (spouses)

The purpose of this coding scheme is to assess whether the *individuals* in this study demonstrated warmth, support, affection, ad intimacy during their conversation. The couples in this study were instructed to have a 15-minute conversation about the experience of watching each other interacting with their child. <u>Your task is to assess the extent to which the *individuals* were responsive to their spouse in their communication with one another</u>.

<u>For each one-minute interval of the conversation</u>, please rate the interaction on a five-point scale with regard to the male's and the female's responsiveness during the interaction. Please use the following scale when rating the interactions:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Responsive				Completely Responsive

Using this scale, you would give the individual the rating of "1" if they showed no signs of warmth or support toward their spouse. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 1:

- The individual is being critical of their spouse, shows contempt, or demonstrates frustration or disgust with spouse.
- The individual appears to be non-intimate or uncomfortable in their interaction with their spouse.
- The individual appears disinterested in their spouse, not paying attention, not listening, or uninvolved in the conversation.
- Look for nonverbal cues that would indicate negative affect or disinterest, such as expressions of anger, contempt, or disgust; lack of eye contact; indirect body orientation; or a general lack of involvement in the conversation.

Using this scale, you would give the individual the rating of "5" if during that minute he or she was completely responsive to their spouse. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 5:
- The individual acknowledges what their spouse is saying (e.g. "I hear you", "I understand where you're coming from")
- The individual uses verbal expressions of love and care for the spouse.
- The individual uses nonverbal expressions of love and care for the spouse. In particular, look for nonverbal cues that would indicate positive affect, such as smiling, touching, leaning toward one another, laughing, etc.
- The individual is being supportive of their spouse (e.g. "I liked what you did with the child", "I trust your sense of judgment")

RESPONSIVENESS (spouses)

Using the following scale, please rate each minute of the interaction with regard to the extent to which each *individual* was responsive in their conversation. Please make your ratings in whole numbers only.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Responsive				Completely Responsive

FAMILY ID#: _____

Minute	Female Rating	Male Rating
0:00 – 0:59		
1:00 – 1:59		
2:00 – 2:59		
3:00 – 3:59		
4:00 – 4:59		
5:00 – 5:59		
6:00 – 6:59		
7:00 – 7:59		
8:00 – 8:59		
9:00 – 9:59		
10:00 – 10:59		
11:00-11:59		
12:00-12:59		
13:00-13:59		
14:00-14:59		
15:00-____		

CONTROL (spouses)

The purpose of this coding scheme is to assess whether the *individuals* in this study were controlling of their spouse in their communication with one another. The couples in this study were instructed to have a 15-minute conversation about the experience of watching each other interacting with their child. Your task is to assess the extent to which the *individuals* were controlling of their spouse in their communication with one another.

For each one-minute interval of the conversation, please rate the interaction on a five-point scale with regard to the male's and the female's control in their conversation. Please use the following scale when rating the interactions:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Controlling				Completely Controlling

Using this scale, you would give the individual the rating of "1" if they did not request anything of their partner, did not make demands, and did not ask them to do anything to resolve the conflict. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 1:

- The individual does **not** place any blame on their partner and does not make any suggestions for ways their partner could change their behavior to solve the disagreement. The individual does not ask their partner to change their behavior or attitude in any way.
- The individual agrees to change his or her own behavior instead of requesting a change from their partner. In fact, they make few suggestions for how to resolve the issue at hand.
- Their nonverbal behaviors may also denote a lack of control. They are **not** assertive, they are relatively passive, and they tend to let their partner guide the conversation.

You would give the individual a rating of "5" if they are nagging or make demands of their spouse to change his/her behavior. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 5:

- The individual uses a lot of "you" statements (e.g., "you need to do this" or "will you please think about that").
- The individual demands that his/her partner do something to solve the conflict or to change their behavior, feelings, or thoughts.
- The individual is nagging and suggests that his/her partner needs to change, but does not make any concessions on his or her own behavior.
- Their nonverbal behaviors also denote control. They may take an aggressive posture, force their partner to make eye contact, gesture in a way that is directive and assertive, etc.

CONTROL (spouses)

Using the following scale, please rate each minute of the interaction with regard to the extent to which each *individual* was controlling in their conversation. Please make your ratings in whole numbers only.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Controlling				Completely Controlling

FAMILY ID#: _____

Minute	Female Rating	Male Rating
0:00 – 0:59		
1:00 – 1:59		
2:00 – 2:59		
3:00 – 3:59		
4:00 – 4:59		
5:00 – 5:59		
6:00 – 6:59		
7:00 – 7:59		
8:00 – 8:59		
9:00 – 9:59		
10:00 – 10:59		
11:00-11:59		
12:00-12:59		
13:00-13:59		
14:00-14:59		
15:00-____		

Appendix E

RESPONSIVENSS (father-child)

The purpose of this coding scheme is to assess whether the *father* in this study was responsive to his child in his communication with him or her. The father in this study was instructed to have a 15-minute interaction with his child where they were playing two games: A memory game and a puzzle. The father was told that he could help his child in whatever ways he feels are appropriate. <u>Your task is to assess the extent to which the *father* was responsive of his child in his communication with him or her during each of the tasks.</u>

<u>For each one-minute interval of the conversation</u>, please rate the interaction on a five-point scale with regard to the father's responsiveness in his interaction with the child. Please use the following scale when rating the interactions:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Completely
Responsive				Responsive

Using this scale, you would give the father the rating of "1" if he showed no signs of warmth or support toward the child during that minute. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 1:

- The father is being critical of his child, shows impatience.
- The father appears to be frustrated or stressed in his interaction with the child.
- The father is not listening to his child, not paying attention to what he or she is saying.
- The father is completing the task for his child even though the child wants to do it.
- The father appears to be non-intimate or uncomfortable in his interaction with the child.
- The father's nonverbal behaviors may also denote a lack of responsiveness, such as expressions of anger, contempt, or disgust; lack of eye contact; indirect body orientation; or a general lack of involvement in the conversation.

You would give the father a rating of "5" if during that minute the father was completely responsive to his child. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 5:

- The father is being supportive, encouraging his child and uses frequent praises to acknowledge his child's attempts to do well on the task (e.g., "good job", "it's great that you're trying").
- The father acknowledges child's feelings, such as frustration and/or enthusiasm.
- The father uses verbal expressions of love and care for his child.
- The father uses nonverbal expressions of love and care for his child. In particular, look for nonverbal cues that would indicate positive affect, such as smiling, touching, leaning toward child, laughing, etc.

RESPONSIVENESS (father-child)

Using the following scale, please rate each minute of the interaction with regard to the extent to which the *father* was responsive in his interaction with the child. Please make your ratings in whole numbers only.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Responsive				Completely Responsive

FAMILY ID#: _____

Minute	Father Rating
0:00 – 0:59	
1:00 – 1:59	
2:00 – 2:59	
3:00 – 3:59	
4:00 – 4:59	
5:00 – 5:59	
6:00 – 6:59	
7:00 – 7:59	
8:00 – 8:59	
9:00 – 9:59	
10:00 – 10:59	
11:00-11:59	
12:00-12:59	
13:00-13:59	
14:00-14:59	
15:00-____	

RESPONSIVENSS (mother-child)

The purpose of this coding scheme is to assess whether the *mother* in this study was responsive to his child in his communication with him or her. The mother in this study was instructed to have a 15-minute interaction with her child where they were playing two games: A memory game and a puzzle. The mother was told that she could help her child in whatever ways he feels are appropriate. Your task is to assess the extent to which the *mother* was responsive of her child in her communication with him or her during each of the tasks.

For each one-minute interval of the conversation, please rate the interaction on a five-point scale with regard to the mother's responsiveness in her interaction with the child. Please use the following scale when rating the interactions:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Responsive				Completely Responsive

Using this scale, you would give the mother the rating of "1" if she showed no signs of warmth or support toward the child during that minute. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 1:

- The mother is being critical of her child, shows impatience.
- The mother appears to be frustrated or stressed in her interaction with the child.
- The mother is not listening to her child, not paying attention to what he or she is saying.
- The mother is completing the task for her child even though the child wants to do it.
- The mother appears to be non-intimate or uncomfortable in her interaction with the child.
- The mother's nonverbal behaviors may also denote a lack of responsiveness, such as expressions of anger, contempt, or disgust; lack of eye contact; indirect body orientation; or a general lack of involvement in the conversation.

You would give the mother a rating of "5" if during that minute the mother was completely responsive to her child. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 5:

- The mother is being supportive, encouraging her child and uses frequent praises to acknowledge her child's attempts to do well on the task (e.g., "good job", "it's great that you're trying").
- The mother acknowledges child's feelings, such as frustration and/or enthusiasm.
- The mother uses verbal expressions of love and care for her child.
- The mother uses nonverbal expressions of love and care for her child. In particular, look for nonverbal cues that would indicate positive affect, such as smiling, touching, leaning toward child, laughing, etc.

RESPONSIVENESS (mother-child)

Using the following scale, please rate each minute of the interaction with regard to the extent to which the *mother* was responsive in her interaction with the child. Please make your ratings in whole numbers only.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Completely
Responsive				Responsive

FAMILY ID#: _____

Minute	Father Rating
0:00 – 0:59	
1:00 – 1:59	
2:00 – 2:59	
3:00 – 3:59	
4:00 – 4:59	
5:00 – 5:59	
6:00 – 6:59	
7:00 – 7:59	
8:00 – 8:59	
9:00 – 9:59	
10:00 – 10:59	
11:00-11:59	
12:00-12:59	
13:00-13:59	
14:00-14:59	
15:00-____	

CONTROL (father-child)

The purpose of this coding scheme is to assess whether the *father* in this study was controlling of his child in his communication with him or her. The father in this study was instructed to have a 15-minute interaction with his child where they were playing two games: A memory game and a puzzle. The father was told that he could help his child in whatever ways he feels are appropriate. Your task is to assess the extent to which the *father* was controlling of his child in his communication with him or her during each of the tasks.

For each one-minute interval of the conversation, please rate the interaction on a five-point scale with regard to the father's control in his interaction with the child. Please use the following scale when rating the interactions:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Controlling				Completely Controlling

Using this scale, you would give the father the rating of "1" if he did not request anything of his child, did not make demands, and did not ask them to do anything to resolve a disagreement or to complete the task. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 1:

- The father does **not** place any blame on his child and does not make any suggestions for ways the child could change their behavior to complete the task. The father does not ask the child to change his or her behavior or attitude in any way.
- The father agrees to change his own behavior instead of requesting a change from the child. In fact, he makes few suggestions for how to resolve the issue at hand (for example, the child says: "I know how to do it!" and he replies something along the lines of: "you know better than I do").
- The father's nonverbal behaviors may also denote a lack of control. He is **not** assertive, he is relatively passive, and he tends to let the child guide the interaction or the task.

You would give the father a rating of "5" if he is nagging or makes demands of his child to change his/her behavior. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 5:

- The father uses a lot of directive declarative statements (e.g., "do this", "stop doing that"), overt commands, or demands to make his child do something or to change his or her behavior, feelings, or thoughts.
- The father is nagging and suggests that his child needs to change, but does not make any concessions on his own behavior.
- The father stresses the importance of the rules during tasks.
- The father's nonverbal behaviors also denote control. He may take an aggressive posture, force the child to make eye contact, gesture in a way that is directive and assertive, etc.

CONTROL (father-child)

Using the following scale, please rate each minute of the interaction with regard to the extent to which the *father* was controlling in his interaction with the child. Please make your ratings in whole numbers only.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Controlling				Completely Controlling

FAMILY ID#: _____

Minute	Father Rating
0:00 – 0:59	
1:00 – 1:59	
2:00 – 2:59	
3:00 – 3:59	
4:00 – 4:59	
5:00 – 5:59	
6:00 – 6:59	
7:00 – 7:59	
8:00 – 8:59	
9:00 – 9:59	
10:00 – 10:59	
11:00-11:59	
12:00-12:59	
13:00-13:59	
14:00-14:59	
15:00-____	

CONTROL (mother-child)

The purpose of this coding scheme is to assess whether the *mother* in this study was controlling of her child in his communication with him or her. The mother in this study was instructed to have a 15-minute interaction with her child where they were playing two games: A memory game and a puzzle. The mother was told that she could help her child in whatever ways she feels are appropriate. <u>Your task is to assess the extent to which the *mother* was controlling of her child in her communication with him or her during each of the tasks.</u>

<u>For each one-minute interval of the conversation</u>, please rate the interaction on a five-point scale with regard to the mother's control in her interaction with the child. Please use the following scale when rating the interactions:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Controlling				Completely Controlling

Using this scale, you would give the mother the rating of "1" if she did not request anything of her child, did not make demands, and did not ask them to do anything to resolve a disagreement or to complete the task. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 1:

- The mother does **not** place any blame on her child and does not make any suggestions for ways the child could change their behavior to complete the task. The mother does not ask the child to change his or her behavior or attitude in any way.
- The mother agrees to change her own behavior instead of requesting a change from the child. In fact, she makes few suggestions for how to resolve the issue at hand (for example, the child says: "I know how to do it!" and she replies something along the lines of: "you know better than I do").
- The mother's nonverbal behaviors may also denote a lack of control. She is **not** assertive, she is relatively passive, and she tends to let the child guide the interaction or the task.

You would give the mother a rating of "5" if she is nagging or makes demands of her child to change his/her behavior. Use the following guidelines to help you determine when it is appropriate to assign a code of 5:

- The mother uses a lot of directive declarative statements (e.g., "do this", "stop doing that"), overt commands, or demands to make her child do something or to change his or her behavior, feelings, or thoughts.
- The mother is nagging and suggests that her child needs to change, but does not make any concessions on her own behavior.
- The mother stresses the importance of the rules during tasks.
- The mother's nonverbal behaviors also denote control. She may take an aggressive posture, force the child to make eye contact, gesture in a way that is directive and assertive, etc.

CONTROL (mother-child)

Using the following scale, please rate each minute of the interaction with regard to the extent to which the *mother* was controlling in her interaction with the child. Please make your ratings in whole numbers only.

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all Controlling				Completely Controlling

FAMILY ID#: _____

Minute	Father Rating
0:00 – 0:59	
1:00 – 1:59	
2:00 – 2:59	
3:00 – 3:59	
4:00 – 4:59	
5:00 – 5:59	
6:00 – 6:59	
7:00 – 7:59	
8:00 – 8:59	
9:00 – 9:59	
10:00 – 10:59	
11:00-11:59	
12:00-12:59	
13:00-13:59	
14:00-14:59	
15:00-____	

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