Social Development Vol 22 No. 2 363–383 May 2013
doi: 10.1111/sode.12014

Parent Characteristics and Early Coparenting Behavior at the Transition to Parenthood

Sarah J. Schoppe-Sullivan[1] and Sarah C. Mangelsdorf[2]

[1]*The Ohio State University*
[2]*Northwestern University*

Abstract

This study examined parent characteristics as correlates of coparenting behavior in 57 primiparous couples. Parents' negative emotionality and perceptions of maternal acceptance in childhood, mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles, and observed marital behavior and family socioeconomic status were assessed during the third trimester of pregnancy, and coparenting behavior was observed at 3.5 months postpartum. Couples who exhibited high-quality marital interaction showed higher supportive coparenting behavior, but couples who showed lower quality marital interaction demonstrated higher supportive coparenting behavior when mothers held more progressive beliefs about fathers' roles. Couples showed more undermining coparenting behavior when family socioeconomic status was lower and when fathers were higher on negative emotionality. Greater perceived maternal acceptance in childhood was only associated with lower levels of undermining behavior when prenatal marital interaction was high in quality. Thus, the characteristics of both parents, especially in combination with preexisting marital behavior, are important determinants of coparenting behavior.

Keywords: coparenting; parent characteristics; marital interaction; transition to parenthood

Introduction

For couples anticipating the birth of their first child, a critical task is the development of an effective coparenting relationship. Coparenting can be defined as the extent to which parents support each other's parenting or fail to do so and consists of several components (Feinberg, 2003): supportive (warm and cooperative) and undermining (hostile, critical, and competitive) behavior between parents, the division of childcare labor (how childcare is divided and satisfaction with this division), joint family management (control of family boundaries and interactions), and agreement about parenting topics (e.g., moral values and behavioral expectations). The notion of coparenting

Correspondence should be addressed to Sarah Jane Schoppe-Sullivan, Human Development and Family Science, The Ohio State University, 131 Campbell Hall, 1787 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210, USA. Email: *schoppe-sullivan.1@osu.edu*

is derived from family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974), which suggests that families consist of inter-dependent subsystems, including the 'executive subsystem' or coparenting relationship, which is afforded special significance with respect to the functioning of the family and its members.

The interest in coparenting has increased, as evidence suggests that aspects of coparenting, especially supportive and undermining behavior, are relevant to young children's socioemotional adjustment, including externalizing and internalizing problems (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998), self-regulation (Karreman, van Tuijl, van Aken, & Deković, 2008), and attachment (Brown, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, & Neff, 2010). Notably, many studies substantiate that the variance in children's adjustment accounted for by coparenting is over and above variance explained by parent–child and couple relationships (Karreman et al., 2008; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998). What is more, coparenting behavior may shape the continued development of couple relationships for families with children (Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch, & McHale, 2004), which in turn affect family and child functioning (Cummings & Davies, 2002).

As evidence continues to indicate the importance of coparenting relationships for child, couple, and family functioning, a key task for researchers is to determine why some couples develop effective coparenting relationships whereas others do not. Unfortunately, relatively few studies have examined the correlates of coparenting at the transition to parenthood, the time at which the coparenting relationship first develops (Van Egeren, 2004). Of these investigations, fewer yet have analyzed correlates of observed coparenting behavior (for exceptions, see McHale & Rotman, 2007; McHale et al., 2004; Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown, & Sokolowski, 2007); most have focused on correlates of new parents' perceptions of their coparenting relationship. It remains critical for research to identify predictors of observed coparenting behavior—especially undermining behavior—because higher undermining behavior, indicated by hostility and competitiveness in coparental interactions, has been consistently linked to externalizing behavior in children and to negative changes in marital quality over time (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004).

The purpose of this study was to address these gaps by examining parent characteristics, specifically personality, family of origin experiences, and mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles, as prebirth determinants of observed supportive and undermining coparenting behavior across the transition to parenthood. We examined whether these characteristics predicted coparenting behavior over and above the prebirth couple relationship, a robust correlate of coparenting behavior (McHale et al., 2004; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). We further tested whether prebirth marital behavior moderated associations of parent negative emotionality, maternal acceptance in childhood, and mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles with postpartum coparenting behavior.

Determinants of Coparenting Behavior

Two useful frameworks for considering the prebirth determinants of coparenting across the transition to parenthood are Belsky's (1984) model of the determinants of parenting and Feinberg's (2003) ecological model of coparenting. Across both of these models, key influences on parenting/coparenting include parent characteristics (personality, developmental history, and beliefs/attitudes) and couple relationship functioning. Below we describe in detail how Belsky's and Feinberg's models guided our hypotheses, and we also review previous research on relations between each of the sets

of proposed influences and coparenting (for a more extensive review, see Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jessee, 2011).

Belsky's (1984) influential model of the determinants of parenting emphasized the primary role of parent personality as both a direct and an indirect (via the marital relationship) influence on parenting behavior. Consistent with this model, numerous studies have linked multiple aspects of personality to marital and parent–child relationships (Belsky & Barends, 2002; Humbad, Donnellan, Iacono, & Burt, 2010; Prinzie, Stams, Deković, Reijntjes, & Belsky, 2009; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000). In particular, negative emotionality (or neuroticism) has been consistently linked with poorer parenting and couple relationships (Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000; Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005; Prinzie et al., 2009).

In his ecological model of coparenting, Feinberg (2003) also highlighted individual parent characteristics as key determinants of coparenting, although only a few studies have linked aspects of personality or related characteristics to coparenting. In an early study of predictors of coparenting across the transition to parenthood, Van Egeren (2003) found that greater maternal trait reactance (resistance to the influence of others) was linked to greater instability in mothers' perceived coparenting experiences whereas greater maternal ego development (socioemotional maturity) was associated with more positive coparenting experiences for fathers. Elliston, McHale, Talbot, Parmley, and Kuersten-Hogan (2008) reported that men who were less ego resilient (low on open-mindedness and perspective taking) were more likely to withdraw from early coparenting interactions, but this is the only study that has linked parent personality to early observed coparenting behavior.

Other studies have reported associations between personality or related characteristics and observed coparenting behavior but have studied families after the transition to parenthood. Talbot and McHale (2004) examined associations between parental self-control and flexibility and observed coparenting behavior in 50 families with 12-month-old infants, and found that greater maternal self-control and greater paternal flexibility were associated with more harmonious coparenting interactions (observed support), but parents' individual characteristics were not associated with coparenting negativity (observed undermining). Notably, these associations were obtained after controlling for observed marital quality. In their study of antecedents of coparenting behavior in families with preschool-aged children, Stright and Bales (2003) found no significant associations between fathers' personality adjustment and observed coparenting behavior, but mothers' personality adjustment was negatively associated with observed unsupportive coparenting behavior. In this study, the aspects of personality that were associated with coparenting could not be discerned because the authors used a score for 'personality adjustment' created by combining scores on the 'Big 5' personality traits. In addition, Stright and Bales (2003) did not control for the quality of the couple relationship in their analyses; thus, it is impossible to know whether the association obtained between mothers' personality adjustment and observed unsupportive coparenting was explained by the associations of both with marital quality.

Thus, it seems likely that parent personality is associated with coparenting behavior, but findings are mixed. Few studies have examined associations between parent personality and early observed coparenting behavior at the transition to parenthood, rendering the potential influence of personality on the development of the coparenting relationship poorly understood. It is especially surprising that no study has tested the association between parent negative emotionality and observed coparenting behavior,

given that negative emotionality is consistently linked with maladaptive couple interactions (Caughlin et al., 2000; Donnellan et al., 2005).

According to Belsky (1984), another important influence on parenting is the parent's developmental history, particularly the individual's experiences in the family of origin. Moreover, in a subsequent article, Belsky and Isabella (1985) argued that childhood experiences can affect adults' marital relationships, particularly at the transition to parenthood. Given that Feinberg (2003) placed the coparenting relationship at the center of the associations between the marital relationship and parenting, just as family of origin experiences affect parenting and couple relationships, they are likely to affect coparenting as well. Consistent with these ideas, parents' family of origin experiences have been associated with their coparenting in a few studies. Van Egeren (2003) found that when new fathers reported higher quality coparenting relationships in their families of origin, they reported more positive coparenting experiences. Stright and Bales (2003) observed greater supportive coparenting behavior in families of preschoolers when mothers reported higher quality coparenting relationships in their families of origin. From his study of families with 8- to 11-month-old infants, McHale (1995) reported that parents showed less discrepancy in involvement during family interaction when mothers reported greater acceptance from their parents in childhood. In the first published study linking adult attachment to early observed coparenting behavior, Talbot, Baker, and McHale (2009) found that families with insecure mothers demonstrated greater coparenting conflict, and families with secure fathers showed higher levels of coparenting cohesion. These relations were maintained even after controlling for prenatal marital quality. To the extent that adult attachment reflects actual experiences in the family of origin, these findings suggest that more positive family of origin experiences are associated with more positive coparenting behavior.

Another potential influence on the coparenting relationship is parents' gender role expectations (Feinberg, 2003). In fact, in an earlier report from the larger study that this investigation is a part of, Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, and Sokolowksi (2008) found that expectant parents with more progressive beliefs about fathers' roles perceived their coparenting relationship as higher in quality after their infants' births. According to the maternal gatekeeping hypothesis (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; McBride et al., 2005), mothers' beliefs regarding family roles may be particularly influential with respect to fathers' involvement in child rearing, such that mothers who believe that fathers should be directly involved in the day-to-day care of their children are more likely to facilitate father involvement (Cannon, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown, & Sokolowski, 2008). This encouraging behavior on the part of mothers may help foster a mutually supportive coparenting relationship. In fact, a number of studies have shown that mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles are more closely related to father involvement in child rearing than are fathers' own beliefs (McBride & Rane, 1997; McBride et al., 2005).

However, none of these sets of correlates of coparenting has received as much attention as the quality of the preexisting or prenatal marital relationship. Indeed, according to Feinberg's (2003) model, coparenting is closely linked to the quality of the overall inter-parental relationship, and Belsky (1984) described the marital relationship as the principal support system for parents. Consistent with these models, Van Egeren (2004) found that prebirth couple relationship quality was a robust predictor of postpartum coparenting experiences, with higher prebirth couple relationship quality portending more positive coparenting experiences for mothers and fathers.

Similarly, McHale et al. (2004) found that prebirth couple relationship quality predicted observed coparental cooperation and warmth, but not competitiveness, at 3 months postpartum. Other studies of coparenting during the infant's first year have also yielded associations between marital quality and coparenting (Cabrera, Shannon, & La Taillade, 2009; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). Given that marital quality is a robust correlate of coparenting behavior, it was included as a predictor in this study as well.

The Present Study

The purpose of this study was to examine parent negative emotionality, perceptions of maternal acceptance in childhood, and mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles as predictors of emerging coparenting behavior across the transition to parenthood. Although it has never before been directly linked to coparenting behavior, given its robust associations with maladaptive parenting and couple interactions (Belsky & Barends, 2002; Donnellan et al., 2005; Prinzie et al., 2009; Robins et al., 2000), we hypothesized that parents high on negative emotionality would show less supportive and more undermining coparenting behavior postpartum. With respect to family of origin experiences, consistent with a few prior studies (McHale, 1995; Stright & Bales, 2003; Talbot et al., 2009; Van Egeren, 2003), we hypothesized that partners who reported more positive childhood relationships with their own mothers would have coparenting relationships characterized by more supportive and less undermining behavior. In light of the maternal gatekeeping hypothesis and previous studies indicating associations of mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles with father involvement in child rearing and coparenting (McBride & Rane, 1997; McBride et al., 2005; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008), we also hypothesized that new parents would show more supportive and less undermining coparenting behavior when mothers held more progressive beliefs about fathers' roles prior to their child's birth.

Finally, consistent with the models of Feinberg (2003) and Belsky (1984), and the empirical literature reviewed above, we hypothesized that couples who exhibited higher quality marital interaction prior to their infant's birth would show more supportive coparenting behavior and less undermining coparenting behavior postpartum. We further tested whether prebirth marital behavior moderated associations of parent negative emotionality, maternal acceptance in childhood, and mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles with postpartum coparenting behavior. With respect to relations of parent negative emotionality and maternal acceptance in the family of origin with coparenting behavior, we hypothesized that prebirth marital behavior would moderate these relations in a dual risk pattern (Belsky, Bakermans-Kranenburg, & van IJzendoorn, 2007). In other words, we expected that the negative impact of high levels of parental negative emotionality and low levels of perceived maternal acceptance in childhood on coparenting behavior would be heightened in the presence of lower quality prebirth marital behavior. Only a few prior studies have tested these types of interaction effects. For instance, Talbot and McHale (2004) found that harmonious coparenting was most likely when high marital quality was combined with high maternal flexibility or high maternal self-control and that high coparenting negativity was most likely when fathers were inflexible and marital quality was low.

In examining the interaction between mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles and prebirth marital behavior, we advanced a somewhat different hypothesis—a protective stabilizing effect (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Specifically, we anticipated that mothers' progressive beliefs about fathers' roles would be associated with greater

supportive and less undermining coparenting behavior, but only when prebirth marital behavior was lower in quality. The coparenting literature supports the notion that effective coparenting relationships can take many forms with respect to the actual division of childcare labor (Feinberg, 2003); parents do not need to have equal roles to be highly supportive of each other's parenting in the context of effective communication and coordination between partners. Thus, we posited that mothers' supportive beliefs about fathers would only be influential when the couple relationship was lower in quality but that the extent to which the mother had progressive vs. traditional views about fathers would be less consequential for coparenting in the context of a high-quality marital relationship.

Method

Participants

Participants were 57 couples who took part in a larger longitudinal investigation of family transitions. In the larger study (N = 103 couples), there were 41 couples in which one or both partners had previous children. However, to be included in the sample for the present study, both members of the couple were required to be expecting their first child. Our rationale for focusing on the primiparous subsample (N = 62 couples) was that our goal was to examine correlates of the developing coparenting relationship, and couples who already had parenting or coparenting experience would not be comparable with those developing their first coparenting relationships. Of the 62 couples, five were dropped from the sample whose data were analyzed in the current study. Of these five couples, one experienced a miscarriage, and the other four couples were missing data on personality, marital behavior, or coparenting behavior. Comparisons of these five couples with those who were included in the sample for the present study indicated no demographic differences.

Study procedures, including the informed consent documents signed by participants, were approved by the sponsoring University's Institutional Review Board. Couples were recruited from childbirth education classes, flyers posted at local businesses, and through print and electronic newsletters and word of mouth. Data were collected at two phases for the study: during the third trimester of pregnancy and 3.5 months postpartum.

Of the 57 couples included in the present study, all were married except one. Couples had been married (or living together) on average for 3.41 years (range = 0–8.92 years, *SD* = 2.07 years). Expectant mothers' ages ranged from 22 to 42 years with a mean age of 28.10 years (*SD* = 4.14 years). Expectant fathers' ages ranged from 22 to 45 years with a mean age of 30.18 years (*SD* = 5.28 years). The median family income ranged from $51 000–61 000 (range: less than $10 000 to over $100 000). Eighty-nine percent of expectant mothers and 79 percent of expectant fathers had obtained at least a college degree (range for expectant mothers: some college to doctoral degree; range for expectant fathers: some high school to doctoral degree). Eighty-six percent of the participants were European American, 5 percent African-American, 4 pecent Hispanic, 3 percent Asian, and 2 percent mixed race/ethnicity. In the third trimester of pregnancy, 4 fathers and 10 mothers were not in the workforce.

Between the first and second phases of this study, all expectant mothers in the N = 57 subsample gave birth to single, healthy, and full-term infants. Thirty of the infants were female, and the infants were 3.67 months old at the time of the second assessment (*SD* = 10.08 days).

Phase 1: Third Trimester Assessments

Procedure. Couples participated in a 2-h home-based assessment during the third trimester of the pregnancy. At the assessment, partners participated in a series of activities including a 10-min videotaped discussion task. Prior to this assessment, partners also completed a series of questionnaires independently.

Measures

Personality. Each partner completed the multidimensional personality questionnaire (MPQ; Tellegen, 1982), a 300-item measure of personality designed for use with non-clinical samples that uses a true/false response format and has well-established reliability and validity (DiLalla, Gottesman, & Carey, 1993; Stroud, Durbin, Saigal, & Knobloch-Fedders, 2010). Ten of the 11 aspects of personality measured by the MPQ can be combined into three 'superfactors': negative emotionality, constraint, and positive emotionality (Robins et al., 2000). For the purposes of this investigation, we focused on negative emotionality, as this factor has been most consistently associated with maladaptive couple interactions (Caughlin et al., 2000; Donnellan et al., 2005). The negative emotionality factor was created by summing scores on the MPQ dimensions of aggression (20 items; e.g., 'I enjoy violent movies'), alienation (20 items, e.g., 'Many people try to push me around'), and stress reaction (14 items, e.g., 'My feelings are hurt rather easily'); $\alpha = .90$ for mothers and .87 for fathers.

Beliefs about the roles of fathers. Expectant mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles were assessed using the 'What is a father' questionnaire (WIAF; Schoppe, 2001), an adaptation of Palkovitz's (1984) role of the father questionnaire, a measure that has demonstrated reliability and validity in previous studies (McBride & Rane, 1997; Palkovitz, 1984). The WIAF includes 15 statements about fathers that tap both non-traditional and traditional beliefs about fathers' roles (e.g., 'fathers and mothers should spend an equal amount of time with their children'; 'fathers should be the disciplinarians in the family'). Each item is rated on a 5-point scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). Items were combined to form a total score (traditional items were reversed), with higher scores indicating more non-traditional or progressive beliefs about fathers' roles ($\alpha = .72$).

Family of origin. Each partner also completed the 60 items from the mother–father–peer scale (MFP; Epstein, 1983) that focus on relationships with parents in childhood. These items require respondents to rate their agreement with 30 statements each about their mother (or mother figure) and father (or father figure) using 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree). The scale of the MFP that is the focus of this investigation is acceptance vs. rejection by mother (maternal acceptance). Higher scores on this scale reflect perceptions of greater maternal acceptance during childhood (e.g., 'My mother enjoyed being with me'). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .93 for expectant mothers and .85 for expectant fathers.

Observed marital behavior. During the 10-min videotaped discussion episode, couples were asked to complete a modified version of the who does what? questionnaire (Cowan & Cowan, 1990) together, after having completed copies of it independently prior to the assessment. Couples were instructed to 'Complete this together as a

couple, deciding how you think it is (or will be, for childcare tasks) and how you would like it to be'. Marital behavior was coded by a team of two trained coders using a set of 7-point scales originally adapted from earlier work on dyadic interaction (e.g., Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988; Markman & Notarius, 1987) and used in previous work on marital interaction (e.g., Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). The dimensions that were coded were engagement, enjoyment, individual positive affect, irritation, individual negative affect, cooperation, balance, global interaction quality, sensitivity, and conflict resolution (for detailed descriptions, see Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). The coders made ratings every 5 min. All couples received at least two sets of ratings; some received three. To make the samples of dyadic interaction more comparable, averaged ratings across the first two episodes were used for each couple. Coders were randomly assigned tapes to code, except for those tapes randomly selected to assess reliability (21 percent). Discrepancies were resolved through conferencing.

Gamma was used as a measure of inter-rater reliability because it controls for chance agreement like kappa but is more appropriate for ordinal data (Hays, 1981; Liebetrau, 1983). The cooperation scale was dropped because of its low average gamma (.58). For the other scales, gammas ranged from .63 to 1.00 ($M = .88$). Data reduction was conducted based on the results of previous work with these coding scales, which has identified two components of marital behavior: positive engagement and marital conflict (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). The first composite, positive engagement, was created by summing scores for engagement, enjoyment, wife and husband individual positive affect, balance, and global interaction quality ($\alpha = .88$). The second composite, marital conflict, was created by summing the irritation and wife and husband individual negative affect scales, and by subtracting the conflict resolution and sensitivity scales ($\alpha = .80$). Positive engagement and marital conflict were significantly associated, $r = -.42$, $p < .01$.

Because in the present study our interest was in couples' prebirth marital behavior as an index of overall adaptation within the marital relationship, the marital behavior data were further reduced by subtracting marital conflict from positive marital engagement (after standardization). Thus, higher scores on this composite marital behavior variable indicated the presence of positive interactive behaviors and the relative absence of negative, destructive conflict. For example, in one couple who received a high score for marital behavior, each partner was quick to acknowledge and appreciate the other's contributions to household labor and generous both in their desire to give their partner credit for participation in household labor and to contribute more themselves. This couple was highly engaged, making frequent eye contact and expressing warmth through humor. Disagreements were easily and quickly resolved. In contrast, low scores on the composite marital behavior variable indicated the presence of destructive conflict and the relative absence of positive interactive behaviors. One couple who received a low score for prebirth marital behavior was notable for their physical distance from each other—the partners were seated relatively far away from each other such that they had difficulty sharing the questionnaire. After a minute or two of attempting to share the clipboard, the husband took it and proceeded to dominate the recording of the couple's responses. Conflicts regarding partners' contributions to household tasks were frequent, not easily resolved, and tended to recur. For instance, at one point, the husband asserted a certain level of contribution to cleaning up after meals, and the wife said 'nice try' and expressed her desire for the partners to contribute equally to that task. In subsequent negotiations about household repairs, the wife agreed that the husband took care of those, but then the husband expressed

his desire for that work to be equally distributed (clearly in 'retaliation' for his wife's earlier request).

Phase 2: 3.5-month Assessments

Procedure. All couples were scheduled for a second home-based assessment when their infants were 3–4 months old. At this assessment, parents and their infants participated in a series of videotaped interactive episodes. In one episode, which took place toward the end of the assessment, couples engaged in free play with their infants together for 5 min.

Measures

Coparenting behavior. In the 5-min family interaction episode, couples were given an infant jungle gym and were instructed to 'play together with your baby as you normally would'. These episodes were designed to elicit typical patterns of coparenting behavior in a non-stressful situation, and were coded for aspects of coparenting behavior using a subset of scales developed by Cowan and Cowan (1996) and used in previous work on coparenting (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004, 2007). Coparenting coding was completed by a team of two coders (a different team than that which coded prebirth marital behavior). Coders were randomly assigned tapes to code, except for those tapes randomly selected to assess reliability (23 percent). Discrepancies were resolved through conferencing.

Coders were trained to focus solely on coparenting incidents within the interactions defined as exchanges between the parents regarding parenting issues or in reference to the infant. Coders then rated the overall nature of coparenting incidents using the following 5-point scales (for detailed descriptions, see Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004): pleasure, warmth, cooperation, displeasure, and competition. Gammas ranged from .76 to .98 ($M = .91$). Data reduction was conducted on a conceptual basis (see Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2007) by combining the three scales that assessed supportive coparenting behavior (pleasure, warmth, and cooperation; inter-correlations for these scales ranged from .61 to .72) and the two scales that assessed undermining coparenting behavior (displeasure and competition; $r = .36$). The two composite variables were only modestly correlated, $r = -.22$, $p = .11$, and were maintained separately to be consistent with previous work that conceptualizes supportive and undermining behavior as different aspects of coparenting (McHale, 1995; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004).

One couple who was rated high on supportive coparenting behavior openly showed appreciation of and support for each other's relationship with their child by consistently drawing the infant's attention to the partner (e.g., 'Mommy's over there!' 'Go see daddy!'). The partners demonstrated active cooperation by each taking one of the infant's arms to help their child sit up and also by singing a song together to their child. These partners were also highly interactive regarding coparenting issues—for instance, the father noted that the infant had started to become 'ticklish' and asked the mother if she had noticed that yet. In the interaction of a different couple who was rated high on undermining coparenting behavior, each partner appeared to have a different way of playing with their child, and the partners played with the child competitively (i.e., the father tickled the infant while the mother played 'peek-a-boo'). The parents also showed active displeasure and irritation with each other's parenting. For instance, the

mother criticized the father for 'shaking up the baby's belly', and the father criticized the mother for not trimming the infant's nails uniformly. This couple's interaction with their infant was tense and uncoordinated.

Results

Analysis Plan

The current study had a modest sample size; however, power analysis indicated adequate power to detect the types of effects we anticipated. The measure of effect size we were concerned with was the change in variance accounted for by the addition of an individual variable to the regression models described below. Thus, in determining statistical power, we used Cohen's *f*-squared, which scales the change in *R*-squared by the percentage of variance unaccounted for by the model. The typical rule of thumb is that an *f*-squared of .02 represents a small effect, an *f*-squared of .15 reflects a medium effect, and an *f*-squared of .35 or greater represents a large effect (Cohen, 1992). For our sample size and the number of predictors in our models, the power to detect a medium effect (.15) was .82, exceeding the threshold typically used for *a priori* power analyses.

Preliminary analyses examined the associations between demographic variables and the independent and dependent variables in the study. These analyses indicated that aspects of family socioeconomic status (i.e., fathers' education and family income) were negatively associated with undermining coparenting behavior. Thus, a socioeconomic status variable was created by standardizing and averaging the scores for mothers' education, fathers' education, and family income, and used as a control in subsequent analyses. Correlations and descriptive statistics for all study variables are presented in Table 1.

Hierarchical linear regression was used to test the associations of mothers' and fathers' negative emotionality and perceptions of maternal acceptance in childhood, and mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles, with observed coparenting behavior at 3.5 months postpartum after controlling for socioeconomic status and observed prebirth marital behavior. Two regressions were computed—one with supportive coparenting behavior as the dependent variable and another with undermining coparenting behavior as the dependent variable. In each regression, socioeconomic status was entered on step 1, followed by marital behavior on step 2. On step 3, mothers' and fathers' negative emotionality were entered together, and on step 4, mothers' and fathers' perceptions of maternal acceptance in childhood were entered. Finally, on step 5, mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles were entered as the final predictor of observed coparenting behavior. The sets of predictors were entered on separate steps to provide a clearer picture of the contributions of each type of predictor to observed coparenting behavior. The order of entry of the predictors was based on their importance according to Belsky's (1984) and Feinberg's (2003) models (after the control for socioeconomic status). Only if the *F* change for a particular step was significant were significant betas for individual variables interpreted. The results of the models are shown in Table 2.

In addition, to test whether prebirth marital behavior moderated associations between parents' characteristics and postpartum-observed coparenting behavior, six additional hierarchical regressions were conducted. Each additional model included one set of two-way parent characteristic × marital behavior interaction variables (e.g., mothers' negative emotionality × marital behavior; fathers' negative emotionality × marital behavior) on a sixth step added to the original model. The interaction terms were simple products of the two centered variables. If significant *F* change was

Table 1. Inter-correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Parent Characteristics, Marital Behavior, and Coparenting Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	*M*	*SD*
1. Socioeconomic status		−.32*	−.26	−.04	.21	−.06	−.04	−.04	−.27*	0.00	2.50
2. Mothers' negative emotionality			.35**	−.29*	−.19	−.03	−.02	.07	.07	11.56	7.76
3. Fathers' negative emotionality				−.04	−.10	−.16	−.17	−.07	.36**	12.37	7.40
4. Mothers' acceptance by own mother					.04	.09	.02	−.09	.07	4.21	.88
5. Fathers' acceptance by own mother						.03	.03	−.02	−.29*	4.42	.56
6. Mothers' progressive beliefs							.16	.34**	.02	3.94	.35
7. Observed marital behavior								.27*	−.04	.13	1.60
8. Supportive coparenting behavior									−.22	10.20	2.02
9. Undermining coparenting behavior										2.72	1.03

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Hierarchical Regressions Predicting Observed Supportive and Undermining Coparenting Behavior

	Supportive coparenting			Undermining coparenting		
	β	ΔR^2	ΔF	β	ΔR^2	ΔF
Predictors						
Step 1		.00	.10		.07	4.25*
Socioeconomic status	−.04			−.27*		
Step 2		.07	4.21*		.00	.14
Socioeconomic status	−.03			−.27*		
Marital behavior	.27*			−.05		
Step 3		.01	.20		.10	3.24*
Socioeconomic status	−.02			−.22		
Marital behavior	.26			.01		
M negative emotionality	.09			−.12		
F negative emotionality	−.06			.35*		
Step 4		.01	.14		.06	2.02
Socioeconomic status	−.03			−.17		
Marital behavior	.26			.02		
M negative emotionality	.06			−.14		
F negative emotionality	−.05			.35*		
M maternal acceptance	−.08			.05		
F maternal acceptance	−.01			−.25		
Step 5		.09	5.64*		.00	.29
Socioeconomic status	.00			−.16		
Marital behavior	.22			.01		
M negative emotionality	.05			−.14		
F negative emotionality	.00			.36*		
M maternal acceptance	−.10			.04		
F maternal acceptance	−.02			−.25		
M progressive beliefs	.32*			.07		

Note: M = mother; F = father.
* $p < .05$.

obtained upon addition of the interaction variables to the model, interaction variables with significant individual betas were graphed and probed using an SPSS (IBM, Somers, NY) script created by Hayes and Matthes (2009). Although it would be preferable to test all interaction effects simultaneously within the same regression model, the interactions were tested separately because of limits imposed by sample size. Results of the tests of moderation by prebirth marital behavior are presented in Table 3.

Predicting Supportive Coparenting

As shown in Table 2, marital behavior was a significant predictor of supportive coparenting behavior when it was entered on step 2. In other words, when couples

Table 3. Results of Tests of Two-way Interactions between Parent Characteristics and Marital Behavior

	Supportive coparenting			Undermining coparenting		
	β	ΔR^2	ΔF	β	ΔR^2	ΔF
Two-way interactions (step 6)						
Negative emotionality		.03	.90		.04	1.37
M negative emotionality × marital behavior	.16			.29		
F negative emotionality × marital behavior	−.22			−.07		
Acceptance by own mother		.01	.41		.14	5.44**
M maternal acceptance × marital behavior	.07			−.35**		
F maternal acceptance × marital behavior	.12			−.27*		
Progressive beliefs		.10	6.42*		.01	.34
M progressive beliefs × marital behavior	−.35*			.08		

Note: M = mother; F = father.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

exhibited higher quality marital interaction prior to the birth of their infant, they also showed more supportive coparenting behavior postpartum. In addition, mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles was also a significant predictor of supportive coparenting behavior when entered on step 5 such that couples showed greater supportive coparenting behavior postpartum when mothers endorsed more progressive beliefs about fathers' roles prebirth. However, the association between mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles and supportive coparenting behavior was moderated by prebirth marital behavior (Table 3). *Post hoc* probing of this interaction (Figure 1) indicated that mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles were only positively associated with supportive coparenting when the quality of prebirth marital interaction was characterized as low or average. When prebirth marital interaction was high in quality, mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles were not associated with supportive coparenting behavior. No other variables (socioeconomic status, mothers' or fathers' negative emotionality, mothers' or fathers' reports of maternal acceptance) were significant predictors of supportive coparenting behavior.

Predicting Undermining Coparenting

When predicting undermining coparenting behavior (Table 2), families' socioeconomic status was a significant predictor on the first step. SES was negatively associated with undermining coparenting—in other words, when parents had higher levels of education and income, they showed lower levels of undermining behavior postpartum. Fathers' negative emotionality was also a significant predictor on step 3. When fathers scored higher in negative emotionality prior to their infant's birth, couples showed greater undermining coparenting behavior postpartum. There were no significant main effects of marital behavior, mothers' or fathers' reports of maternal acceptance, or mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles on undermining coparenting behavior.

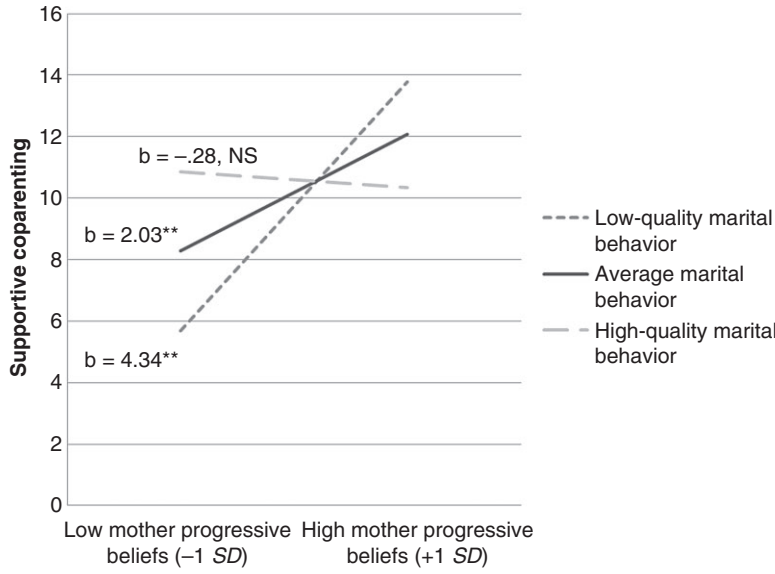

Figure 1. Association between Mothers' Beliefs about Fathers' Roles and Postpartum Supportive Coparenting Behavior Varies as a Function of Prebirth Marital Behavior.
Note: NS = not significant.
** $p < .01$.

However, both mothers' and fathers' reports of maternal acceptance in childhood interacted with prebirth marital behavior to predict postpartum undermining coparenting behavior (Table 3). Graphing and *post hoc* probing of the first interaction effect (Figure 2) revealed that mothers' reports of maternal acceptance were positively associated with undermining coparenting behavior when prebirth marital behavior was low in quality but marginally negatively associated with undermining coparenting behavior when prebirth marital behavior was high in quality. For couples with average marital behavior, mothers' reports of maternal acceptance in childhood were not associated with undermining behavior. The pattern of the significant maternal acceptance × marital behavior interaction for fathers was somewhat different (Figure 3). In this case, fathers' reports of maternal acceptance in childhood were significantly and negatively associated with undermining coparenting behavior when prebirth marital behavior was high or average in quality. When prebirth marital behavior was low in quality, there was no association between fathers' reports of maternal acceptance in childhood and undermining behavior.

Discussion

This study yielded important information regarding parent characteristics associated with early observed coparenting behavior. Couples exhibited highly supportive coparenting behavior when they exhibited high-quality marital interaction prebirth. Moreover, couples with marital behavior that was low or average in quality showed higher supportive coparenting behavior postpartum when mothers held more progressive beliefs about fathers' roles. Highly undermining coparenting behavior was more

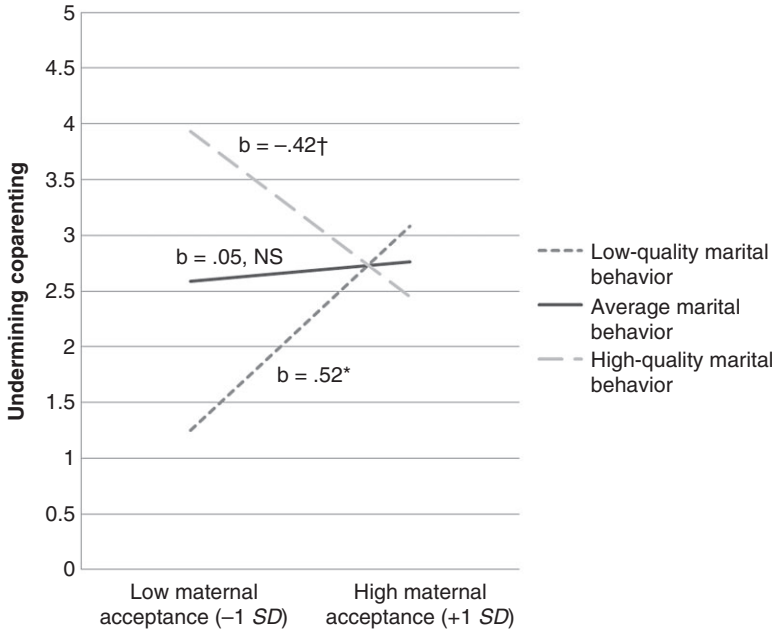

Figure 2. Association between Mothers' Reports of Maternal Acceptance and Postpartum Undermining Coparenting Behavior Varies as a Function of Prebirth Marital Behavior.
Note: NS = not significant.
* $p < .05$, † $p < .10$.

likely to be demonstrated by new parents when families were lower in socioeconomic status and when fathers were high in negative emotionality. In addition, greater perceived maternal acceptance in childhood by mothers and fathers was associated with lower levels of undermining behavior, but only when the prenatal marital relationship was functioning well. When prebirth marital behavior was low in quality, couples in which mothers perceived their own mothers as more accepting in childhood actually demonstrated higher levels of undermining coparenting behavior postpartum. These findings are consistent with the key roles ascribed to parent characteristics by Belsky's (1984) and Feinberg's (2003) models, and yet provide vital new clues to uncovering the reasons why some couples develop effective coparenting relationships whereas others do not.

One predictor of supportive coparenting behavior was mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles. As hypothesized, mothers' beliefs interacted with marital behavior in a protective stabilizing pattern (Luthar et al., 2000). When mothers endorsed more progressive beliefs, and couples demonstrated low- or average-quality prenatal marital behavior, couples were more warm and cooperative during family play at 3.5 months postpartum. Although our study is the first to demonstrate an association between mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles and observed coparenting behavior, this association is not surprising, given prior research linking mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles and gatekeeping behaviors with father involvement in child rearing (McBride et al., 2005; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008). When mothers are highly supportive of fathers'

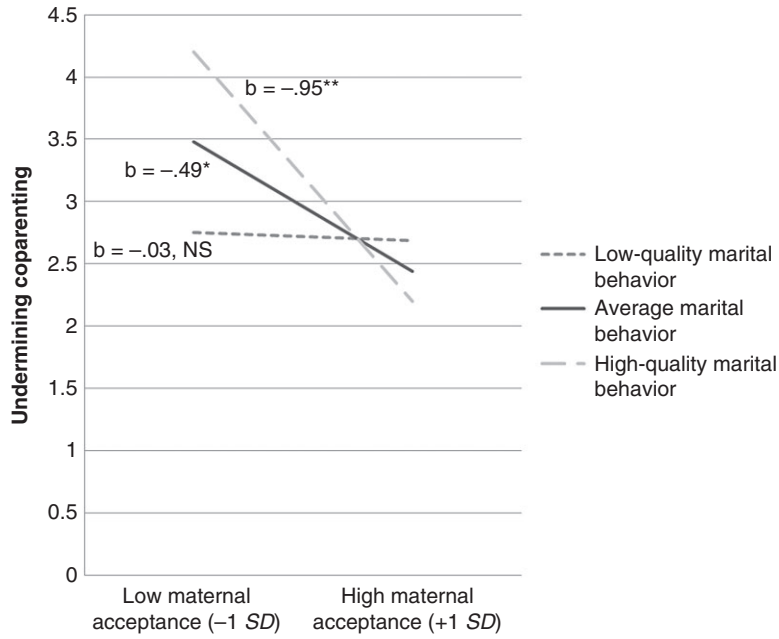

Figure 3. Association between Fathers' Reports of Maternal Acceptance and Postpartum Undermining Coparenting Behavior Varies as a Function of Prebirth Marital Behavior.
Note: NS = not significant.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

involvement with their infants, they provide direct encouragement to fathers, which would have been coded as supportive coparenting behavior in this study. Certainly, fathers may respond with greater involvement and reciprocal support, helping to create a more supportive coparenting dynamic.

That mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles were only positively associated with supportive coparenting behavior when prebirth marital behavior was low or average in quality suggests that in the context of a high-quality couple relationship, whether or not the mother has more 'traditional' or 'non-traditional' beliefs about fathers' roles may not matter for the development of supportive coparenting behavior. But in the context of an average- or low-quality marital relationship, the mothers' beliefs about fathers' roles may play a larger role in how much supportive coparenting behavior emerges between coparents. Therefore, interventions that focus on the transition to parenthood and/or coparenting (e.g., Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009; Feinberg & Kan, 2008) and target increasing mothers' support for father involvement may be especially fruitful for fostering supportive coparenting behavior in couples that enter parenthood with less positive marital relationships. Future research should delve deeper into the nuances of observed coparenting behavior to more directly examine whether fathers in lower quality marital relationships are apt to withdraw from coparenting interactions unless mothers actively encourage their involvement.

A key contribution of this study was its elucidation of parent characteristics associated with early undermining coparenting behavior. Higher undermining behavior

has been consistently linked to externalizing behavior in children and to negative changes in marital quality over time (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004), but previous studies were unable to identify correlates of observed undermining behavior during early infancy (McHale et al., 2004). Consistent with our hypotheses and with the large body of research linking negative emotionality with poorer parental and couple relationship functioning (Caughlin et al., 2000; Donnellan et al., 2005; Prinzie et al., 2009), fathers' negative emotionality predicted greater postpartum undermining coparenting behavior. It stands to reason that fathers who experience more frequent and intense negative emotions may be more likely to initiate or reciprocate hostile and competitive interactions during family play. Notably, the association of fathers' negative emotionality and undermining coparenting behavior was present even when controlling for SES, which was negatively associated with undermining coparenting behavior, consistent with the results of several other studies that have linked higher SES with more adaptive coparenting behavior (e.g., Stright & Bales, 2003).

Moreover, even after taking into account the effects of SES and fathers' negative emotionality on undermining behavior, fathers who reported feeling more acceptance from their mothers in childhood were part of couples who demonstrated less undermining coparenting behavior postpartum, but only when couples exhibited average- or high-quality marital interaction prior to the birth of their child. Unfortunately, when couples showed low-quality marital behavior to begin with, the quality of fathers' perceived early relationships with their mothers did not matter with respect to postpartum undermining behavior. Although the pattern of this interaction effect was not dual risk (Belsky et al., 2007), as hypothesized, the role of fathers' perceptions of maternal acceptance in childhood in the present study is consistent with some prior research on associations between family of origin experiences and coparenting (McHale, 1995; Van Egeren, 2003), and makes sense if fathers with better relationship models are less likely to undermine their partners and/or be undermined as long as they are in a reasonably well-functioning couple relationship.

Although mothers' perceptions of childhood relationships with their mothers were not directly associated with supportive or undermining coparenting behavior, when mothers perceived greater acceptance from their own mothers in childhood, couples showed less undermining coparenting behavior when prebirth marital interaction was high in quality but more undermining coparenting behavior when prebirth marital interaction was low in quality. The pattern of this interaction effect was also not dual risk (Belsky et al., 2007), as hypothesized. However, the first part of this effect is similar to the analogous association for fathers, with the benefits of positive family of origin experiences most pronounced for those with stronger prebirth couple relationships. The positive association between mothers' reports of maternal acceptance in childhood and undermining behavior in the context of low-quality marital behavior was especially unanticipated, but we offer a potential explanation. If mothers who perceive their early mother–child relationships more positively are more confident in their own parenting, in the context of low marital quality, that may actually have a negative impact on coparenting. In particular, confident mothers may undermine their partners more when difficulties are already present in the couple relationship. Talbot et al. (2009) found a similar counterintuitive pattern, such that families with fathers secure in their adult attachment status showed higher levels of coparenting conflict, especially when secure fathers were paired with insecure mothers, and reasoned that secure fathers may be especially motivated parents and therefore may have more

opportunities to 'clash' with mothers. Thus, it seems clear that parents' family of origin experiences are relevant to coparenting, but to foster additional progress in understanding the roles of these experiences, future research should specify and test particular facets of these experiences (adult attachment status vs. reported experiences of parenting vs. reported experiences of coparenting), consider joint contributions of mothers' and fathers' developmental histories, and continue to examine the roles of moderator variables such as marital behavior.

Although this study has made a significant contribution to understanding the roles of parents' characteristics in early coparenting behavior, we also acknowledge limitations of this work. Our assessment of coparenting quality consisted of relatively brief behavioral observations, which may not fully capture the quality of the developing coparenting relationship. A more comprehensive assessment of early coparenting could be obtained using multiple measures; however, observations of coparenting behavior in brief semi-structured play interactions have been linked to child and family functioning in prior studies (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). It is also important to recognize that although some of the predictors of coparenting behavior we examined explained a significant and substantial portion of the variance in supportive and undermining behavior, we must be tentative in drawing conclusions from non-significant results because our sample size was relatively modest.

Moreover, other factors not examined in this study are likely also important to the development of coparenting. For instance, outlooks about the future family (McHale et al., 2004), violated expectations about the division of childcare labor (Van Egeren, 2004), postpartum depression (Cabrera et al., 2009), and child temperament (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2007) play established roles in early coparenting. Future research with larger samples should examine multiple classes of predictors simultaneously so their relative strength can be more precisely evaluated, and should consider contextual sources of stress and support (Belsky, 1984) as additional important influences on coparenting behavior. In addition, the associations between parent characteristics, other relevant factors, and coparenting are probably not static. As such, longer term longitudinal studies will be necessary to more closely examine how correlates of coparenting change over time and in concert with the child's development. Finally, replication of these results—especially the patterns of moderation—in samples more diverse in race/ethnicity, education, family income, and family structure (e.g., 41 percent of US children were born to unmarried parents in 2010; Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2011) will be necessary to support generalization of these results to larger populations of expectant parents.

These limitations notwithstanding, this study was among the first to identify parent characteristics that may predispose first-time parents to particular types of observed coparenting behaviors—especially undermining behaviors—and that operate beyond any influence on the preexisting couple relationship. Continued research on the determinants of coparenting is necessary both to further understand the development of this important relationship and to inform efforts to prevent coparenting problems before they begin, thereby protecting family and child functioning.

References

Allen, S. M., & Hawkins, A. J. (1999). Maternal gatekeeping: Mothers' beliefs and behaviors that inhibit greater father involvement in family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *61*, 199–212.

Belsky, J. (1984). The determinants of parenting: A process model. *Child Development*, *55*, 83–96.

Belsky, J., Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J., & van IJzendoorn, M. H. (2007). For better and for worse: Differential susceptibility to environmental influences. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *16*, 300–304.

Belsky, J., & Barends, N. (2002). Personality and parenting. In M. H. Bornstein (Ed.), *Handbook of parenting: Vol. 3. Being and becoming a parent* (pp. 415–438). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Belsky, J., & Isabella, R. A. (1985). Marital and parent–child relationships in family of origin and marital change following the birth of a baby: A retrospective analysis. *Child Development*, *56*, 342–349.

Brown, G. L., Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., & Neff, C. (2010). Observed and reported supportive coparenting as predictors of infant–mother and infant–father attachment security. *Early Child Development and Care*, *180*, 121–137.

Cabrera, N. J., Shannon, J. D., & La Taillade, J. J. (2009). Predictors of coparenting in Mexican American families and links to parenting and child social emotional development. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, *30*, 523–548.

Cannon, E. A., Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., Brown, G. L., & Sokolowski, M. S. (2008). Parent characteristics as antecedents of maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior. *Family Process*, *47*, 501–519.

Caughlin, J. P., Huston, T. L., & Houts, R. M. (2000). How does personality matter in marriage? An examination of trait anxiety, interpersonal negativity, and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *78*, 326–336.

Cohen, J. (1992). A power primer. *Psychological Bulletin*, *112*, 155–159.

Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (1990). Who does what? In J. Touliatos, B. F. Perlmutter, & M. A. Straus (Eds.), *Handbook of family measurement techniques* (pp. 447–448). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cowan, C. P., & Cowan, P. A. (1996). *Schoolchildren and their families project: Description of co-parenting style ratings*. Unpublished coding scales, University of California, Berkeley.

Cowan, P. A., Cowan, C. P., Pruett, M. K., Pruett, K., & Wong, J. J. (2009). Promoting fathers' engagement with children: Preventive interventions for low-income families. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *71*, 663–679.

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

DiLalla, D. L., Gottesman, I. I., & Carey, G. (1993). Assessment of normal personality traits in a psychiatric sample: Dimensions and categories. In L. J. Chapman, J. Chapman, & D. C. Fowles (Eds.), *Progress in experimental personality and psychopathology research* (Vol. 16, pp. 137–162). New York: Springer.

Donnellan, M. B., Larsen-Rife, D., & Conger, R. D. (2005). Personality, family history, and competence in early adult romantic relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *88*, 562–576.

Easterbrooks, M. A., & Emde, R. N. (1988). Marital and parent–child relationships: The role of affect in the family system. In R. Hinde, & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), *Relationships within families: Mutual influences* (pp. 83–103). New York: Oxford University Press.

Elliston, D., McHale, J., Talbot, J., Parmley, M., & Kuersten-Hogan, R. (2008). Withdrawal from coparenting interactions during early infancy. *Family Process*, *47*, 481–499.

Epstein, S. (1983). *The mother–father–peer scale*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

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

Feinberg, M. E., & Kan, M. L. (2008). Establishing family foundations: Intervention effects on coparenting, parent/infant well-being, and parent–child relations. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *22*, 253–263.

Hamilton, B. E., Martin, J. A., & Ventura, S. J. (2011). *Births: Preliminary data for 2010*. Hyattsville, MD: National Vital Statistics Reports Web Release.

Hayes, A. F., & Matthes, J. (2009). Computational procedures for probing interactions in OLS and logistic regression: SPSS and SAS implementations. *Behavior Research Methods*, *41*, 924–936.

Hays, W. L. (1981). *Statistics*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
Humbad, M. N., Donnellan, M. B., Iacono, W. G., & Burt, S. A. (2010). Externalizing psychopathology and marital adjustment in long-term marriages: Results from a large combined sample of married couples. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, *119*, 151–162.
Karreman, A., van Tuijl, C., van Aken, M. A. G., & Deković, M. (2008). Parenting, coparenting, and effortful control in preschoolers. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *22*, 30–40.
Liebetrau, A. M. (1983). *Measures of association*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
Luthar, S. S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child Development*, *71*, 543–562.
Mangelsdorf, S. C., Laxman, D., & Jessee, A. (2011). Coparenting in two-parent nuclear families. In J. P. McHale, & K. M. Lindahl (Eds.), *Coparenting: A conceptual and clinical examination of family systems* (pp. 15–38). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
Markman, H. J., & Notarius, C. I. (1987). Coding marital and family interaction: Current status. In T. Jacob (Ed.), *Family interaction and psychopathology: Theories, methods, and findings* (pp. 329–390). New York: Plenum.
McBride, B. A., Brown, G. L., Bost, K. K., Shin, N., Vaughn, B., & Korth, B. (2005). Paternal identity, maternal gatekeeping, and father involvement. *Family Relations*, *54*, 360–372.
McBride, B. A., & Rane, T. R. (1997). Role identity, role investments, and paternal involvement: Implications for parenting programs for men. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, *12*, 173–197.
McHale, J. P. (1995). Coparenting and triadic interactions during infancy: The roles of marital distress and child gender. *Developmental Psychology*, *31*, 985–996.
McHale, J. P., Kazali, C., Rotman, T., Talbot, J., Carleton, M., & Lieberson, R. (2004). The transition to coparenthood: Parents' prebirth expectations and early coparental adjustment at 3 months postpartum. *Development and Psychopathology*, *16*, 711–733.
McHale, J. P., & Rasmussen, J. L. (1998). Coparental and family group-level dynamics during infancy: Early family precursors of child and family functioning during preschool. *Development and Psychopathology*, *10*, 39–59.
McHale, J. P., & Rotman, T. (2007). Is seeing believing? Expectant parents' outlooks on coparenting and later coparenting solidarity. *Infant Behavior and Development*, *30*, 63–81.
Minuchin, S. (1974). *Families and family therapy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Palkovitz, R. (1984). Parental attitudes and fathers' interactions with their 5-month-old infants. *Developmental Psychology*, *20*, 1054–1060.
Prinzie, P., Stams, G. J. J. M., Deković, M., Reijntjes, A. H. A., & Belsky, J. (2009). The relations between parents' Big Five personality factors and parenting: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *97*, 351–362.
Robins, R. W., Caspi, A., & Moffitt, T. E. (2000). Two personalities, one relationship: Both partners' personality traits shape the quality of their relationship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *79*, 251–259.
Schoppe, S. J. (2001). *What is a father?* Unpublished manuscript, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.
Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Brown, G. L., Cannon, E. A., Mangelsdorf, S. M., & Sokolowksi, M. S. (2008). Maternal gatekeeping, coparenting quality, and fathering behavior in families with infants. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *22*, 389–398.
Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., Brown, G. L., & Sokolowski, M. S. (2007). Goodness-of-fit in family context: Infant temperament, marital quality, and early coparenting behavior. *Infant Behavior and Development*, *30*, 82–96.
Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J., Mangelsdorf, S. C., Frosch, C. A., & McHale, J. L. (2004). Associations between coparenting and marital behavior from infancy to the preschool years. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *18*, 194–207.
Stright, A. D., & Bales, S. S. (2003). Coparenting quality: Contributions of child and parent characteristics. *Family Relations*, *52*, 232–240.
Stroud, C. B., Durbin, C. E., Saigal, S. D., & Knobloch-Fedders, L. M. (2010). Normal and abnormal personality traits are associated with marital satisfaction for both men and women: An actor–partner interdependence model analysis. *Journal of Research in Personality*, *44*, 466–477.

Talbot, J. A., Baker, J. K., & McHale, J. P. (2009). Sharing the love: Prebirth adult attachment status and coparenting adjustment during early infancy. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, *9*, 56–77.

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

Tellegen, A. (1982). *Brief manual for the multidimensional personality questionnaire*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Van Egeren, L. A. (2003). Prebirth predictors of coparenting experiences in early infancy. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, *24*, 278–295.

Van Egeren, L. A. (2004). The development of the coparenting relationship over the transition to parenthood. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, *25*, 453–477.

Acknowledgments

This investigation is part of a longitudinal study of family development conducted at the University of Illinois and was funded by support for the first author's dissertation research from the University of Illinois. Portions of this article were presented at the 2004 International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development biennial meeting, Ghent, Belgium. We express our gratitude to the families who participated in this study and those who assisted with data collection and coding, especially Geoffrey Brown, Katie Bliss, Meghan Gerc, Brieanne Kraft, and Bethany McNutt.