

Processes Linking Adolescent Well-Being, Marital Love, and Coparenting

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This study examined coparenting in a sample of 177 two-parent families with firstborn adolescents by using annual home interview data from mothers, fathers, and adolescents. With a path-analytic approach and with earlier problem behaviors controlled for, coparenting conflict predicted relative increases in adolescent risky behavior over 2 years. In addition, evidence for 2 types of mediation was found. Marital love mediated the link between adolescents' early risky behavior and coparenting 1 year later, and coparenting conflict mediated the link between marital love and adolescents' risky behavior 1 year later. Linkages did not emerge for coparenting cooperation or triangulation. Interventions that are focused on the marital and coparental relationships in families with adolescents may modify trajectories of adolescent risky behavior.

Keywords: adolescence, marital quality, coparenting

Coparenting refers to the degree to which two individuals work as a team rearing a child; the construct underscores individuals' connection as parents. Coparenting has been studied in various family types (e.g., clinically referred families, families of divorce) dating back to the 1950s (McHale et al., 2002). The study of coparenting in intact nonclinical families gained prominence, however, when Jouriles, Murphy, Farris, and Smith (1991) found that conflict surrounding coparenting in maritally intact families was linked to difficulties in child adjustment above and beyond the effects of general marital conflict. Although subsequent studies likewise showed that coparenting predicts unique variance in child well-being, gaps exist in the coparenting literature. First, much of this research has focused on families with preschool and school-aged children; few investigations have examined families with adolescents. Second, little is known about how coparenting oper-

ates within normally functioning families because much of the research has examined families of divorce and families with coparenting problems (Gable, Crnic, & Belsky, 1994; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). In addition, more work is needed that focuses on family processes related to coparenting.

The purpose of this study was twofold. To better inform researchers and clinicians as to the nature of coparenting in families with adolescents, our first goal was to describe mother–father differences on ratings of coparenting cooperation, conflict, and triangulation as well as the associations between coparenting and family background characteristics. Second, to inform future intervention research, we used a longitudinal design to examine potential processes through which adolescent well-being, marital love, and coparenting are linked.

History and Conceptualization of Coparenting

Research on coparenting can be traced to clinical psychologists' writings from over 50 years ago (McHale et al., 2002). In the 1970s, publication of the first empirical research that examined coparenting as a distinct construct relevant to family functioning coincided with a growth in research on families of divorce. The research focused on how divorced parents navigated coparenting and how coparenting was related to child well-being (Ahrons, 1981; Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1982). Research on coparenting in intact families at that time was sparse. As Block, Block, and Morrison (1981, p. 965) noted, "Unfortunately, aside from clinical studies and studies of divorce where parental conflict is often extreme and pervasive, empiricism seldom has focused on specific studies of parental conflict in essentially 'normal', clinically unselected families." In the 1990s, however, research on coparenting in intact families took off.

Coparenting has been conceptualized in different ways in

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This research was supported by National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Grant RO1-HD32336 (Ann C. Crouter and Susan M. McHale, coprincipal investigators). We are grateful to our collaborators: Matthew Bumpus, Christina Chhin, Kelly Davis, Aryn Dotterer, Melissa Fortner, Heather Helms, Sandee Hemman, Julia Jackson-Newsom, Kristen Johnston, Marni Kan, Ji-Yeon Kim, Mary Maguire Klute, Jaime Marks, Ashleigh May, Carolyn Ransford, Lilly Shanahan, Cindy Shearer, Corinna Tucker, Kim Updegraff, and Shawn Whiteman, to the dedicated families who participated in this research, and to Mark Feinberg for his comments on a draft of the article.

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the literature. Although several models of coparenting have been proposed (Feinberg, 2003; Margolin et al., 2001), researchers agree that coparenting is multidimensional. In this study, we adopted a framework proposed by Margolin et al. (2001) that draws attention to conflict (interparental disagreement around childrearing issues), coparenting cooperation (parents' support for one another), and triangulation (parents actively drawing children into marital conflicts).

Researchers vary in whether they consider coparenting to be a marital or a parenting construct (see McHale et al., 2002). Some researchers conceptualize coparenting as a marital construct because of its focus on marital conflict and cooperation. In contrast, others have suggested that coparenting cannot be understood strictly within the context of marital relationships because coparenting can occur between any two adults who rear a child together. Indeed, after a divorce, parents often continue coparenting. Furthermore, Gable et al. (1994) suggested that it is possible for parents to have a troubled marriage yet still have a strong coparenting relationship. Feinberg, Kan, and Hetherington (2007) examined coparenting in a sample of families with adolescents (including both stepfamilies and nondivorced families) and found that coparenting conflict predicted unique variance in parental negativity and adolescent adjustment, holding constant the effects of marital quality and marital disagreement. Accordingly, some researchers consider coparenting to be a parenting or family-level construct.

Coparenting and Child Outcomes

A sizable body of work documents associations between coparenting and child outcomes. Theoretically, youths can be buffered from the effects of marital discord through a positive coparenting relationship (Gable et al., 1994). Alternatively, coparenting may be the vehicle through which marital discord affects youth well-being. For example, McHale and Rasmussen (1998) found that hostile-competitive coparenting and low levels of harmony between coparents during their child's infancy were associated with more child anxiety, competitiveness, and externalizing behaviors 3 years later, controlling for general marital quality. Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, and Frosch (2001) found that parents with high levels of supportive coparenting had preschool-aged children with fewer externalizing problems 1 year later. In one of a handful of studies examining coparenting in families with school-aged youths, McConnell and Kerig (2002) reported that higher levels of hostile-competitive coparenting were concurrently related to parents' reports of sons' anxiety, internalizing, and externalizing behaviors. For girls, interparental differences in warmth and investment were linked to more internalizing problems. Finally, in a study of adolescents, Fletcher, Steinberg, and Sellers (1999) found that inconsistency in parenting (not coparenting *per se*) was related to higher levels of internalized distress.

Several studies have examined coparenting in relation to other family processes. Brody and Flor (1996) measured the associations between youth adjustment and coparenting in

rural African-American families and found that harmonious family interactions and youth self-regulation mediated the association between parents' perceptions of received support from their spouse and adolescents' well-being. Similarly, Katz and Low (2004) explored whether coparenting mediated the link between marital violence and preschool children's adjustment. They found that hostile-competitive coparenting mediated the marriage-child adjustment association, whereas positive coparenting did not. Following from this work, we tested whether coparenting operated as a mechanism through which marital love was associated with adolescents' well-being. Documenting the role of coparenting in youth adjustment would provide a potentially important direction for intervention programs directed at families of adolescents.

Coparenting Adolescent Offspring

Adolescence is a period of transition for families, a time when parents report being the most concerned about their parenting responsibilities (Pasley & Gecas, 1984). Pubertal development and other changes during this period are related not only to increases in negative affect (Ge, Conger, & Elder, 2001) but also to changes in the ways adolescents and parents interact. Parent-adolescent relationships also tend to become more reciprocal in nature during adolescence, with both parents and offspring taking an active role in redefining their relationship; this process, however, may be accompanied by conflict.

Adolescence also signals a sharp rise in problem behaviors, including substance use and other delinquent acts, especially for boys (McCord, 1990). In contrast, adolescence is a time of increased internalizing problems for some girls (Ge et al., 2001). Some researchers have accounted for gender differences in adolescent adjustment by documenting boys' and girls' differential reactions to risk factors. For example, Block, Block, and Morrison (1981) found interparental disagreement had more implications for preschool boys' than girls' psychological functioning. There may be a shift in gendered vulnerabilities as youths enter adolescence, however. Crawford, Cohen, Midlarsky, and Brook (2001) reported that, as girls entered midadolescence, their depressive symptoms were significantly associated with parental discord, whereas this finding did not hold for boys. In addition, Margolin et al. (2001) found that girls tended to feel caught in the middle of marital discord more so than boys, which might help to explain girls' increased levels of depressive symptoms in adolescence. In sum, extant research has argued for including adolescent gender as a moderator of the effects of coparenting on adolescents.

Whereas coparenting has been shown to be influential for the adjustment of young children, research has yet to show the importance of coparenting for adolescent well-being (Feinberg et al., 2007). The degree of consistency parents provide for their adolescents may have significant implications for adolescents' functioning, especially if adolescents take an active role in creating coalitions with one of the coparenting figures. Alternatively, because adolescents are more autonomous, coparenting may not be as critical for

adolescents' well-being as it is for younger children. The nature of the coparental relationship also may change as youths become more independent, with particular aspects of coparenting becoming more salient, such as conflict, and other aspects of coparenting becoming less salient, such as cooperation (Margolin et al., 2001).

Feinberg et al. (2007) were the first to examine the associations between parenting, coparenting conflict (specifically, disagreement over childrearing issues), marital quality, and youth adjustment in families with adolescents. They found that coparenting conflict predicted changes over a 3-year period in adolescent antisocial behavior but not depressive symptoms. This article focused exclusively on coparenting conflict. Coparenting is multidimensional, however, and different dimensions may have different implications for adolescents' well-being. Accordingly, in this study we examined three dimensions of coparenting—cooperation, conflict, and triangulation—and their links with adolescent offspring's risky behavior and depression.

Coparenting and Marital Quality

Researchers have proposed three hypotheses linking coparenting and marriage. First, marital quality may impact couples' coparenting. By using an experimental manipulation, Kitzmann (2000) found that fathers displayed less democratic coparenting styles after a conflictual conversation with their spouses; these authors suggested a spillover hypothesis by which the negative affect experienced in marital conflict first spills into the coparenting relationship and then into parenting interactions with youths. Similarly, Belsky, Crnic, and Gable (1995) found that parents who had larger within-couple differences on individual characteristics maintained a less supportive coparenting relationship than did couples who were more similar. They suggested that differences between couples on individual characteristics created tension that affected their coparenting relationship; these findings suggest a direct association between marital dynamics and coparenting. A second hypothesis is that coparenting impacts marital quality. Gable et al. (1994) suggested that low levels of supportive coparenting might lead spouses to believe that their partners do not have faith in their parenting competencies, which, in turn, could influence marital quality. Supporting this hypothesis, Belsky and Hsieh (1998) found marriages that deteriorated over time had higher initial levels of unsupportive coparenting. Finally, a third hypothesis is that marital quality and coparenting may be reciprocally related (McHale et al., 2002).

Associations Between Youths' Characteristics and Coparenting

Several researchers have proposed that youths' characteristics may be related to coparenting. Margolin et al. (2001) suggested that coparenting likely depends on the age and gender of offspring. In addition, Feinberg (2003) suggested that parents whose offspring have easy temperaments will have an easier time coparenting than do parents whose offspring have more difficult temperaments.

The coparenting literature, however, has not found much evidence supporting the notion of child effects. For example, Stright and Bales (2003) found that preschool children's age, gender, and temperament were not related to observed coparenting and suggested that child characteristics are less important than parent characteristics for parenting quality. Parents face different kinds of childrearing demands in adolescence, however. Accordingly, we tested whether adolescents' earlier problem behaviors were related to parents' reports of coparenting 1 year later, hypothesizing that higher levels of problem behaviors would predict lower levels of coparenting over time. We also examined whether parents' marital love mediated the link between adolescent problem behavior and coparenting, testing the idea that high levels of adolescents' problem behaviors may decrease the energy parents invest in their marriage, influencing their feelings of love and, ultimately, their ability to coparent.

Summary of Research Questions

In sum, this study was directed at two research goals. First, we assessed the nature of coparenting in intact families with adolescents, addressing two questions: (a) How do parents of adolescents perceive their coparental relationship? and (b) Do mothers and fathers differ in their perceptions of the coparental relationship? Second, we examined two potential pathways through which adolescent well-being (operationalized in terms of risky behaviors and depressive symptoms), marital love, and coparenting may be linked over time (see Figure 1). Specifically, we asked: (a) Does marital love mediate the association between adolescents' earlier well-being and coparenting 1 year later? and (b) Controlling for prior levels of adolescent well-being, does coparenting mediate the association between marital love and adolescent well-being 1 year later?

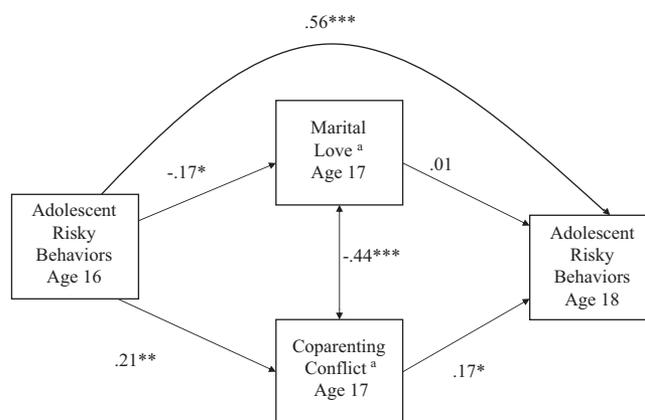


Figure 1. Analyses linking adolescents' risky behavior at age 16, marital love and coparenting conflict at age 17, and adolescents' risky behavior at age 18.^a Mean of parents' reports. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Method

Participants

Participants were drawn from a longitudinal study of families. They were recruited via letters to families of youths in the 4th or 5th grade in 18 rural and urban school districts in a mid-Atlantic state. These letters described the research project and criteria for participation: (a) always married parents, (b) a firstborn in the 4th or 5th grade, (c) a sibling 1–4 years younger, and (d) both parents employed at least part-time. Families returned postcards indicating their interest, and follow-up phone calls were made to determine eligibility. Over 90 percent of the families who returned postcards agreed to participate. The data used in this study were drawn from Phases 6, 7, and 8 (collected in 2001–2003) when the measures of interest were collected. Of the original 203 families participating in this study, 7 families withdrew from the study during the course of the investigation, 8 experienced a divorce, 5 experienced the death of a parent, and 6 were missing data on key variables, leaving 177 families for the present analyses.

Reflecting the demographics of their communities, the sample was almost exclusively White. The average ages of mothers, fathers, and adolescents at Time 1 were 42.22 years ($SD = 3.97$), 44.54 years ($SD = 5.09$), and 16.34 years ($SD = .79$), respectively. Mothers and fathers on average reported some post-high-school training or some college (mothers = 14.84, $SD = 2.19$; fathers = 14.91, $SD = 2.45$; 12 denotes a high school education, with each year of education denoted by an additional point). Median family income at Phase 6 was \$76,000 ($SD = \$40,761$), and average marital duration was 19.0 years ($SD = 2.49$).

Procedure

Families were interviewed annually in their homes. The lead interviewer provided an introduction to the family, during which the family was paid a \$200 honorarium and informed consent/assent was obtained from family members. In individual interviews lasting 2 to 3 hours, the interviewers divided into teams, with the lead interviewer interviewing the parents and the second interviewer interviewing the adolescents.

Measures

Perceptions of coparenting. Perceptions of coparenting were assessed with a 14-item scale assessing three dimensions of coparenting: cooperation, conflict, and triangulation (Margolin et al., 2001). Each item was rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*almost always*). Husbands and wives completed this questionnaire independently. (See Table 1 for sample items and alphas.)

Marital love. Marital love was assessed with a 9-item scale developed by Braiker and Kelly (1979) on which husbands and wives used a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*very much*) to rate items such as “How attached do you feel to your partner?” Cronbach’s alpha was .94 for mothers and fathers. Because of skewness and kurtosis, a squared transformation of this variable was used in the analyses.

Adolescents’ risky behavior. Adolescents’ risky behavior was assessed with 17 questions from the Michigan Study of Adolescent Life Transitions (Eccles & Barber, 1990), for which adolescents rated the frequency of their risk-taking behavior at ages 16 and 18 years, using a scale that ranged from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*more than 10 times*) over the previous year. Items included how often youths skipped a day of school or used drugs. Alphas were .87 and .88 for the two time points. Because of skewness and kurtosis, an inverse transformation was performed on this index for the analyses.

Adolescents’ depressive symptoms. Adolescents’ depressive symptoms were assessed with 10 items from the Childhood Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1981), collected when adolescents were 16 and 18 years old. From three statements, adolescents chose the item that best described their experiences during the previous 2 weeks (e.g., “I hate myself,” “I do not like myself,” “I like myself”). Alphas were .88 and .81 for the two time points, and a square root transformation was performed on this measure.

Results

Descriptive Analyses of Coparenting in Adolescence: Comparing Mothers and Fathers

As Table 1 indicates, mothers and fathers reported relatively high levels of coparenting. Mothers’ and fathers’

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Measures of Mothers’ and Fathers’ Coparenting ($N = 177$)

Variable	Mother			Father			Number of items	<i>t</i> test difference between parents ($df = 176$)	Correlation between parents’ reports	Sample item
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α				
Conflict	2.11	.72	.88	2.06	.65	.86	5	0.82	.50***	My spouse and I have different standards for our children’s behavior.
Cooperation	3.55	.81	.81	3.94	.60	.75	5	−6.46***	.37***	My spouse fills me in on what happens during our children’s day.
Triangulation	1.32	.45	.70	1.33	.49	.77	4	0.23	.39***	My spouse tries to get our children to take sides when we argue.

Note. Sample items are from Margolin et al. (2001). Each item was rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*almost always*).
*** $p < .001$.

ratings were significantly correlated on all three dimensions of coparenting, and paired *t* tests revealed only one significant difference between mothers' and fathers' ratings: Fathers scored higher on the measure of cooperation than did mothers. In subsequent analyses, the average of parents' coparenting scores was used for three reasons. First, coparenting is an inherently dyadic construct representing teamwork between parents. Second, our preliminary analyses suggested that mothers' and fathers' reports were similar. Finally, using an average score can help to reduce mono-reporter bias. Along these lines, mothers' and fathers' reports of marital love also were similar ($r = .54, p < .001$), and thus we used the average of mothers' and fathers' reports in the analyses.

Links Between Adolescent Well-Being, Marital Love, and Coparenting

We used path analyses to examine the linkages between adolescent well-being, marital love, and coparenting. As a preliminary step, we examined bivariate correlations to determine which control variables should be included in the path analyses. As Table 2 indicates, parents' education was positively related to coparenting cooperation and adolescents' risky behavior, whereas family income was not. Because the correlation between mothers' and fathers' education was reasonably high ($r = .56, p < .001$), the mean of both parents' education was used as a control variable. Table 2 indicates that adolescents' age and gender were correlated with risky behavior and that adolescent gender was correlated with depressive symptoms at a trend level; these variables were therefore used as controls in all subsequent models.

As noted, the data were drawn from three waves of a longitudinal study in which data collection occurred annually. At Time 1, adolescent risky behaviors and depressive symptoms were assessed; adolescents were 16 years old on average. At Time 2, when adolescents were 17 years old, marital love and coparenting were assessed. Finally, at Time 3, risky behaviors and depressive symptoms were assessed when adolescents were 18 years old on average.

To examine whether the hypothesized processes worked the same for adolescent boys and girls, we included interactions between adolescent gender and adolescent behavior, and follow-up analyses were conducted separately for boys and girls if an interaction was significant. Interactions between adolescent gender and coparenting were also examined; however, because they were never significant, they were removed from the final models. To reduce multicollinearity, predictor variables were centered.

Risky behavior and coparenting conflict. As Table 3 reveals, adolescents' risky behavior at age 16 was negatively associated with parents' marital love 1 year later. Further, controlling for young adolescents' risky behavior, marital love was negatively associated with coparenting conflict. In addition, a direct, positive association was found between adolescents' risky behavior at age 16 and coparenting conflict 1 year later. This direct effect was qualified by an interaction between adolescent gender and risky behavior: Post hoc analyses revealed that adolescents' risky behavior predicted coparenting conflict for boys ($B = 26.92, SE = 6.27, \beta = .43, p < .001$) but not for girls ($B = 1.08, SE = 5.27, \beta = .02, ns$), and a Sobel test, conducted to determine whether marital love mediated the link between adolescents' risky behavior and coparenting conflict, indicated mediation at a trend level for boys ($z = 1.71, p < .10$) but not for girls ($z = -.65, ns$).

Next, as shown in the final column in Table 3, adolescents' risky behavior at age 16 as well as marital love and coparenting conflict assessed at age 17 were entered to predict adolescents' risky behavior at age 18. Analyses revealed that adolescents' risky behavior was quite stable over time. Nevertheless, controlling for earlier risky behavior and marital love, higher coparenting conflict was associated with relative increases in youth risky behavior over 2 years. In these analyses, no direct association between marital love and later risky behavior emerged, and a significant Sobel test indicated that coparenting conflict mediated the association between marital love and adolescents' risky behavior ($z = -2.14, p < .05$; see Figure 1).

Table 2
Correlations Between Demographic Characteristics and Indices of Marital Love, Coparenting, and Adolescent Psychosocial Functioning ($N = 177$)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Family's income	—									
2. Parents' education ^a	.14 [†]	—								
3. Adolescents' gender ^b	-.13 [†]	-.12	—							
4. Adolescents' age	.13 [†]	-.004	.10	—						
5. Marital love ^a	.05	.07	-.15 [*]	-.06	—					
6. Conflict ^a	-.05	-.12	.10	.009	-.50 ^{***}	—				
7. Cooperation ^a	.07	.15 [*]	-.18 [*]	-.11	.63 ^{***}	-.56 ^{***}	—			
8. Triangulation ^a	.07	.02	.05	.12	-.28 ^{***}	.23 ^{**}	-.29 ^{***}	—		
9. Risky behavior	-.10	-.15 [*]	.29 ^{***}	.15 [*]	-.21 ^{**}	.31 ^{***}	-.24 ^{**}	.03	—	
10. Depressive symptoms	.03	-.03	-.13 [†]	-.08	-.06	.18 [*]	-.11	.07	.39 ^{***}	—

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

^a Mean of parents' reports.

^b Gender: 1 = girls; 2 = boys.

Table 3

Summary of Path Coefficients From Three Regression Analyses Linking Adolescents' Risky Behavior at Age 16, Marital Love and Coparenting Conflict at Age 17, and Adolescents' Risky Behavior at Age 18 ($N = 177$)

Variable	Marital love			Coparenting conflict			Adolescents' risky behavior at age 18		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β
Adolescents' gender ^a	-254.09	197.87	-.10	-0.04	.08	-.03	-0.002	0.001	-.13 [†]
Adolescents' age	-48.49	122.85	-.03	-0.05	.05	-.07	0.00016	0.00077	.01
Parents' education ^b	18.59	47.81	.03	-0.02	.02	-.06	-0.00079	0.00030	-.16 ^{**}
Risky behavior at age 16 ^c	-20,415	10,084	-.17 [*]	12.64	4.11	.21 ^{**}	0.54	0.07	.56 ^{***}
Gender \times Risky behavior ^c	-17,636	19,923	-.07	21.48	8.05	.17 ^{**}	-0.11	0.13	-.05
Marital love ^{b,c}				-.0002	0.000031	-.44 ^{***}	0.00000011	0.0000055	.01
Coparenting conflict ^b							0.003	0.001	.17 [*]
R^2		.06			.33			.41	
<i>F</i>		2.10 [†]			13.54 ^{***}			16.04 ^{***}	

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

^a Gender: 1 = girls; 2 = boys.

^b Mean of parents' reports.

^c A squared transformation for marital love measure and an inverse transformation for the risky behavior measure were used.

Risky behavior and coparenting cooperation. As reported previously, adolescents' risky behavior was associated with marital love 1 year later in the expected direction. Controlling for adolescents' risky behavior, marital love was significantly and positively associated with coparenting cooperation ($B = .0003$, $SE = .00003$, $\beta = .58$, $p < .001$). As was the case for coparenting conflict in families with boys, a significant Sobel test revealed that marital love mediated the link between adolescents' risky behavior and coparenting cooperation ($z = -2.02$, $p < .05$). Adolescents' risky behavior, marital love, and coparenting cooperation were then entered to predict adolescents' subsequent risky behavior. In this model, coparenting cooperation was not significantly associated with risky behavior 1 year later. In addition, no direct effect of marital love on adolescents' later risky behavior was found, and no gender interactions emerged in these analyses.

Risky behavior and coparenting triangulation. In addition to an association between adolescents' risky behaviors and marital love 1 year later, this analysis revealed that marital love was significantly associated with coparenting triangulation ($B = .000069$, $SE = .000019$, $\beta = -.28$, $p < .001$). No direct link was found, however, between adolescents' risky behavior and coparenting triangulation 1 year later. A trend-level Sobel test indicated, however, that marital love mediated some of the link between adolescent risky behavior and coparenting triangulation 1 year later ($z = -1.78$, $p < .10$). When controlling for adolescents' risky behavior and marital love, no association between coparenting triangulation and adolescents' subsequent risky behavior was found.

Depressive symptoms and coparenting conflict. The same path-analytic strategy was used to study adolescents' depressive symptoms. Adolescents' early depressive symptoms were not significantly related to marital love 1 year later. Controlling for adolescents' age 16 depressive symptoms, marital love predicted coparenting conflict ($B = -.0002$, $SE = .00003$, $\beta = -.47$, $p < .001$). In addition, higher levels of age 16 depressive symptoms predicted higher coparenting conflict 1 year later ($B = .08$, $SE = .03$, $\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). In the final model, depressive symptoms

were relatively stable over 2 years ($B = .36$, $SE = .06$, $\beta = .45$, $p < .001$). Controlling for early depressive symptoms and marital love, no association between coparenting conflict and depressive symptoms 1 year later was found. Further, no interactions with adolescent gender emerged in these analyses. The analyses examining links between coparenting cooperation, triangulation, and depressive symptoms mirrored these nonsignificant results.

Discussion

Our results corroborated findings from a growing body of literature highlighting the importance of coparenting for youth well-being. This study found that perceptions of conflictual parenting teamwork predicted relative change in adolescent risky behavior over 2 years, highlighting the significance of this family dynamic for adolescents. In discussing our study findings, we will first describe coparenting in families with adolescents, focusing on similarities and differences in mothers' and fathers' reports of coparenting. Then, we will consider the pathways linking adolescents' well-being, marital love, and coparenting.

Coparenting in Families With Adolescents

This study was one of the first to address coparental processes in families with adolescents. As results indicated, mothers' and fathers' ratings of coparenting were relatively positive (i.e., high on cooperation and low on conflict and triangulation). In addition, spouses generally saw eye to eye regarding their coparenting relationship, although fathers did rate their coparenting cooperation significantly higher than did mothers. One explanation for these findings is that these parents had been coparenting together for many years. Despite the transitions that occur in adolescence, it appears that parents in this sample had done a reasonably good job at staying on the same page with regard to their parenting. As suggested by Margolin et al. (2001), parents who were not good at coparenting may have separated or divorced and would not have been included in this study. Nonetheless,

even in a self-selected group of well-functioning families, there was sufficient variability in coparenting to predict adolescents' well-being.

One interesting finding was the strong association between marital love and coparenting, although both measures were via self-report at the same point in time. To help deal with mono-reporter bias, the means of mothers' and fathers' ratings of coparenting and marital love were used in analyses. Despite this step, however, marital love and coparenting were highly related.

It is difficult to compare these findings with findings from previous literature examining coparenting and marital characteristics, as this study differed in a number of important ways. First, because this study examined coparenting in families with adolescents, parents in this sample likely had been married longer than was the case in other studies. Because both marital quality and coparenting change over time, the association between these two variables is also likely to change as marital relationships unfold (Kurdek, 1999). Second, this study used a self-report measure of coparenting, which assesses perceptions of the coparenting relationship, instead of an observational methodology, which assesses behaviors indicative of coparenting. Finally, previous studies focused on marital conflict instead of marital love as the marriage indicator (Feinberg et al., 2007). These differing approaches make it difficult to compare findings across studies.

Nevertheless, previous research has found small, albeit significant correlations between marital conflict and coparenting. As noted, one explanation for this strong association between coparenting and marital love in this sample is that, because the parents in this study had been married and engaging in coparenting for a long time, the boundaries between mothers' and fathers' roles as spouses and parents may have blurred. This pattern differs from Feinberg et al.'s (2007) evidence that coparenting conflict and marital disagreement are distinct constructs. Our analyses examined marital love, however, and Feinberg et al. examined marital disagreement. In addition, because Feinberg's sample included both non-divorced and stepfamilies, the overlap in marital and parenting roles may have depended in large part on the length of time spent in a marital and coparental relationship.

Examining Pathways of Influence

Broadly speaking, some evidence from this study supported the proposed pathways of influence linking adolescents' well-being, marital love, and coparenting over time. Controlling for earlier problem behaviors, coparenting conflict predicted relative changes in adolescents' risky behavior; the fact that coparenting did not predict changes in depressive symptoms over time, however, coincides with Feinberg et al.'s (2007) findings. In addition, results supported the two proposed mechanisms linking adolescents' risky behavior, marital quality, and coparenting. First, adolescents' risky behavior was associated with parents' marital love 1 year later, which, in

turn, was related to parents' teamwork. These findings suggest that adolescents' acting out behaviors may have negative implications for parents' marital love, which then relates to their parenting teamwork. The second path tested was whether coparenting was a link through which marital love was associated with later adolescent functioning. We found that parents who saw their relationship as more loving reported lower levels of coparenting conflict, which in turn was associated with lower levels of adolescent risky behavior. It appears that one of the ways through which marital quality may be linked to adolescent functioning is through parental disagreement over childrearing issues. Although this study does not provide conclusive evidence for these pathways, the findings suggest that further exploration of the processes linking marriage, coparenting, and youth adjustment may be a fruitful direction for research.

Associations Between Coparenting and Offspring's Behavior

Results revealed some evidence of associations between coparenting and offspring's behavior. Specifically, adolescents' depressive symptoms predicted parents' coparenting conflict 1 year later for both boys and girls. In addition, adolescent problem behavior predicted coparenting conflict 1 year later for parents of boys. It is important to note that boys engaged in more risky behavior than did girls, on average, and that there was more variability in risky behaviors for boys than girls. It is interesting to note that previous work examining associations between coparenting and gender did not find child gender to be related to coparenting quality (Stright & Bales, 2003). Although these authors attributed this finding primarily to their small sample size, they also suggested that child characteristics play less of a role than do parent characteristics in determining parenting. Our findings suggest that youths' characteristics may be a more salient determinant of coparenting in adolescence as youths become more autonomous (Collins & Steinberg, 2006). Our findings also suggest that adolescent gender may not directly impact coparenting; rather, adolescent gender may moderate the association between earlier behavior and coparenting.

Our correlational design means that we cannot draw causal inferences about the pattern of findings. The gold standard for determining causality is an experimental design with random assignment. To be more confident in making causal inferences with the current design, however, it would be necessary to test whether changes in adolescents' behaviors predicted changes in coparenting over time, a question we could not test because we measured coparenting at only one time point.

This study found that perceptions of coparenting conflict predicted adolescent risky behavior over time, suggesting that coparenting conflict is indeed an important family process for families with adolescents. Analyses did not reveal the same pattern of findings for depressive symptoms, however. Why are perceptions of coparenting

significantly associated with changes in adolescents' risky behavior but not changes in depressive symptoms? First, risky behavior may provide parents with an immediate situation to work on together. Depressive symptoms, in contrast, are less visible to parents. Second, in this study, adolescents reported on their depressive symptoms over the previous week, but they reported on their risky behavior over the previous year. Thus, the measure of depressive symptoms reflects a state-like characteristic of adolescents, whereas the risky behavior measure assessed a trait-like adolescent characteristic. Because coparenting was assessed by asking parents to reflect on the entire year (therefore capturing a trait-like characteristic), the coparenting measure may have lent itself to predicting trait-like adolescents' risky behavior more so than state-like depressive symptoms.

We do not know how the self-report measures of coparenting map onto actual coparenting behaviors. Our results, however, indicate that parents' perceptions of coparenting are linked to adolescents' well-being. In addition, the correlation between mothers' and fathers' coparenting scores is relatively high, indicating that the measures are tapping into an actual family dynamic. Our results suggest that parents' perceptions of coparenting have important implications for adolescent functioning.

Dimensions of Coparenting

Because this study was one of the first to examine coparenting in adolescence, the decision was made to examine the various subscales of coparenting separately. Overall, coparenting conflict consistently predicted change in adolescent well-being over time. As described in Results, coparenting cooperation and triangulation were linked to the variables of interest in a similar direction as coparenting conflict, although the findings were not usually as strong. The associations found between coparenting conflict and adolescent problem behaviors align with previous work in which the presence of blatant and tangible aspects of negative coparenting may be more important determinants of youth well-being than are the presence of positive aspects of coparenting (Katz & Low, 2004).

Why were coparenting triangulation and cooperation not as strongly related to adolescents' well-being as coparenting conflict? One explanation may have to do with the high correlation between mothers' and fathers' reports of coparenting conflict. Conflict may be easier for parents and adolescents to see and rate compared with cooperation and triangulation, which may be more subjective. In addition, analyses revealed that the means of coparenting triangulation were relatively low. If triangulation had been more evident (or acknowledged more readily by parents), there might have been stronger associations with adolescents' well-being. It may also be that our measure did not fully capture all types of triangulation that occur within families. Adolescents may actively create coalitions with parents, but the measure we used focused only on parents drawing their offspring

into coalitions. A multidimensional measure of triangulation may better capture the nuances of this construct for families with adolescents.

Findings regarding coparenting cooperation may reflect, as Margolin et al. (2001) suggested, a lower level of importance for cooperation between parents as their offspring enter adolescence. Because younger children are highly dependent on their parents, high levels of cooperation may be more critical for younger children than for more self-sufficient adolescents. Our findings highlight the importance of examining dimensions of coparenting separately because of their differential implications for child well-being.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our study had several limitations. First, all of the measures relied on self-reports from family members and constituted perceptions of family phenomena rather than objective indices of family members' behaviors. In addition, participants' reports were used for multiple measures. As noted, to reduce the problem of mono-reporter bias, we averaged mothers' and fathers' reports of marital love and coparenting, but the strong association between marital love and coparenting may be due in part to a response bias. Finally, this research was limited to self-reports of coparenting. Future research should use a multimethod approach to assess coparenting in families with adolescents, including observational methods, self-reports of coparenting, and open-ended questions in which parents can describe their coparenting relationship.

Another limitation of this research was the homogeneous sample consisting of White, working- and middle-class, two-parent families. It is possible that the family processes surrounding coparenting may operate differently in cultural groups in which families are embedded in kin networks, and, in addition to mothers and fathers, extended kin are involved in daily parenting. Taking a cross-cultural perspective, some cultures may view parenting as the mother's domain, making parenting teamwork less critical for offspring's well-being. Further research needs to examine the similarities and differences in what gives rise to coparenting in other types of families.

Another area for future research would be to examine adolescents' perceptions of their parents' coparenting relationship. As McHale et al. (2002) have argued, youths not only interpret their family dynamics, but they often are aware of subtle signs of disconnection and distance between their parents. In addition, because parenting teamwork is socially desirable, parents may overstate the quality of their coparenting relationship; social desirability may be less of a factor for adolescents' reports of coparenting. Moreover, previous work by Cummings, Davies, and Simpson (1994) documented links between youths' reports of marital conflict and child adjustment, highlighting the appropriateness of this approach.

A final direction for future research would address the question of whether coparenting is content specific. Some parents may be very good at coparenting in particular areas,

such as emphasizing the importance of education, but struggle to present a unified front in other areas, such as dating and romantic relationships. Furthermore, the implications of coparenting for adolescents' well-being may vary as a function of the content area. For example, because one of the main tasks of adolescence is autonomy seeking, it may be critical that parents are unified when it comes to adolescents' independence. On the other hand, parents' agreement on topics such as appropriate appearance might not be as critical for adolescents' well-being.

Clinical Research Implications

This research has implications for practitioners working with adolescents and their families. First, it is important for therapists to think about coparenting in a multifaceted way. Our research suggests that coparenting conflict between parents may have implications for adolescents' problem behaviors, whereas coparenting cooperation and triangulation may not have the same implications for such behavior. Conflict may be especially relevant for adolescents because they are more likely to observe it, whereas other aspects of coparenting may not be as visible. Educating clinicians about how the multiple dimensions of coparenting are related to adolescents' behavior as well as developing intervention strategies to better manage and resolve coparenting conflict are critical steps for families with adolescents. Second, and perhaps of most importance, the coparenting relationship may be an intervention point for working with adolescents: Strengthening the marital and coparental relationship in families with delinquent adolescents may contribute to reducing adolescent problem behavior.

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Received May 26, 2006

Revision received March 19, 2007

Accepted March 20, 2007 ■

Call for Nominations

The Publications and Communications (P&C) Board of the American Psychological Association has opened nominations for the editorships of **Psychological Assessment**, **Journal of Family Psychology**, **Journal of Experimental Psychology: Animal Behavior Processes**, and **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Personality Processes and Individual Differences (PPID)**, for the years 2010-2015. Milton E. Strauss, PhD, Anne E. Kazak, PhD, Nicholas Mackintosh, PhD, and Charles S. Carver, PhD, respectively, are the incumbent editors.

Candidates should be members of APA and should be available to start receiving manuscripts in early 2009 to prepare for issues published in 2010. Please note that the P&C Board encourages participation by members of underrepresented groups in the publication process and would particularly welcome such nominees. Self-nominations are also encouraged.

Search chairs have been appointed as follows:

- **Psychological Assessment**, William C. Howell, PhD, and J Gilbert Benedict, PhD
- **Journal of Family Psychology**, Lillian Comas-Diaz, PhD, and Robert G. Frank, PhD
- **Journal of Experimental Psychology: Animal Behavior Processes**, Peter A. Ornstein, PhD, and Linda Porrino, PhD
- **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: PPID**, David C. Funder, PhD, and Leah L. Light, PhD

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Deadline for accepting nominations is **January 10, 2008**, when reviews will begin.