

Parent Characteristics as Antecedents of Maternal Gatekeeping and Fathering Behavior

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The present study examined the role of prebirth parent characteristics as predictors of maternal gatekeeping (mothers' attempts to encourage or discourage fathers' interaction with their infant) and fathering behavior. Parents' idealization of their relationships within their families of origin, beliefs about the roles of fathers, and personality attributes (negative emotionality and communion) were assessed before their infant's birth. At 3.5 months postpartum, maternal gatekeeping behaviors (negative control, facilitation) and fathers' involvement and competence with their infants were assessed during observation of triadic play and child care. Results suggest reciprocal relations between maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior. Furthermore, greater paternal communion was associated with greater paternal competence during play, whereas greater maternal communion was associated with lower paternal competence during child care. Greater maternal communion and greater maternal idealization related to fathers' lower relative involvement during play. As for maternal gatekeeping behavior, high negative emotionality in 1 parent was only accompanied by high levels of inhibitory maternal gatekeeping when the other parent had less progressive beliefs about the father's role. The implications of these findings for clinicians and practitioners are discussed.

Keywords: *Maternal Gatekeeping; Fathering; Coparenting; Transition to Parenthood; Idealization; Communion*

Fam Proc 47:501–519, 2008

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This investigation is part of a longitudinal study of family development conducted at the University of Illinois, and was funded by support for the second author's dissertation research from the University of Illinois. This paper is based in part on the first author's senior honors thesis, and portions of this work were presented at the 2005 National Council on Family Relations conference, Phoenix, AZ, and the 2006 Conference on Human Development, Louisville, KY. We wish to thank the families who participated in this study and the research assistants who assisted with data collection and coding, especially Barbara Gapinski.

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With women increasingly working outside the home, societal expectations for fathers' increased active involvement with their young children have emerged (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). These expectations have also been fueled by evidence linking greater father involvement with positive child outcomes (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). As a result, fathers have become more involved in raising their children over the past few decades, although fathers still spend less time caring for their children than mothers do (Hofferth, Pleck, Stueve, Bianchi, & Sayer, 2002; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004), even when mothers work outside the home (Coltrane & Adams, 2001). Thus, researchers have investigated factors that may facilitate or hinder father involvement. One potential influence on father involvement is the extent to which mothers are supportive of or resistant to increased paternal involvement (Allen & Hawkins, 1999), a phenomenon known as *maternal gatekeeping*.

The primary goal of this study was to investigate maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior in the context of triadic family interaction at a crucial family transition—the addition of a new child. The importance of early triadic interaction has been stressed by family systems researchers (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Favez, 2006; Frascarolo, Favez, Carneiro, & Fivaz-Depeursinge, 2004), who assert that a child's birth results in the emergence of new behaviors between members of the couple which coalesce in the development of the unique personality of the mother-father-infant triad (e.g., McHale & Fivaz-Depeursinge, 1999; Minuchin, 1985). Moreover, with respect to the development of father-child relationships, this transition has been described as a “critical period” (Doherty, Erickson, & LaRossa, 2006, p. 438), an assertion supported by research indicating stability in fathering behavior across infancy (Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, & Cabrera, 2006).

MATERNAL GATEKEEPING AND FATHERING BEHAVIOR

Maternal gatekeeping behavior is a component of the *coparenting relationship*, or the relationship between adults in the family with respect to parenting (Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch, & McHale, 2004). Although the term “maternal gatekeeping” has negative connotations, we posit that mothers may play a gatekeeping role within the coparenting relationship through both facilitative and inhibitory behaviors that serve to *regulate* father involvement (DeLuccie, 1995). Inhibitory gatekeeping behaviors can include assuming primary responsibility for childrearing or criticizing the father's parenting behavior. Facilitative gatekeeping behaviors may include encouraging the father as he interacts with the child and creating opportunities for him to gain experience in child care. Ultimately, inhibitory gatekeeping behaviors can limit collaboration between parents by curtailing men's opportunities to care for the child (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Fagan & Barnett, 2003).

Several investigations suggest the existence of gatekeeping by demonstrating relations between mothers' attitudes or beliefs about the importance of fathers and father involvement (Beitel & Parke, 1998; DeLuccie, 1995; McBride & Rane, 1997; Palkovitz, 1984). Other studies have found links between mothers' egalitarian gender role attitudes and their support for father involvement (Hoffman & Moon, 1999), as well as associations between mothers' reluctance to relinquish family responsibility, their external validation of a mothering identity, and lower levels of father involvement (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Most recently, McBride et al. (2005) found that fathers' perceptions of themselves as highly committed parents were only associated

with greater father involvement when mothers believed that the father's role was important. Although these studies are suggestive, none of them assessed actual gatekeeping behavior. Only one study (Fagan & Barnett, 2003) operationalized maternal gatekeeping behaviorally, and found that mothers who reported greater preferences for completing child-care tasks themselves reported that their partners were less involved. However, this study was limited by its sole focus on the inhibitory dimension of gatekeeping and its reliance on maternal reports of gatekeeping and father involvement.

PARENT CHARACTERISTICS, MATERNAL GATEKEEPING, AND FATHERING BEHAVIOR

In addition to examining relations between maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior in the context of observed interaction, a second goal of this study was to investigate parent characteristics (family of origin history, beliefs about fathers' roles, personality) as potential antecedents of maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior.

Family of Origin: Idealization of Parents

Parental family of origin history is one factor proposed to predict maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior. Specifically, this study focused on idealization of one's parents when recalling relationships with them during childhood. According to adult attachment theory (e.g., Main, 2000), idealization of one's parents may be indicative of a dismissing (insecure) attachment style. Dismissing individuals are believed to have experienced parental rejection in childhood and have adopted a defensive strategy toward managing memories of these negative experiences. Accordingly, dismissing individuals have shown biological signs of emotional suppression (Roisman, Tsai, & Chiang, 2004), as well as perceptual processing indicative of hypervigilance to rejection and other painful attachment experiences (Maier et al., 2005), two characteristics that may plausibly be detrimental to relationships. Indeed, research has shown that dismissing individuals demonstrate less positive affect, greater withdrawal, and greater emotional inhibition than secure individuals when interacting with relationship partners (Paley, Cox, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999; Roisman, 2007). Given these findings, we expected mothers who idealized their own parents to show more inhibitory and less facilitative gatekeeping behaviors, and fathers who idealized their own parents to show less involvement and competence when interacting with their infants.

Beliefs about Fathers

As noted above, previous research suggests that mothers' attitudes about the father's role may be an important influence on father involvement (e.g., Beitel & Parke, 1998; McBride et al., 2005; Palkovitz, 1984). Moreover, fathers with more progressive or nontraditional beliefs about fathers demonstrate greater involvement in various aspects of child rearing (e.g., Jacobs & Kelley, 2006). Thus, both parents' beliefs may be relevant to father involvement and maternal gatekeeping, as suggested by the recent work of Matta and Knudson-Martin (2006). Thus, we expected that when parents held more progressive beliefs about the roles of fathers, mothers would engage in more facilitative and less inhibitory gatekeeping behaviors, and fathers would demonstrate greater involvement and competence with their infants.

Personality

Parent personality may also be an important influence on maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior, as a large body of research suggests links between personality variables and marital and parent-child relationship quality (Belsky & Barends, 2002). In particular, individuals with personalities characterized by high levels of negative affect (i.e., neuroticism, depression) are more likely to have troubled marriages and to engage in more maladaptive and less sensitive parenting (for reviews see Bradbury & Karney, 2004; Seifer & Dickstein, 2000). Moreover, in her seminal study of prebirth predictors of the developing coparenting relationship, Van Egeren (2003) found that maternal trait reactance (associated with anger, impulsivity, and avoidant relationships) was linked to greater instability in early coparenting experiences. Thus, we predicted that when parents had high levels of negative emotionality before their child's birth, mothers would engage in less facilitative and more inhibitory gatekeeping behaviors, and fathers would demonstrate less involvement and competence with their infants postpartum.

However, given the hypothesized importance of parents' beliefs about fathers' roles for maternal gatekeeping behavior (McBride et al., 2005), we speculated that relations between parent negative emotionality and maternal gatekeeping might depend on parents' beliefs. Specifically, we hypothesized that relations between parents' negative emotionality and maternal inhibitory gatekeeping behavior would be particularly strong when parents had less progressive beliefs about fathers' roles. In contrast, parents with highly progressive beliefs about fathers' roles might be protected from the potentially damaging effects of high levels of negative affect.

We also examined another aspect of parental personality—communion—which captures the extent to which an individual is interpersonally oriented and feels integrated or merged in his/her relationships with others (Krueger, Caspi, Moffitt, Silva, & McGee, 1996). Research demonstrates associations between communion-related attributes and psychological well-being; namely, individuals high on communion tend to have more self-acceptance, a strong sense of competence, trusting relationships with others, and a deep sense of meaning in life (Diehl, Owen, & Youngblade, 2004; Helgeson, 1994). Thus, it seems likely that high levels of communion personality would be associated with high-quality coparenting and parenting, with mothers high on communion eager to facilitate (and reluctant to inhibit) fathers' involvement with their children, and fathers high on communion especially involved and competent parents. In fact, men who score high on extraversion, an aspect of personality linked with communion (Diehl et al., 2004), manifest more positive affect, engagement, and teaching when interacting with their infants (Belsky & Barends, 2002).

However, communion is a gender-linked personality attribute, such that women typically score higher on measures of communion than men (Diehl et al., 2004; Helgeson, 1994). Although to our knowledge no prior research has examined the associations between communion and maternal gatekeeping, fathering behavior, or related constructs, other research (e.g., Hoffman & Moon, 1999) suggests that women's gender-related personal characteristics may relate to gatekeeping behavior and support for father involvement, such that women who endorse more traditional gender roles demonstrate less support for father involvement and may be more likely to act as gatekeepers. To the extent that high levels of communion in women are indicative of adoption of traditional gender roles, mothers high on communion may

prioritize their relationships with their children more than their relationships with their partners, leading them to use greater inhibitory and less facilitative gatekeeping behaviors. Given competing hypotheses, our examination of relations between communion personality and maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior was exploratory.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The central goal of this study was to investigate maternal regulation of father involvement in the context of triadic interaction, the importance of which has been stressed in the extant literature (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Favez, 2006; Frascarolo et al., 2004). Although previous studies of gatekeeping (e.g., Beitel & Parke, 1998; Palkovitz, 1984) have utilized an observational approach to measure paternal involvement, no prior published studies have included observations of maternal gatekeeping behavior. The current study also takes an important next step by examining associations between parent characteristics and maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior, and it does so longitudinally, an approach more consistent with the idea that parent characteristics are *antecedents* of these behaviors.

Specifically, we addressed two questions: (1) What are the associations among maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior during play and child-care interactions in families with infants? and (2) How do parents' personal characteristics relate to maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior? With respect to the first question, consistent with notions of gatekeeping, we expected that when mothers engaged in more facilitation and less inhibition of fathering behavior, fathers would be more involved and competent with their infants. With respect to the second question, we hypothesized that when parents reported less idealization of their own parents and held more progressive beliefs about the father's role, mothers would engage in more facilitative and less inhibitory gatekeeping behavior, and fathers would show greater involvement and competence with their infants. In contrast, we anticipated that fathers would be less involved and competent with their infants, and mothers would show more inhibitory and less facilitative gatekeeping behavior when both parents scored higher on negative emotionality. As discussed above, we did not propose a directional hypothesis with respect to relations between communion personality and maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior. Finally, we examined whether parents' beliefs about fathers' roles moderated relations between parents' negative emotionality and inhibitory maternal gatekeeping behavior, anticipating that this association would be strongest when parents had less progressive (i.e., more traditional) beliefs about fathers' roles.

METHOD

Participants

Participating families ($N = 97$) took part in a longitudinal study of family transitions conducted in a midwestern city in the United States. Two-parent families who were expecting a child were recruited to participate, and data were collected at two phases for the study: during the third trimester of pregnancy and 3.5 months postpartum. Expectant parents were married (97%) or cohabiting (3%) for an average of 4.10 years ($SD = 3.06$ years). Sixty-two percent were anticipating parenthood for the first time. Expectant parents were mostly European American (82% mothers; 80%

fathers); 6% of mothers and 7% of fathers were Latino; 6% of mothers and 9% of fathers were African American; 4% of mothers and 2% of fathers were Asian; and 1% of mothers and 2% of fathers were of mixed backgrounds. The average age of expectant mothers was 29.20 years ($SD = 4.49$ years), and the average age of expectant fathers was 31.94 years ($SD = 6.85$ years). Expectant parents were typically college educated and had a family income of \$51,000–\$60,000 per year; education ranged from “some college” to “Ph.D. or equivalent degree” for mothers and from “some high school” to “Ph.D. or equivalent degree” for fathers. Family income ranged from <\$10,000 to over \$100,000.

Phase 1: Third Trimester Assessment

Two weeks before a scheduled home visit during the third trimester of pregnancy, researchers mailed identical packets of questionnaires to participating couples: one for the expectant mother and one for the expectant father. The questionnaires required them to report independently about themselves, their relationships, and their expectations about the new baby.

Measures: Parent Characteristics

Family of Origin

Each partner completed a 60-item adapted version of the Mother-Father-Peer Scale (MFP; Epstein, 1983), which assessed their recollections of relationships with their parents during childhood. Respondents rated 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*; 5 = *strongly agree*). The scale of the MFP that is the focus of this study is *idealization* of both mother and father (seven items each). This scale measures the extent to which the respondent's recollection of his/her parent is unrealistically positive, and high scores may indicate an inability to accept parents as human beings with resulting imperfections (e.g., “When I was a child, my mother was close to a perfect parent”; “When I was a child, my father and I never disagreed”). Previous work supports the reliability and validity (i.e., relations with attachment security) of this scale (Allen, McElhaney, Kuperminc, & Jodl, 2004). For mothers' reports of idealization of mother and father, Cronbach's α s were .82 and .84, respectively. For fathers' reports of idealization of mother and father, Cronbach's α s were .83 and .85, respectively. Because mothers' idealization of their mothers and fathers was significantly correlated ($r = .53, p < .01$), as was fathers' idealization of both parents ($r = .51, p < .01$), these scales were averaged separately by respondent to create an *idealization of parents* variable for mothers and for fathers.

Beliefs About the Roles of Fathers

Expectant parents' beliefs about fathers' roles were assessed using the “What Is a Father?” Questionnaire (WIAF; Schoppe, 2001), adapted from the Role of the Father Questionnaire (Palkovitz, 1984), a measure which has demonstrated reliability and validity (i.e., relations with father involvement) across a number of previous studies (e.g., McBride & Rane, 1997; Palkovitz, 1984). The WIAF includes 15 statements that tap both nontraditional and traditional beliefs about fathers (e.g., “fathers are just as sensitive in caring for children as mothers are”; “fathers should be the disciplinarians in the family”), which respondents rate on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*;

5 = *strongly agree*). For the purposes of the current study, the items were combined to create a total score (traditional items were reversed). Higher total scores indicate more nontraditional or *progressive* beliefs about the roles of fathers (e.g., “a father should be as heavily involved in the direct care of his child as the mother”). Cronbach’s α for mothers and fathers were .72 and .71, respectively.

Parental Personality

Expectant parents’ personality characteristics were assessed using the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (Tellegen, 1982), a widely used measure of personality with well-established reliability and validity (DiLalla, Gottesman, & Carey, 1993). For the purposes of the current study, we computed the higher-order “superfactors” *Negative Emotionality* and *Communion* following the procedures of Krueger et al. (1996). *Negative Emotionality* reflects the extent to which an individual has a low threshold for experiencing negative emotions like fear, anxiety, and anger. *Communion* captures the extent to which an individual is interpersonally oriented and tends to feel merged within their relationships.

Phase 2: 3.5-Month Assessment

Researchers maintained contact with participating families during the remainder of the pregnancy. All expectant mothers gave birth to single, healthy, full-term infants (53% male). Each couple scheduled a second home-based assessment at approximately 3.5 months postpartum ($M = 3.71$ months; $SD = 10.70$ days). During this assessment, partners and their infants participated in two videotaped triadic family interaction episodes. First, couples were given an infant jungle gym and were instructed to “play together with your baby as you normally would” for 5 minutes (free-play episode). Second, couples were given a “onesie” (infant bodysuit) and were asked to change the infant into the onesie cooperatively (clothes-change episode). The latter episodes lasted on average 3.36 minutes (range: 1.40–8.03 minutes).

Measures: Observational Coding of Maternal Gatekeeping and Fathering Behavior

Two trained coders rated the free-play and clothes-change family interaction episodes for maternal gatekeeping using scales developed by Bayer (1992). The dimensions used to rate maternal gatekeeping were *maternal negative control* (verbal and nonverbal attempts to limit the father’s interaction with the infant; for example, mother criticizes father’s care or monopolizes interaction) and *maternal facilitation* (positive support for the father’s interactions with the infant; for example, mother may refer to father during play or turn the baby towards dad). As well, Bayer’s scales included a dimension for rating fathering behavior: *paternal competence* (father’s observed confidence in his ability to interact with the infant; for example, father initiates play or child-care activity with infant). In addition, one scale was created for the purposes of this study: *father involvement* (amount of time father spends interacting with the infant relative to the mother). Coders rated these aspects of parents’ behavior for each episode using 5-point scales (1 = *low levels of the behavior*; 5 = *high levels of the behavior*).

The coders overlapped on 27 of 97 videotapes for purposes of reliability. Agreement within one scale point ranged from 89% to 100% ($M = 98\%$). Gammas were also used to assess interrater reliability because they control for chance agreement but are more

appropriate for ordinal data than kappa (Hays, 1981; Liebetrau, 1983). γ ranged from .77 to 1.0 ($M = .90$).

RESULTS

Analysis Plan

First, descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. Second, correlations among the observed gatekeeping and fathering behavior variables were computed to examine their interrelations across play and child-care interactions. Third, correlations among parent characteristics, maternal gatekeeping, and fathering behavior were also computed. Finally, we conducted a series of regression analyses predicting observed gatekeeping and fathering behavior from the sets of parent characteristics. We also examined interactions between parent negative emotionality and beliefs about the father's role as predictors of maternal negative control.

Preliminary Analyses

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Observational Variables

Means and standard deviations for variables assessing parent characteristics and observed gatekeeping and fathering behavior are reported in Table 1. Means for parent characteristics reflect that the current study's sample consists of relatively

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Parent Characteristics and Gatekeeping and Fathering Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Range</i>
Family-of-origin: MFP			
Idealization of parents—mother	2.53	0.73	1.07–4.14
Idealization of parents—father	2.77	0.73	1.14–4.36
Beliefs about the roles of fathers: WIAF			
Progressive beliefs—mother	3.93	0.35	2.80–4.80
Progressive beliefs—father	3.82	0.36	2.87–4.93
Parent personality: MPQ			
Negative emotionality—mother	11.48	7.54	0.00–32.00
Negative emotionality—father	13.23	8.45	0.00–38.00
Communion—mother	51.85	12.83	26.00–76.00
Communion—father	47.06	14.00	4.00–75.00
Gatekeeping and fathering behavior: observations			
Free play			
Maternal negative control	2.03	1.04	1.00–5.00
Maternal facilitation	2.13 _a	0.83	1.00–5.00
Paternal competence	3.74 _b	0.93	2.00–5.00
Father involvement	2.79	0.66	1.00–5.00
Clothes change			
Maternal negative control	1.85	0.88	1.00–4.50
Maternal facilitation	1.93 _a	0.69	1.00–4.50
Paternal competence	3.53 _b	1.13	1.00–5.00
Father involvement	2.75	0.82	1.00–5.00

Note. MFP = Mother-Father-Peer Scale; MPQ = Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire; WIAF = What Is a Father? Questionnaire.

Subscript letters indicate significant mean-level differences between free-play and clothes-change episodes.

well-functioning families. On average, mothers engaged in some mild gatekeeping behavior (both negative control and facilitation) across the free-play and clothes-change episodes. Interestingly, mothers were observed engaging in significantly greater facilitation (behaviors in support of paternal involvement) during the free play than during the clothes change, $t(95) = 2.02$, $p < .05$. Fathers were perceived by observers as moderately competent (confident in their fathering abilities) in their interactions with their infants, although fathers tended to be somewhat less involved in interactions with their infants relative to mothers. There was a significant difference between levels of paternal competence across the interaction contexts: fathers showed greater competence in the free play than in the clothes change episode, $t(95) = 2.17$, $p < .05$.

Some intriguing patterns emerged when considering intercorrelations among the maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior variables (Table 2). Within both episodes, maternal negative control and maternal facilitation were negatively correlated, whereas father involvement and competence were positively correlated. In the free-play episode, when mothers showed greater facilitation, fathers were less involved with their infants relative to mothers. In contrast, during the clothes-change episode, when mothers showed more facilitation, fathers were more involved with their infants relative to mothers. Maternal negative control, paternal competence, and father involvement showed significant, although modest to moderate, stability across the free-play and clothes-change episodes.

TABLE 2
Intercorrelations Among Observed Gatekeeping and Fathering Behavior Variables Within and Across Episodes

	Free Play				Clothes Change			
	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
Free play								
1. Maternal negative control		-.22*	-.04	.15	.40**	-.12	.12	.11
2. Maternal facilitation			-.10	-.23*	.03	.17	-.16	-.06
3. Paternal competence				.68**	-.13	.13	.56**	.29**
4. Father involvement					.07	-.08	.41**	.26*
Clothes change								
5. Maternal negative control						-.34**	-.18	-.11
6. Maternal facilitation							.15	.30**
7. Paternal competence								.67**
8. Father involvement								

Note.

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

Associations of parent characteristics with maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior

First, correlations among the variables assessing parent characteristics were computed to check for multicollinearity; these intercorrelations did not indicate high levels of multicollinearity (r s ranged from $-.22$ to $.42$). Next, we examined associations between parent characteristics and maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior (see Table 3). Several significant associations emerged with respect to parents' idealization. Mothers who evidenced greater idealization of their parents had partners who were less competent and less involved during the free play. Fathers were also less competent in the free play when they viewed their parents as more perfect. Some correlations also surfaced between parents' beliefs about fathers and maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior, but only for fathers. Fathers with more progressive beliefs demonstrated greater competence in the clothes change and had partners who displayed more facilitation in the free play. With respect to parental personality, fathers' negative emotionality was negatively associated with maternal facilitation in the free play such that more fearful or anxious fathers had partners who were less likely to facilitate their involvement. Finally, both mothers' and fathers' communion was significantly related to fathering behavior across contexts: when mothers were more interpersonally oriented, fathers were less competent in the clothes change and

TABLE 3
Correlations between Parent Characteristics and Observed Gatekeeping and Fathering Behaviors

Parent Characteristics	Gatekeeping and Fathering Behavior Coding Variables							
	Free Play				Clothes Change			
	<i>M</i> Neg Cont	<i>M</i> Fac	<i>P</i> Comp	<i>F</i> Inv	<i>M</i> Neg Cont	<i>M</i> Fac	<i>P</i> Comp	<i>F</i> Inv
MFP								
Idealization of parents—mother	-.17	.16	-.22*	-.27**	-.10	.07	-.13	-.06
Idealization of parents—father	.11	.07	-.21*	-.17	.12	.00	-.17	-.09
WIAF								
Progressive beliefs—mother	-.03	-.01	.03	-.09	-.03	-.01	.04	.04
Progressive beliefs—father	-.01	.21*	-.02	-.14	-.18	.04	.20*	.10
MPQ								
Negative emotionality—mother	-.08	-.05	.00	-.01	.14	-.01	-.12	-.09
Negative emotionality—father	.12	-.21*	.16	.08	-.02	-.01	.10	.03
Communion—mother	-.06	.04	-.19	-.33**	-.08	.05	-.27**	-.20*
Communion—father	.05	-.11	.24*	.17	-.01	.08	.23*	.20*

Note. MFP = Mother-Father-Peer Scale; WIAF = What is a Father? Questionnaire; MPQ = Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire; *M* Neg Control = Maternal Negative Control; *M* Fac = Maternal Facilitation; *P* Comp = Paternal Competence; *F* Inv = Father Involvement.

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

less involved relative to mothers in both episodes, whereas when fathers were more interpersonally oriented, they demonstrated greater competence in both contexts and were more involved relative to mothers in the clothes change.

Regression Analyses

Before conducting our focal analyses, *t* tests were conducted comparing first-time parents and non-first-time parents on all prebirth characteristics, gatekeeping, and fathering variables; there were no significant differences between the two groups and thus we did not control for parent status in the following regression analyses.

A series of regression equations was used to examine the relative contributions of the different parent characteristics to the prediction of maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior. The set of parent characteristics was entered as a block of variables in each equation. When equations did not explain a significant portion of the variance in the dependent variable, results are presented in text to conserve space.

Equations Predicting Maternal Gatekeeping Behavior

When predicting maternal negative control in the free play, the set of parent characteristics did not account for a significant portion of the variance, $F(8,83) = 1.04$, *ns*. However, when predicting maternal facilitation in the free play, fathers' negative emotionality was a significant predictor, consistent with the correlation analyses reported in Table 3 ($\beta = -.26$, $p < .05$), even as the overall equation did not reach significance, $F(8,83) = 1.71$, *ns*. When predicting maternal negative control in the clothes change, the overall equation was not significant, $F(8,82) = 0.77$, *ns*. Likewise, the set of parent characteristics did not account for a significant portion of the variance in maternal facilitation in the clothes change episode, $F(8,82) = 0.25$, *ns*.

Equations Predicting Fathering Behavior

When predicting paternal competence in the free play, the regression equation including the set of parent characteristics explained a significant portion of the variance (Table 4).

TABLE 4
Regression Predicting Paternal Competence in the Free Play from Parent Characteristics

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
MFP			
Idealization of parents—mother	-.24	.13	-.19
Idealization of parents—father	-.21	.13	-.16
WIAF			
Progressive beliefs—mother	.23	.32	.09
Progressive beliefs—father	-.14	.30	-.05
MPQ			
Negative emotionality—mother	-.01	.02	-.04
Negative emotionality—father	.01	.01	.11
Communion—mother	-.01	.01	-.19
Communion—father	.02*	.01	.24*

Note. MFP = Mother-Father-Peer Questionnaire; WIAF = What is a Father? Questionnaire; MPQ = Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire.

$F(8,83) = 2.49^*$, $R^2 = .19$.

* $p < .05$.

TABLE 5

Regression Predicting Paternal Competence in the Clothes Change from Parent Characteristics

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
MFP			
Idealization of parents—mother	-.21	.16	-.13
Idealization of parents—father	-.15	.16	-.10
WIAF			
Progressive beliefs—mother	.24	.37	.08
Progressive beliefs—father	.51	.36	.16
MPQ			
Negative emotionality—mother	-.03	.02	-.16
Negative emotionality—father	.02	.02	.10
Communion—mother	-.03**	.01	-.31**
Communion—father	.02	.01	.19

Note. MFP = Mother-Father-Peer Scale; WIAF = What is a Father? Questionnaire; MPQ = Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire

$F(8,82) = 2.97^{**}$, $R^2 = .23$.

** $p < .01$.

Consistent with the correlation analyses, paternal communion was a significant predictor of paternal competence, such that fathers demonstrated greater competence in the free play when they had higher levels of interpersonal orientation. No other individual variables explained significant variance in paternal competence during the free play. The equation predicting paternal competence in the clothes change was also significant (Table 5). In particular, maternal communion emerged as a significant individual predictor of paternal competence. Thus, when mothers were less interpersonally oriented, fathers demonstrated greater competence in the clothes change.

In addition, the equation predicting father involvement in the free-play episode explained a significant portion of the variance (Table 6). Consistent with our correlation analyses, mothers' idealization and communion surfaced as significant individual predictors of father involvement. Therefore, mothers who saw their own parents as perfect parents and who defined themselves in terms of their relationships with others had partners who were relatively less involved in the free play. As for father involvement in the clothes-change episode, the set of parent characteristics did not account for a significant portion of the variance, $F(8,82) = 1.24$, *ns*. Yet, as in the free play and consistent with significant correlations, mothers' communion emerged as a unique contributor to father involvement, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .05$, illustrating that the more interpersonally oriented mothers were, the less fathers were involved relative to mothers in the clothes change.

Testing Interactions Between Parents' Negative Emotionality and Beliefs About Fathers' Roles When Predicting Maternal Negative Control.

Given the difficulty of detecting interaction effects in nonexperimental research with small samples (McClelland & Judd, 1993), interactions between mothers' and fathers' negative emotionality and mothers' and fathers' progressive beliefs were tested individually as predictors of maternal negative control in a series of regression equations. Before conducting these analyses all independent variables were mean centered. In each equation, the mothers' or fathers' negative emotionality variable

TABLE 6
Regression Predicting Father Involvement in the Free Play from Parent Characteristics

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
MFP			
Idealization of parents—mother	-.21 *	.09	-.23 *
Idealization of parents—father	-.12	.09	-.13
WIAF			
Progressive beliefs—mother	.19	.22	.10
Progressive beliefs—father	-.36	.21	-.19
MPQ			
Negative emotionality—mother	-.01	.01	-.11
Negative emotionality—father	.00	.01	.05
Communion—mother	-.02 **	.01	-.34 **
Communion—father	.01	.01	.17

Note. MFP = Mother-Father-Peer Scale; WIAF = What is a Father? Questionnaire; MPQ = Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire.

$F(8,83) = 3.59^{**}$, $R^2 = .26$.

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

was entered first, followed by the mothers' or fathers' beliefs variable and then the product of the two variables. If a significant interaction was obtained, it was graphed and probed according to procedures detailed by Preacher, Curran, and Bauer (2006).

In the analyses, two significant interaction effects were obtained. When predicting maternal negative control in the free play, the interaction between fathers' negative emotionality and mothers' progressive beliefs was significant, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .05$. The graph of this interaction is shown in Figure 1. As indicated, the slope of the regression line representing mothers with low progressive beliefs was significantly different from zero ($p < .01$), suggesting that when these mothers have partners with high negative

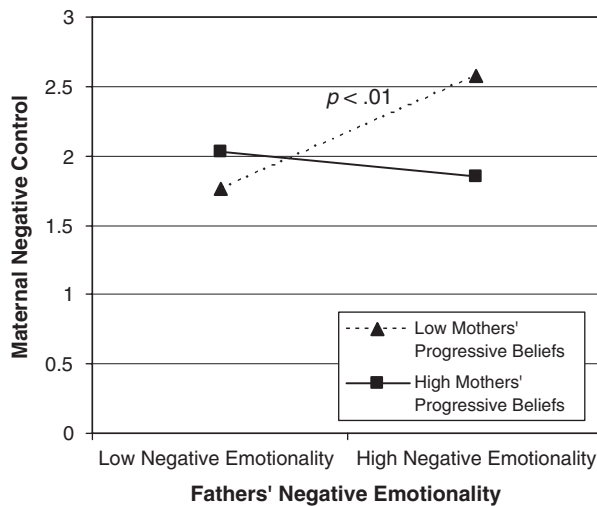


FIGURE 1. Interaction between fathers' negative emotionality and mothers' progressive beliefs when predicting maternal negative control in the free play

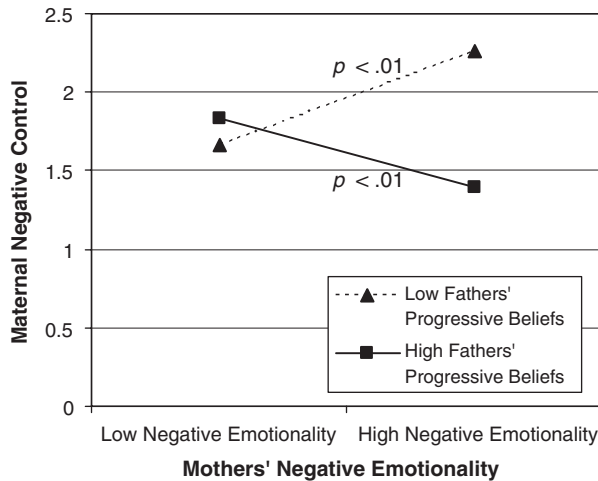


FIGURE 2. Interaction between mothers' negative emotionality and fathers' progressive beliefs when predicting maternal negative control in the clothes change

emotionality, they show more negative control. There was no significant association between fathers' negative emotionality and mothers' use of negative control during the free play when mothers were high on progressive beliefs.

When predicting maternal negative control in the clothes change, the interaction between mothers' negative emotionality and fathers' progressive beliefs was significant, $\beta = -.28$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 2). As noted, the slope of the regression line representing fathers with low progressive beliefs differed significantly from zero ($p < .01$). Thus, when fathers were low on progressive beliefs and mothers were high on negative emotionality, mothers engaged in more negative control. The slope of the regression line representing fathers with high progressive beliefs also differed significantly from zero ($p < .01$), such that when fathers had high progressive beliefs, mothers high on negative emotionality refrained from using negative control.

DISCUSSION

The present study represents an advance in our understanding of potential influences on fathers' interactions with their infants within the family triad. This investigation was unique in its utilization of observations of parental behaviors to examine associations between maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior, and exploration of parents' personal characteristics as antecedents of these behaviors. In short, evidence consistent with bidirectional relations between maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior was obtained, and parents' beliefs about fathers' roles were found to moderate the relation between parent negative emotionality and inhibitory maternal gatekeeping behavior. Additionally, mothers' idealization of their relationships with their parents and mothers' and fathers' communion personality emerged as significant predictors of fathering behavior.

Our findings with respect to relations between maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior suggest that gatekeeping may be as much a response to fathering behavior as a regulator of it. During the child-care task, greater maternal facilitation was

accompanied by greater relative father involvement, a pattern consistent with our hypotheses. In contrast, a different pattern emerged during triadic play, such that greater maternal facilitation was accompanied by lower father relative involvement. Perhaps fathers' lower levels of involvement in triadic play sparked mothers to give them positive encouragement, thus "swinging the gate open," especially given that play is a context particularly conducive to father involvement (Hofferth et al., 2002; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). The complexity of these relations serves as a reminder of the interdependence of family members' behaviors in the triadic context (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Favez, 2006).

Although our set of parent characteristics was not able to explain a significant portion of the variance in maternal gatekeeping behaviors in either context, we did find evidence that parents' beliefs about fathers' roles moderated relations between parent negative emotionality and inhibitory maternal gatekeeping behavior, consistent with our expectations. In particular, high negative emotionality in one parent was only accompanied by high levels of maternal negative control when the other parent had less progressive beliefs about fathers' roles, a finding that held across interaction contexts. It seems that progressive beliefs may protect against the potential for parent negative emotionality to "spill over" into mothers' gatekeeping behavior. Consistent with previous research, these findings emphasize the central role of beliefs about fathers for understanding gatekeeping behavior (Beitel & Parke, 1998; Jacobs & Kelley, 2006; Palkovitz, 1984).

With our set of parent characteristics, we were able to predict paternal competence in the free play and father involvement in both the free-play and clothes-change episodes. Mothers' communion was a consistent predictor of fathering behavior, such that fathers were less involved relative to mothers, as well as less competent relative to other fathers, particularly in the clothes change, when mothers were higher on communion. These findings are consistent with research linking women's gender-related personal characteristics and father involvement (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Hoffman & Moon, 1999). Mothers high on communion likely have an identity highly defined by their relationships with others and thus place great importance on their relationships with their children. These mothers may have a strong sense of competence in their roles as mothers and find the maternal role especially meaningful (Diehl et al., 2004; Helgeson, 1994).

However, contrary to expectations, maternal communion was not linked to gatekeeping behavior. The link between maternal communion and fathering behavior may be indirect (Belsky & Barends, 2002), and may not involve gatekeeping behavior as measured in the current study. Perhaps mothers high on communion, for whom mothering is central to their identities, may subtly behave so as to monopolize their infants, and/or may simply have partners who are comfortable taking a "back seat" to mothers in family interactions. Indeed, maternal monopolization behaviors have been noted in another study of triadic interaction (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Favez, 2006). In contrast, higher levels of communion among *fathers* were linked to greater paternal competence in family play. Possibly, fathers who are more likely to define themselves in terms of their relationships invest more in the parenting role. This finding resonates with prior research linking extraversion, an aspect of personality related to communion (Diehl et al., 2004), with more positive parenting among fathers (Belsky & Barends, 2002). It is important to keep in mind that individuals high on communion tend to have high psychological functioning (Diehl et al., 2004; Helgeson, 1994);

however, our findings suggest more intricate relations between parent communion and parenting behavior within the family system. Thus, attention to this aspect of personality in future research on triadic family interactions is warranted.

Another key predictor of fathering behavior in the current study was mothers' idealization of their childhood relationships with their parents. In particular, when mothers viewed their parents as "perfect," fathers were relatively less involved during family play. These findings are consistent with adult attachment theory (e.g., Main, 2000), which suggests that parent idealization is associated with a dismissing attachment style, and thus potentially maladaptive dyadic relationship strategies (Paley et al., 1999; Roisman, 2007). Although researchers are beginning to explore links between attachment styles and family-level dynamics (e.g., Mikulincer & Florian, 1999), future research is needed to confirm the relations between idealization and triadic interaction patterns found in the present study.

A key strength of the current study was its longitudinal design, which allowed us to consider parent characteristics as antecedents of maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior. However, relations among parent behaviors were examined concurrently. Thus, our interpretations of these relations await further substantiation through longitudinal work. It is also important to bear in mind that characteristics of the present sample may have affected the findings obtained. Participating families constituted a relatively well-functioning convenience sample including resident fathers willing to participate in this type of intensive study. Thus, these findings may not be generalizable to clinically referred families, families with nonresident fathers, or those of more diverse structures.

It is also important to note that the brief triadic interaction episodes we used represent snapshots of family interaction that may not be representative of normative patterns. More lengthy observations may have increased the reliability of our ratings of parental behavior and thus increased the effect sizes obtained, which although significant, were relatively small. In addition, given the modest to moderate stability of parental behavior across episodes, and the somewhat different patterns of parent characteristics that portended these behaviors in play versus child-care situations, future research should carefully consider the role of context in maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior. However, consistent across contexts was our finding that parent characteristics interacted to predict maternal negative control, in keeping with the notion that family members' behaviors in a triadic context result from the synergy of contributions from all individuals (Fivaz-Depeursinge & Favez, 2006; Frascarolo et al., 2004; McHale & Fivaz-Depeursinge, 1999).

Implications for Research

In light of our findings, further research should work to elucidate the antecedents and consequents of the personal and relational factors that shape fathers' interactions with their infants in the triadic context. Moreover, the direction of the relationship between maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior should be further examined, as maternal gatekeeping may be as much a consequence as a cause of fathering behavior. Maternal gatekeeping is an elusive construct, but as this and other investigations have demonstrated (Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Szewczyk Sokolowski, 2008), it is not impossible to pinpoint.

Clinical and Practice Implications

The implications of this study for therapeutic work center around (1) identifying parent characteristics both prenatally and postpartum that may increase the likelihood of maternal negative control and lack of father involvement in childrearing, and (2) drawing attention to the reciprocal and cyclical relations between maternal and paternal behavior.

As stated by Fivaz-Depeursinge and Favez (2006), parents-to-be may be some of the most motivated clients therapists and practitioners will ever meet, and thus may be prime targets for psychoeducational efforts. To the extent that parents desire high levels of paternal involvement, practitioners in prenatal workshops and clinical settings should assess parents' negative emotionality and encourage expecting couples to examine their beliefs about fathers' roles, in light of our finding that high negative emotionality in one parent tends to interact with the other parent's less progressive beliefs, resulting in high levels of maternal negative control. As well, therapists should assess communion and parent idealization in mothers, as these characteristics predicted low levels of father involvement. These same parent characteristics can be addressed postpartum, in parenting groups, parenting workshops, and family therapy, as some families are beginning to experience difficulties due to a mismatch between their prebirth expectations and their current parenting patterns.

Considering our finding that maternal gatekeeping may be as much a consequence of fathering behavior as a regulator of it, the reciprocal nature of parenting and coparenting behaviors should be addressed by therapists and practitioners both before the birth of a new child as well as after. Once a mother realizes that her coparenting behaviors have the potential to affect the father's participation with the infant, and what is more, that her behaviors may be a reaction to her partner's fathering, she may be more conscientious about her actions. Likewise, for fathers, increased awareness of the effects of mothers on their parenting, as well as the effects of their behavior on mothers' coparenting, may position them to exercise greater agency in parenting. In sum, bringing parents' levels of communion, beliefs about fathers, idealization of their parents, and the interdependence of parenting behaviors into "conscious discussion" may help them to operationalize patterns of parenting behaviors commensurate with their ideals (Matta & Knudson-Martin, 2006).

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