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THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PARENTING ALLIANCE TO PARENTS' PROBLEM SOLVING BEHAVIORS DURING A DISCUSSION TASK

By

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ABSTRACT

THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE PARENTING ALLIANCE TO PARENTS' PROBLEM SOLVING BEHAVIORS DURING A DISCUSSION TASK

By

Carol Cracchiolo Laub

This study examined the relationship between parents' perceptions of their parenting alliance, the effectiveness of couple problem solving, and the problem solving behaviors used by both parents during a discussion task of a discipline problem. Subjects were 52 predominantly middle class couples, married an average of 7 years, with at least one child between 3 and 4 years of age. Results revealed that mothers' problem solving behaviors were more predictive than fathers' problem solving behaviors of problem solving outcomes and of both parents' perceptions of the parenting alliance. The majority of the couples studied (63%) adopted an egalitarian power structure, which was associated with the most effective problem solving. The remaining couples were categorized as either father- or mother- dominant systems. Whereas father dominance was associated with the most positive perceptions of the parenting alliance and fewer feelings of denigration, it was also associated with the poorest problem solving outcomes. Mother dominance was associated with the most negative perceptions of the parenting alliance and greater feelings of denigration, but the quality of problem solving outcomes among the mother dominant couples did not differ from those of egalitarian couples.

This work is dedicated to my parents, who did not have the opportunity to pursue higher education, yet impressed upon their children the importance of expanding one's intellectual horizons. It is through the inspiration of their life examples and the emotional and instrumental support they have selflessly given me, that I have been able to achieve what I have.

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Above all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my best friend and husband, Rick, for his unfailing support and dedication, his patience and encouragement, and for his computer wizardry. Without his significant personal contributions, this work might never have come to fruition.

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INTRODUCTION

Children who grow up in an environment in which there is parental discord and conflict have been found to be at increased risk for the development of behavior problems and other social, emotional, and psychological difficulties. Furthermore, children from discordant families are more likely to experience dysfunctional parent-child relationships. Negative parent-child interactions experienced as a child further places these individuals, when adults, at greater risk for perpetuating negative parent-child relationships with their own children (Belsky & Isabella, 1985; Engfer, 1988). However, a growing body of literature suggests that marital discord of itself is not a necessary nor sufficient precursor of social and emotional difficulties in childhood. A number of studies indicate that in non-clinic samples the relationship between marital discord and child problems is much weaker than in clinic samples, suggesting that some other "third variable" may be inflating the association between marital and child problems in clinic samples (Emery, 1982; Emery & O'Leary, 1984). Thus, there is evidence that there are other factors which may mediate the association between marital and child difficulties.

The parenting alliance is gaining attention in the literature as one potentially mediating factor which is separate from, yet integrally related to the spousal

relationship. Cohen and Weissman (1984) and others (Benedek, 1959; Frank et al., 1988) propose that the principal influence of the spousal system may be in its restrictive or facilitative influence on the parenting partnership, especially for fathers (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1990). However, most research investigating the effects of marital discord on parent-child outcomes has focused solely on the marital relationship, often neglecting to consider the individual and unique contributions of the parental subsystem.

This study examined the relationship between observations of parents' interactions during a discipline conflict resolution task and parents' self-reports of the quality of their parenting partnership. The subjects in this study were drawn from a sample of intact families recruited from the patient rosters of a pediatric clinic and have at least one child between the ages of three and four. This sample allowed for an examination of patterns of interparental behaviors in "normal" families at an early developmental stage.

For many of these families the transition to parenthood was fairly recent and many aspects of parenting attitudes and behaviors were still being negotiated between spouses. In addition, the parenting alliance in this life cycle stage is less integrated with and hence more distinct from the marital relationship than in later stages (Belsky, 1979; Frank, Hole, Jacobson, Justkowski, & Huyck, 1986; Frank, Jacobson, & Hole, 1988). For example, Frank, Jacobson, & Hole (1988) found that the parenting experiences of parents with preschoolers were primarily attributable to the parenting alliance alone, rather than to marital satisfaction; whereas in later family

life cycle stages marital satisfaction and the parenting alliance accounted for more shared variance in parents' experiences as parents.

This study sought to determine the extent to which parents' behaviors as parents are related to their perceptions of their parenting alliance and their effectiveness in problem solving. Particular attention was given to the way in which parents asserted power, were affectively involved, and were able to work effectively on a task during a discussion of a parenting issue, all of which are integrally related to and should be facilitative of a positive parenting alliance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The marital relationship has been consistently implicated as having a direct effect on parent-child relationships, and consequently on children's psychosocial development. The expansive body of literature linking marital discord to child behavior problems and less optimal adjustment has most clearly demonstrated the link between the spousal relationship and child outcomes, and it is this literature which is most often cited as supportive of the interdependencies of the subsystems within the family. For example, marital discord has been more strongly associated with child behavior problems (most prominently in boys) than other factors such as parental psychopathology, parental cognitive factors, and parental stress (Block, Block, & Gjerde, 1986; Block, Block, & Morrison, 1981; Christensen, Phillips, Glasgow, & Johnson, 1983; Emery & O'Leary, 1982; O'Leary & Emery, 1984).

However, there is increasing evidence which suggests that it is the parental relationship, rather than the marital relationship per se, which has the greatest influence on parent-child relationships and child outcomes. In addition, numerous studies which do not directly investigate aspects of the parenting partnership or alliance lend support to its importance as a mediating factor between the marital and parental subsystems, especially for families in the early life cycle stages. For example, Goldberg and Easterbrooks (1984) found stronger links between measures of marital quality and adaptive parenting than between measures of marital quality and child adjustment in families with toddlers. In addition, in Easterbrooks and Emde's

(1988) extension of this work, parents' abilities to resolve conflict and their agreement about child discipline were strongly associated with positive parent-child interactions, whereas marital adjustment was not significantly related to observational measures of parent-child interaction. Goldberg and Easterbrooks (1984) suggest that some "third variable" not directly examined in their study may contribute simultaneously to both marital and parent-child interactions. More recent investigations have demonstrated the importance of the parenting alliance as this "third variable" which makes separate contributions to marital and parent-child relationships (e.g., Frank et al., 1988).

The Parenting Alliance

Since its introduction in 1984 by Cohen and Weissman, the concept of the "parenting alliance" is proving increasingly to be one of the most important aspects of the spousal system, especially for parents of preschool children. According to these authors who work within the psychoanalytic tradition, the parenting alliance is that component of the marital relationship which is distinct from the spouses' sexual and libidinal needs. It evolves as parents engage in child-rearing and helps to facilitate and affirm the performance of parenting skills. Cohen and Weissman (1984) propose that even in the absence of marital intimacy, parents who have the capacity to "acknowledge, respect, and value the parenting roles and tasks of the partner" (p. 35) can sustain the psychological and behavioral stresses of parenting. These authors' clinical observations and several findings in the literature indicate that marital intimacy is neither necessary nor sufficient for a good parenting partnership; and that even after the dissolution of a marriage, some parents are able to remain connected

through the shared process of empathic parenting (Durst, Wedenmeyer, & Zurcher, 1985; Emery, 1982; Hess & Camara, 1979). The parenting alliance thus provides a stable basis for the psychosocial development of the parents, with significant implications for the parent-child relationship. Weissman and Cohen (1985) hold that as motherhood and fatherhood develop simultaneously, the parenting alliance provides the psychological underpinnings for parent-child interactions.

Frank, Hole, Jacobson, Justkowski, & Huyck's (1986) study of the parenting alliance supported the notion of the spousal system as limiting or facilitating adaptive parenting via its effects on the parenting partnership (Benedek, 1970; Cohen & Weissman, 1984; 1985). The same study also demonstrated that the constructs of marital satisfaction and a positive parenting alliance are not interchangeable. In Frank et al.'s (1986) interview study, parents coded as having a strong and positive alliance described a "mutually supportive relationship characterized by shared decision making and respect for each other's parenting abilities" (Frank et al., 1988, p. 6). In contrast, parents classified as having a weak or negative parenting alliance felt deprecated, indicated a lack of support, described an unwillingness or inability to agree on important parenting decisions, or were themselves critical of their spouse's parenting abilities (Frank et al., 1986). This operational definition of the parenting alliance was significantly, but not strongly, related to a measure of marital intimacy. The authors suggest that the parenting alliance and marital intimacy may make different contributions to more adaptive parenting.

In a continuation of this work, Frank et al. (1988) devised a questionnaire (the

Family Experiences Questionnaire-FEQ) based on their interview data to assess the parenting alliance. Results from this study indicate that the unique contribution of the parenting alliance to parents' reports of overinvolvement (overcontrol and narcissistic investments in the child) and adaptive parenting experiences (confidence, empathic investments in the child, and low reports of undercontrol), was much greater than that of marital satisfaction. In addition, the relationship of marital satisfaction to the parents' overinvolvement and adaptive parenting experiences was to a large extent due to its relationship to the parenting alliance. Furthermore, the parenting experiences of parents with preschoolers were mostly attributable to the parenting alliance alone, while parents' experiences in later developmental stages were predicted by both the parenting alliance alone and by its combined effect with marital satisfaction.

In sum, Frank et al.'s (1988) findings suggest that the parenting alliance mediates the relationship between marital satisfaction and parents' feelings and attitudes about parenting. In addition, their data suggest that marital and parental roles may become more closely integrated as children grow older. These results underscore the importance of the parenting alliance, particularly to parents of preschool children, as it is less integrated with the marital relationship at this stage and has the greatest influence on more adaptive parenting experiences.

A number of related studies are consistent with Cohen & Weissman's (1984) observations and Frank et al.'s (1988) findings in that they suggest that the parenting alliance makes independent contributions toward adaptive parenting experiences and positive child and family outcomes, and that marital intimacy and/or satisfaction is not

necessary for a positive parenting alliance. For example, in a study examining family relationships in families with a mentally retarded child, Floyd (1988) investigated the role of the parenting alliance and its relationship to the marital and parental subsystems. Subjects in this study were families with a mentally retarded child between the ages of 6 and 18 years old who was living in the home and attending special classes for trainable or educable mentally impaired children. Results indicate that marital quality and the parenting alliance contributed independently to family functioning. In addition, the parenting alliance had both direct and indirect links to family functioning by buffering stress and enhancing marital quality.

Studies of families with divorced parents underscore the importance of distinguishing between the marital and parental systems. Durst, Wedenmeyer, and Zurcher (1985) and Hess & Camara (1979) found that a cooperative coparent system is the most adaptive family configuration after divorce, with more favorable outcomes including: reintegration of the family, better parent-child relationships, greater consensus on parenting roles, less conflict and more support between parents, and clear but flexible boundaries between subsystems. Parents in this cooperative family type are considered full partners in parenting, making joint decisions, and having mutual respect for each other as parents. The relationship between spouses becomes redefined into a cooperative one which concerns only parental functioning, and supports the needs of the children after divorce.

Operationalizing the Parenting Alliance

As defined by Cohen and Weissman (1984), the core function of the parenting alliance is to enable parents to sustain the psychological and behavioral stresses associated with parenting. Recent studies support the stress-buffering hypothesis of the parenting alliance, and demonstrate differential effects of the parenting alliance for fathers and mothers. Floyd's (1988) study of families with a mentally retarded child (discussed above) demonstrated that the parenting alliance was directly and indirectly linked to optimal family functioning by reducing stress and improving marital quality. Likewise, in a study investigating child illness, the parenting alliance, and parent stress, Frank, Wagner, Olmsted, Laub, Freeark, Breitzer, & Peters (1989) found that parents' perceptions of the parenting alliance were significantly correlated with stresses associated with perceived child characteristics (e.g., demandingness, moodiness, distractibility) for both mothers and fathers, and stresses associated with parent characteristics (e.g., depression, social isolation, parenting confidence) for fathers.

While these studies confirm the stress-reducing function of the parenting alliance, little is known about the actual processes by which the parenting alliance is able to reduce parental stress. Furthermore, the parenting alliance and parental stress are both subjective experiences and hence are appropriately assessed by self-report measures. Thus, these confirmatory studies have demonstrated a strong relation between two subjective experiences: perceptions of the parenting alliance and perceptions of parental stress. What remains to be determined is to what degree

parents' observable interactions as parents are related to their perceptions of their parenting alliance. Specifically, the question to be answered in this study was to what extent parents' abilities to resolve conflict about parenting issues and to effectively deal with parenting difficulties as a dyad are related to their perceptions of the parenting alliance. In particular, this study examined the relationship between parents' assertions of interindividual power, affective involvement, and problem solving abilities in their relationship as parents.

Penman's (1980) Manifest and Latent Coding Schemes

In this study it was hypothesized that parents who are mutually supportive and actively involved in their interactions as parents would report a strong parenting alliance. Moreover, parental interactions which involve shared positive affect and an equitable distribution of power should foster a positive parenting alliance and promote more effective problem solving. On the other hand, it is believed that parents who are less actively involved in decision-making and more emotionally removed from each other and the communication process, should report a negative alliance which is characterized by a lack of respect for each other's parenting abilities and feelings of denigration. In addition, parental interactions which include more hostile and aggressive responses in their attempts to resolve parenting issues are believed to be particularly destructive to the parenting alliance and effective problem solving. Robyn Penman's (1980) dimensions of affective involvement and power offer a means of testing these hypotheses. Penman devised a message classification coding scheme for use in marital dyads which conceptually relates the dimensions of power and

affective involvement. This scheme also has been used successfully with parent-child dyads to identify a number of dyadic interaction styles (Hakim-Larson & Hobart, 1987).

The conceptual foundations of Penman's theory of interpersonal communication are rooted in systems theory, communication theory, and rules theory. Of these three bases, Penman considers systems theory to be the most far-reaching, encompassing the latter two. The systems approach to the study of communication processes is based on three fundamental tenets: emphasis on studying whole systems rather than integral components in isolation, concern with the complex set of relations within and between systems, and emphasis on the dynamic and self-directed activity of living systems. According to systems theory, all open systems are characterized by a dynamic homeostasis, moving toward increasing differentiation and organization. In human groups, the exchange of information maintains the interrelations between members and establishes structure. Furthermore, Penman (1980) holds that because people are often unaware of why they behave as they do and inaccurate in reporting their reasons for their behavior, an outside observers' perspective is necessary to understand the relationship and communications between system members.

Based on this perspective of interpersonal communication theory, Penman (1980) improved upon previous message category systems by developing one which is of general relevance, has an extensive set of categories, and is designed specifically for real groups (e.g. families, marital dyads, etc.). In addition, his scheme allows for the simultaneous classification at two different levels of inference, the manifest and

the latent. The inclusion of two levels makes it possible to identify incongruencies in messages and therefore reveal some of the more enigmatic processes underlying communication. The categories within each of these levels are based on "mutually exclusive and exhaustive criteria" and are intended for the classification of all communication behavior, with an emphasis on the vocal mode (Penman, 1980, p. 59).

Penman's message classification scheme conceptually interrelates the dimensions of power and emotional involvement. The Power dimension is described as "a specific instance of the differentiation tendency", while the Involvement dimension is described as "a specific instance of the integrative tendency" (Penman, 1980, p. 61). The Power dimension is defined as interindividual influence. More specifically, power will be defined in this study as one's attempts to influence the other through power assertion. The Involvement dimension, which has historically received relatively less attention in the literature than power, has been defined in terms of behaviors indicative of "solidarity and affiliation", and "accepting and loving" attitudes; all of which reflect some degree of personal involvement with the other (Penman, 1980, pp. 61-62). Involvement is a bidirectional dimension in which the involvement may be either towards the other or away from the other, indicating both type and degree of involvement.

Penman's two coding schemes, manifest and latent, differ in the level of inference necessary to classify each statement. The Manifest Level Scheme consists of nine manifest message categories which vary from high to low power assertion, and from negative to positive emotional involvement. At the manifest level, one is

primarily concerned with the explicit information expressed by the sender in terms of its usual meaning, while ignoring extra-linguistic information as much as possible. (See Figure 1).

In comparison, the Latent Level Scheme is more complex and the frame of reference is more inferential and comprehensive. Both linguistic and extra-linguistic information is to be considered, as well as the temporal context of the speech unit. The Latent Level places the information from the manifest level into a relational context. In this level, four positions are assigned to each dimension of Power and Involvement, comprising a total of 16 Latent categories. (See Figure 2.).

Figure 1. Summary of Penman's Manifest Level Classification Scheme

POWER			
P	**AGGRESS** Asserts self Shows aggression Justifies behavior	**ADVISE** Gives solutions Gives guidance Gives explanation	**SUPPORT** Shows understanding Reassures Shows Trust
O W	**DISAGREE** Differs Corrects Criticizes Contradicts	**EXCHANGE** Gives information Gives suggestions Asks for information Asks for suggestions	**AGREE** Confirms Reconciles Conciliates
E R	**AVOID** Hesitates Withdraws Noncommittal Shows uncertainty	**REQUEST** Asks for decision Asks for approval Asks for evaluations Asks for directions	**CONCEDE** Passively accepts Passively supports Complies Acquiesces

I N V O L V E M E N T

From: Robyn Penman (1980), Communication Processes and Relationships, Academic Press, New York.

Figure 2. Summary of Penman's Latent Level Classification Scheme

	CELL 1: AGGRESS		**CELL 2: INITIATE**	
	REJECT Shows hostility Discredits other Denigrates task/other	**CONTROL** Manoeuvers to gain control Forcefully challenges Takes over, directs	**INITIATE** Influences other Leads without control Stands for self while inviting other	**SHARE** Joins forces Confronts Affirms self & other
	COUNTER Defies, refuses Defends self Stands for self at expense of other	**RESIST** Counteracts Is cynical, skeptical Sets up obstacles	**OFFER** Tentatively suggests Informs other Is task oriented	**COLLABORATE** Reciprocates Cooperates Expands on other
	CELL 3: AVOID		**CELL 4: OBLIGE**	
P	**EVADE** Vague, wordy Does not respond directly Manoeuvers out of situation	**ABSTAIN** Is indecisive Uses delaying tactics Is unwilling to commit self	**SEEK** Seeks confirmation Requests information Allows other to start	**OBLIGE** Accepts Concurs w/other Endorses other
O				
W				
E	**REMOVE** Refuses to participate Ignores other Dissociates self	**RELINQUISH** Concedes defeat Backs away Abandons previous position	**SUBMIT** Defers to other Gives responsibility to other Takes path of least resistance	**CLING** Seeks control by other Accepts any directives Mutually colludes
R				

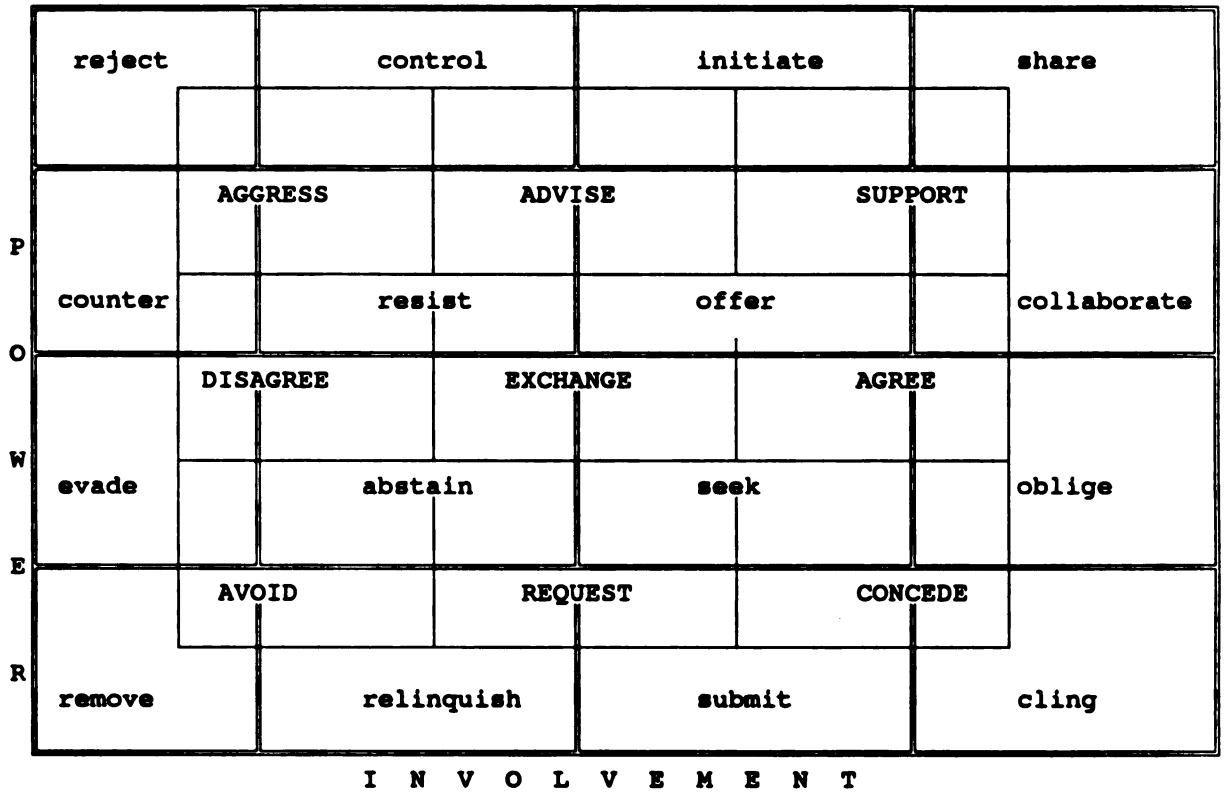
I N V O L V E M E N T

From: Robyn Penman (1980), Communication Processes and Relationships, Academic Press, New York.
Note: Cell designations and labels were added by this author.

Superimposing the Manifest Scheme on the Latent Scheme, the domain covered by any one manifest category corresponds with the domain of four latent categories. (See Figure 3). Because the Latent Level encompasses the Manifest Level and conveys more information about the system relationships, it was the classification scheme used to analyze the observational data in this study.

The data base for the development of Penman's (1980) classification system consisted of the tape recordings of 18 couples discussing 3 different items (i.e., problem solving task, modified consensus inkblot technique, and discussing characteristics of a happy couple) over a 1 hour period. Couples had been living together for at least one year and had plans to continue to do so. The range of relationship duration was from 1 to 33 years, with about two-thirds being together for 5 years or under. Participants' ages ranged from 18-61 years, with approximately two-thirds being 30 years or under.

Figure 3. Integrated Manifest and Latent Level Schemes



From: Robyn Penman (1980), Communication Processes and Relationships, Academic Press, New York.

Percentage frequencies of all manifest and latent categories were calculated for each dyad. At the manifest level, Exchange was found to be the most frequently used category for all dyads. Couples were similar at the manifest level in that Exchange, Advise, and Concede were the most common types of message (accounting for at least 60% of all message units), and acts of giving support (Support) and seeking support (Request) were the least common. In addition, at the latent level couples had similar responses with Offer, Oblige, and Resist (accounting for more than 50% of all message units) being the most common messages and Clinging, Sharing, Removing, Relinquishing, and Rejecting being among the least common. Whereas Penman (1980) does not directly address differences between men and women in their communication styles, he does relate that there are few differences between members of each dyad, and between couples as a group. In general, at both levels of communication the central and most neutral category (Exchange and Offer, respectively) is the most common communicative act in all couples analyzed. Penman (1980) therefore views this type of act as the central point around which other acts revolve and to which the communication process continually returns.

Penman's (1980) classification scheme can be reduced to its four major quadrants to facilitate comparisons with other coding systems and to generate some general hypotheses about the parenting alliance: Cell 1 (Aggress): high power assertion-negative affective involvement (reject, control, counter, resist), Cell 2 (Initiate): high power assertion-positive affective involvement (initiate, share, offer, collaborate), Cell 3 (Avoid): low power assertion-negative affective involvement

(evade, abstain, remove, relinquish), and Cell 4 (Oblige): low power assertion-positive affective involvement (seek, oblige, submit, cling) (See Figure 2.). The clearest hypothesis related to Penman's cells is that the interactions falling within the Aggress cell (1) would be most deleterious to the feelings of mutual respect and positive regard for each other's parenting abilities which characterize a positive parenting alliance. Thus, behaviors falling within Cell 1 would be expected from parents reporting negative alliances. In addition, as argued below, these interactions should be related to poorer problem solving outcomes. On the other hand, interactions which fall in the Initiate cell (2) would involve more active and supportive involvement and more positive affect from both parents, thus fostering a positive parenting alliance and more effective problem solving.

Conflict Resolution in Marital and Family Systems

While Penman (1980) has not related his coding system to measures of parental harmony or marital adjustment, predictions as to more specific relationships between the parenting alliance and his four behavioral quadrants can be formulated on the basis of findings reported in the conflict resolution literature. Many studies investigating conflict resolution styles include coding systems which are closely related to the dimensions of power and affective involvement and can be superimposed to varying degrees upon Penman's classification scheme (Billings, 1979; Fineberg & Lowman, 1975; Markman & Notarius, 1987; Rusbult & Zembrolt, 1983).

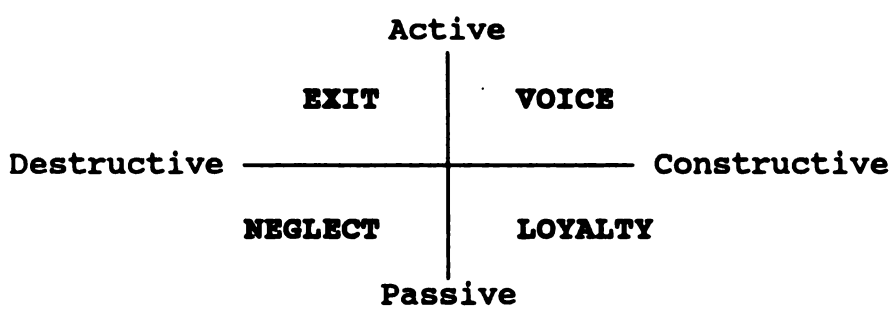
The research on conflict resolution is of particular relevance to young families, as parents in this life cycle stage are still negotiating family roles and functions; and it

is through the constructive resolution of inevitable conflict that the parental system becomes defined and integrated (Deutsh, 1969; Sprey, 1969). Productive conflict resolution has been compared to the process of creative thinking and has been found to progress through phases from recognition of the problem, to efforts to solve the problem, and finally to testing tentative solutions (Deutsch, 1969). One of the few studies investigating the components of effective family problem solving revealed that families who performed well across a variety of problem solving tasks were more cooperatively and actively involved in the problem solving task, i.e. they: a) attempted more problem solving strategies, b) deliberated longer over solutions, and c) came to more satisfactory agreements (Blechman & McEnroe, 1985). On the other hand, Deutsch (1969) reported that participants who resorted to strategies of power assertion and relied on coercion and threat (interactions classified by Penman in the high power assertion-negative affective involvement cell (1: aggress)), typically found themselves caught up in a cycle of destructive conflict which led to less effective resolutions to the problem. Destructive conflict presumably is caused by and causes ineffective communication and misperceptions.

One way of conceptualizing the conflict resolution process that dovetails with Penman's (1980) system has been proposed by Rusbult & Zembrolt (1983). Their multidimensional scales have been used in a number of studies examining differences in the conflict resolution styles of distressed and non-distressed dating undergraduate couples (Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986). These authors identify four categories of behavior which are based on a model of response to dissatisfaction. These

categories include: a.) "exit"-ending the relationship or discussion (e.g., breaking up, physically abusing one's partner), b.) "voice"-actively and constructively expressing dissatisfaction (e.g., suggesting solutions, discussing problems), c.) "loyalty"-remaining passively loyal to the relationship and waiting for conditions to improve (e.g., hoping things will improve, praying for improvement), and d.) "neglect"-passively allowing the relationship to atrophy (e.g., ignoring one's partner, refusing to discuss a problem) (Rusbult & Zembrolt, 1983, p. 275-276). These four categories differ along the two dimensions of constructiveness/destructiveness and activity/passivity. Constructive categories include voice and loyalty, while more destructive categories include exit and neglect. Exit and voice represent active behaviors, whereas loyalty and neglect are more passive behaviors. (See Figure 4.).

Figure 4. A Typology of Problem Solving Responses in Close Relationships



From: Rusbult et al. (1986), J. of Personality and Social Psychology, 50, 744-53.

This typology of problem solving can be compared to Penman's Latent Level classification scheme, where the active/passive dimension is similar to Penman's power assertion dimension and the constructive/destructive dimension is similar to the

dimension of affective involvement. Behaviors in Penman's high power assertion-negative involvement cell (1: aggress) coincide with the Active/Destructive quadrant, whereas behaviors in Penman's low power assertion-negative affective involvement cell (3: avoid) overlaps with the Passive/Destructive quadrant. Finally, Penman's low power assertion-positive involvement cell (4: oblige) corresponds with the Passive/Constructive quadrant, and the high power assertion-positive involvement cell (2: initiate) resembles the Active/Constructive quadrant.

Rusbult et al. (1986) found that destructive problem solving behaviors (Neglect and Exit) and partners' perceptions of each other's destructive problem solving behaviors were strongly related to couple distress. In addition, destructive problem solving behaviors (Neglect and Exit) were more predictive of couple functioning than constructive problem solving behaviors, with Exit being the strongest predictor. Whereas the tendency to respond with Voice was somewhat predictive of couple functioning, Loyalty responses failed to predict couple distress/nondistress. In addition, couple distress was associated with the tendency to reciprocate destructive problem solving behaviors, and with the inability to respond constructively to destructive responses from one's partner. Thus, the tendency to react to relationship difficulties with destructive behaviors has a significant negative effect on the couple's adaptive functioning.

Gender differences were found in problem solving responses, with females engaging in significantly more Voice and Loyalty, and somewhat less Neglect behaviors than men. There were no significant gender differences in the tendency to

Exit. However, females' Exit and Neglect responses were found to be more deleterious to the relationship than their partners' similar responses. Rusbult et al. (1986) conclude that in comparison with women, men are less likely to solve problems through Loyalty or Voice, and are somewhat more likely to resort to Neglect. Thus, when the female partner uses the destructive behaviors of Exit or Neglect, the male is less likely than his partner in similar circumstances to ameliorate the situation through Voice or Loyalty responses and avoidance of neglect. Women's destructive responses are therefore more salient and harmful to the relationship because they are not part of her regular repertoire, and because they are not compensated for by adaptive responses from her partner. The authors speculate that since women generally utilize constructive responses, when they do issue destructive behaviors, it is more indicative of serious difficulties within the relationship.

Rusbult et al.'s (1986) findings emphasize that women's destructive responses (especially Exit) are particularly damaging to the relationship. These authors imply that it is the negative affective quality in women's responses which is most predictive of couple difficulties, since Exit and Neglect vary on the active/passive (or power assertion) dimension. Yet, because these authors did not analyze within couple differences, it remains unclear whether it is the negative affective quality, the assertion of power, an interaction between the two and/or within couple differences in these behaviors which are most predictive of couple dysfunction.

Additional conflict resolution studies which focus on the role of affect in the marital subsystem coincide with Rusbult et al.'s (1986) results, pointing to the

destructive impact of negative affect and its reciprocity. These studies compare distressed and non-distressed couples across a number of different interactional paradigms and reveal three consistent patterns (Billings, 1979; Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975; Gottman & Levenson, 1986; Margolin & Wampold, 1981; Vincent, Weiss, & Birchler, 1975). First, distressed couples exhibit more negative affect than non-distressed couples. Second, distressed couples engage in greater reciprocity of negative affect. And third, distressed couples have more rigid, highly structured interactions in which one spouse's behavior is highly predictive of the other's subsequent behavior.

Gottman and Levenson (1986) have expanded the work on negative affective reciprocity to include an escape conditioning model which accounts for gender differences in conflict resolution styles and explains the process by which satisfied couples (and perhaps those with positive parenting alliances) avoid negative and rigid behavior patterns. This model is generated by physiological studies which indicate that males show quicker, larger, and more prolonged autonomic nervous system (ANS) responses to stress than females. These sex differences in ANS responses are purportedly related to sex differences in the problem solving behavior of men and women (Levenson & Gottman, 1983; 1985). Because chronic ANS activity is considered unpleasant and harmful, these authors posit that men would tend to avoid situations associated with high levels of ANS activation. Whereas negative affect has been shown to produce higher levels of ANS activation in men (as measured by heart rate and galvanic skin response), they may try to moderate the amount of negative

affect to which they are exposed by creating a rational rather than emotional climate in relationships. These tendencies may take the form of more conciliatory, less conflict-engaging, and more withdrawing behaviors in men.

The literature on sex differences in response to conflict confirms these conflict-avoidant behaviors in men. In addition, women have been shown to be less conciliatory, more conflict-engaging, and less likely to withdraw from negative affect (Kelley, Cunningham, Grisham, Lefebvre, Sink, & Yablon, 1978; Raush, Barry, Hertel & Swain, 1974). Raush, Barry, Hertel, & Swain (1974) found similar responses to conflict in marital couples problem solving in improvisational scenes. Whereas men and women tended to behave in similar manners overall, there were significant differences between the two. Men made more attempts to resolve the conflict and to reconcile their partners, whereas women responded with appeals, personal attack, and twice as much coercion. These data appear to be somewhat disparate from Rusbult et al.'s (1986) findings.

According to Gottman & Levenson's (1986) escape conditioning model, these sex differences in responses to conflict are expressed to varying degrees in satisfied and dissatisfied couples. As found in this study and the research cited above, dissatisfied couples respond with greater rigidity, stereotypy and predictability of behavior. The escape conditioning model may explain both how marriages become more and less satisfying. It links a reduction of physiological arousal to reinforcement of the behavioral sequence. In explanation, when both spouses move from a state of high ANS arousal (upset) to low levels of ANS arousal (calm), the

behavior patterns associated with the escape moments will become reinforced. In sum:

> "it seems likely that in unhappy marriages, there are many instances of upset over unresolved issues, and thus there will be many conditioning trials over which to strengthen the association that links a specific kind of upset with a specific behavior that serves to reduce that upset. In satisfied marriages, there will be fewer moments of upset, and thus fewer conditioning trials to establish rigid response patterns" (Gottman & Levenson, 1986, p. 46).

Therefore, in more satisfied couples, when supportive and empathic statements are used to restore calm, this response is more likely to be integrated in the couple's repertoire in response to upset. It is expected that similar processes are at work in the conflict resolution of parents with strong alliances. As these couples are likely to respond to conflict with more positive affect, it is these same supportive responses that should be reinforced as they help to reduce the stresses associated with resolving parenting issues.

In sum, there is considerable evidence in the conflict resolution literature which suggests that largely through their ability to avoid and to respond constructively to negative affect, parents with a strong parenting alliance would be more effective in resolving conflicts about parenting issues. Throughout the literature reviewed above, negative affect has been more strongly associated than positive affect with measures of marital satisfaction, communication satisfaction, and problem solving abilities (Coombs, 1966; Haynes, Chavez, & Samuel, 1984; Wills, Weiss, & Patterson, 1974). Thus, the ability to respond more constructively to negative affect and the avoidance of its reciprocation, should encourage more shared decision-making and more mutual positive regard between parents, both essential characteristics of a

positive alliance. In sum, parents who are better able to avoid the reciprocation of negative affect also avoid dissatisfaction in the communication process, exacerbation of conflict, and less effective problem solving; thus fostering a more positive parenting alliance (Menaghan, 1982; Birchler, Weiss, & Vincent, 1975; Gottman & Levenson, 1986). In addition, parents who feel respected and valued by their partners are more likely to have more positive communications and more effective problem solving. This prediction is supported by Coomb's (1966) study of dating couples which found that individuals' perceptions that their partners valued them were significantly related to ease in communication and satisfaction with the interaction.

The Role of Power in Conflict Resolution

The above discussion of the conflict resolution literature has largely focused on the importance of the quality of affective expression in the marital and parental dyad. The role of power, while often alluded to and subsumed in behavioral classification schemes, has not been adequately defined nor properly addressed in this research. One of the clearest shortcomings of these studies is their failure to consider the independent and shared contributions of power and affect to the conflict resolution process. The power dimension must be more carefully addressed as it has important implications for parental problem solving. In particular, there is some evidence that independent of affect, an unequal distribution of power which favors the mother is less adaptive for families than egalitarianism or father-dominance.

Research indicates that egalitarianism and husband-dominance are associated with high marital satisfaction, while child and wife-dominant marriages are lowest in

marital satisfaction (Kolb & Straus, 1974; MacDonald, 1980). Low husband dominance has also been associated with poor problem-solving ability and family dysfunction (Jacob, Ritchey, Cvitkovic, & Blane, 1981; Kolb & Straus, 1974; Moos & Moos, 1984). In his study of power distribution in "normal" families, Jacob (1974) found that in triadic interactions of parents and their adolescent sons, most middle class and lower class families were father-dominant or egalitarian, as measured by both process and outcome measures. However, previous studies investigating power distribution and problem solving have suffered from diverse methodological problems ranging from an over-reliance on outcome measures (e.g., "win" scores in decision making), relative neglect of fathers' reports, and inconsistency between definitions and measures of power. In addition, previous studies investigating power distribution and problem solving in couples have primarily addressed conflicts and decisions which pertain to the family system, the marital system, or to some other contrived scenarios not directly related to the individual couple or family. Hence, the distribution of power in the parental system has not been directly investigated during interactions involving conflict over pertinent parenting issues.

There are some special considerations that need to be taken into account in generalizing from the literature on power and the marital system to hypotheses about power assertion and distribution in the parenting alliance. As childcare has often of necessity been primarily the mother's role, she traditionally has had the most immediate influence in determining how children would be raised. For example, in

his 1977 study of young suburban families, Cohen found that due to the frequent absence of fathers, mothers were principally responsible for making decisions relating to their children. More important to this study are the findings that mothers typically made the decisions related to child punishment, and that the only area in which fathers took an active role in decision making was related to the formal education of their child. Thus, it would seem that women may have more influential power in making decisions pertaining to the discipline of their child. However, this data must be scrutinized as to its applicability to the more contemporary couples in this study sample and to parents with a strong alliance. Cohen (1977) indicated that the mothers in his sample were quite dissatisfied with their husbands' lack of involvement in parenting, and they developed a supportive network in which they formed alliances with other mothers to give them emotional and instrumental support in their roles as parents. Whether this balance of power in favor of the mother is potentially disruptive to effective problem solving by parents as a couple is as yet unclear.

Clearly, the relation of power assertion to the parenting alliance and effective problem solving is complex. Whereas shared decision making and respect for each other's parenting abilities are associated with a positive parenting alliance, it follows that parents who share more equally in making decisions about child-rearing, relying on each other for both instrumental and emotional support, would have a positive as opposed to a negative alliance. In addition, greater father involvement in parenting is presumably associated with more positive parenting alliances rather than negative alliances. Furthermore, numerous studies have demonstrated the importance of the

mother's role in involving the father in active parenting by delegating power and responsibility to the paternal role (Beitel, 1989; Belsky, 1979). However, it is important to consider the interaction between power assertion and affect. Maternal power assertion may not operate independently of affect, or negative affect may increase the negative implications of maternal dominance. It is more likely that when mothers assert an inordinate amount of power which is paired with less affective involvement (i.e., more aggressive, controlling behaviors), rather than eliciting the father's active involvement in parenting, this should cause fathers to feel denigrated, to withdraw from parenting interactions, and to abdicate or defer child-rearing responsibilities to their wives. This sequence obviously undermines the parenting alliance. Alternatively, parents who demonstrate a more egalitarian or father-led power distribution with more positive or neutral affect in problem solving interactions should be able to maintain and facilitate a strong parenting alliance. Furthermore, more equitable distributions of power assertion and positive affective involvement in the parental dyad, should be linked to more effective problem solving.

Conflict Resolution and The Parenting Alliance

The research on conflict resolution has demonstrated that constructive and effective conflict resolution involves a process in which members of a system (e.g., the parental dyad in this study) work cooperatively to identify the problem, generate a number of possible solutions to the problem, choose and agree upon a solution, implement the solution, and then evaluate the solution (Bales & Strodtbeck, 1951; Blechman & McEnroe, 1985; Deutsch, 1969). More effective problem solving is

expected to result in solutions which are likely to resolve the problem and are developmentally appropriate for the age of the child.

As with the parenting alliance, Penman's (1980) classification scheme can be used not only to assess this general hypothesis, but also to examine whether effective parental problem solving is the outcome of somewhat different behaviors for fathers and mothers. Clearly the least effective problem solving and the most negative alliances are expected for both fathers and mothers whose problem solving styles include high power assertion and negative affective involvement (Penman's cell 1). A similar yet somewhat weaker association with poor problem solving and a weak alliance was expected for parents exhibiting low power assertion and negative affective involvement (Penman's cell 3). On the other hand, a position of high power assertion and neutral or positive affect (Penman's cell 2) should be strongly associated with a positive alliance and effective problem solving, though (extrapolating from Rusbult et al.'s (1980) findings) this association should not be as strong as the above two positions. Finally, interactions which indicate low power assertion and positive affective involvement (Penman's cell 4: obliging) are expected to have little (and if anything a somewhat positive) association with the alliance and problem solving. These behaviors can be described as system maintaining. In addition, when mothers respond with more power assertion than fathers, combined with negative affective involvement, it is expected to have more detrimental effects on the parenting alliance and problem solving. In sum, an egalitarian distribution of power assertion or father dominance, coupled with positive affective involvement of both parents should be

linked to the most positive alliances and most effective problem solving, whereas high power assertion combined with negative affective involvement of both parents should be associated with the most negative alliances and poorest problem solving.

HYPOTHESES

1) Individual behaviors characteristic of Penman's cell 1 (aggress) of high power assertion-negative affective involvement will be strongly and negatively associated with the parenting alliance and quality of couple problem solving, and this will be especially true for mothers.

2) Individual behaviors characteristic of Penman's cell 3 (avoid) of low power assertion-negative affective involvement will be strongly and negatively associated with the parenting alliance and couple problem solving, and this will be especially true for mothers.

3) Individual behaviors characteristic of Penman's cell 2 (initiate) of high power assertion-positive affective involvement will be moderately and positively associated with the parenting alliance and couple problem solving. (Individual behaviors characteristic of Penman's cell 4 (oblige) of low power assertion-positive affective involvement are not expected to be related to the parenting alliance nor couple problem solving.)

4) The strongest predictor of the parenting alliance and problem solving will be the behaviors in cell 1, the second best predictor will be the behaviors in cell 3, and the third best predictor will be the behaviors in cell 2.

5) Mother dominance (as opposed to father dominance or egalitarianism) by itself will not be negatively associated with the parenting alliance and couple problem solving. However, when mother dominance is accompanied by mothers' negative affective involvement, this will be strongly and negatively related to the outcome variables.

8) The interaction of parents' destructive (cell 1) problem solving behaviors will be strongly and negatively associated with the outcome variables and will contribute significantly to the prediction of the outcome variables, above and beyond the contributions of either mothers' or fathers' destructive (cell 1) behaviors.

9) The tendency to respond destructively (behaviors falling within cells 1 and 3) rather than constructively (behaviors falling within cells 2 and 4) to partner's negative behaviors (cells 1 and 3) will be strongly and negatively associated with the parenting alliance and couple problem solving, especially for mothers.

10) Fathers' submission (cell 3 & 4 behaviors) to mothers' aggressing behaviors (cell 1) will be associated with more negative outcomes.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects were 52 families participating in the Family Factors in Children's Health (Otitis Media) Study at Michigan State University (Frank et al., 1986), a longitudinal study examining factors that may contribute to children's health and illnesses. Subjects were recruited from the Primary Care Clinic at Michigan State University run by the Department of Pediatrics in the College of Osteopathic Medicine. All families 1.) which had a child between the ages of 3 and 4 years old, 2.) which were intact at the time of contact, 3.) which had no more than 4 children, 4.) in which both parents had the equivalent of a high school education, 5.) in which at least one parent was presently employed, 6.) in which the target child did not have a serious chronic illness (i.e., asthma, cystic fibrosis, diabetes, cancer), were potential candidates for this study. Potential candidates were first identified by computer printouts which list all patient contacts and diagnoses for children who were currently between 3 and 4 years of age. Further screening and recruitment took place in a phone interview. If both parents agreed to participate in the study they were then visited in their home by project staff, who explained the study in greater detail, recruited them into the project, conducted a brief interview, distributed questionnaires, scheduled further contacts, and administered the Discipline Problems Task (DPT). The couples in this sample were married an average of 7 years with a range of 3 to 13 years. All families received $75 as monetary compensation for their participation.

Procedures

Each family participating in the study completed a number of questionnaires, behavioral observation sessions, and interviews (Frank, Brietzer, & Freeark, 1986). The data were collected throughout the course of an approximately 3 week contact schedule. The data were collected both in the family's home and at the Michigan State University Psychological Clinic, where videotaping of structured interactional tasks took place. Data were collected by a trained team of graduate and undergraduate students. Data collectors were blind as to the target child's health status.

The instruments that are of particular relevance to this study examine parents' views of their parenting behaviors and their parenting partnership with their spouse. In addition, this study examined the processes of problem solving and conflict resolution between parents during a behavioral interaction (the Discipline Problems Task).

The Parenting Alliance. The parenting alliance was assessed with the Family Experiences Questionnaire (FEQ) (Appendix A), a relatively new measure devised by Frank, Jacobson, & Hole (1988). Frank et al. (1988) developed and tested the FEQ on a sample of 760 parents with at least one child between the ages of 1 and 19 years old living in their home. A pool of 106 items describing the parenting alliance was generated from the interview protocols from 39 parents in the Frank et al. (1986) study. Parents used a four point scale (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree) to indicate how much each of the items described their parenting

relationship with their spouse. Frequently omitted items and items with little variability were then eliminated and the remaining 80 items were subjected to a principal components analysis using oblique rotation. A scree test indicated that four factors were useful to interpret. Items that had large loadings on one of the four factors and smaller loadings on the other three factors were used.

The parenting alliance was evaluated with two scales from the FEQ which assess Cohen & Weissman's (1984) description of the parenting alliance as characterized by parents' feelings of mutual respect and positive regard for each others' parenting abilities. Mothers' and fathers' scores will be examined independently, as well as jointly in an average score for each couple.

The General Positive Parenting Alliance (POSPA) scale includes 13 positively and 18 negatively keyed items. A high scores on this scale indicates that the respondent 1) respects their spouse's parenting abilities, 2) feels supported as a parent by their spouse, 3) believes that their spouse does his or her share of the parenting, and 4) feels that parenting has increased the extent of cohesiveness in the spousal subsystem. Frank et al. (1988) report that this scale is internally consistent (Chronbach's alpha $>$ .90); and test-retest reliability computed over a three week interval for a sample of 30 mothers and fathers was .86 (Frank et al., 1988). Alphas for the sample reported in Frank et al. (manuscript in preparation) (.96 for mothers and .94 for fathers) are comparable to those reported by Frank et al. (1988).

The Denigrated Spouse (DENIG) scale includes 6 positively and 4 negatively keyed items (e.g. "My spouse makes me look like the 'bad person' in the eyes of our

children," "My spouse makes me feel that I am the best possible parent for my children"). Frank et al. (1988) report that Chronbach's alpha for this scale was in the range of .83 to .91.

Two recent studies have demonstrated the construct validity of the general positive parenting alliance scale through its mediating effects on parent stress. In an investigation of child illness and parent stress, Frank et al. (1989b) examined the relationship between parents' perceptions of the parenting alliance, parent related stresses (e.g., feeling trapped by parenting, depression, low parenting confidence), child-related stresses (e.g., demandingness, moodiness, distractibility), and child illness. Parents' perceptions of the parenting alliance correlated significantly with parent-related stresses ($r = -.65$; $p < .001$) and child-related stresses ($r = -.44$; $p < .011$) for fathers, but only with child-related stress ($r = -.27$; $p < .05$) for mothers. In addition, Floyd's (1988) study of families with mentally handicapped children linked the parenting alliance directly and indirectly to optimal family functioning, via its buffering of stress and enhancement of marital quality.

The Discipline Problems Task (DPT). In a visit to the subject families' homes, parents individually completed a brief questionnaire (Appendix B) to respond to the question "How difficult is it for you and your spouse to agree on how and when to discipline (child's name)?" in part (A) of the DPT Questionnaire. Responses range from "rarely a problem" to "almost always a problem" (rarely a problem =1, sometimes a problem=2, often a problem=3, always a problem=4). Parents then independently listed in order of difficulty (most to least difficult) three examples

within the last few weeks when they had the most difficulty agreeing on how to discipline their (target) child in part (B) of the DPT.

After parents completed the questionnaire, the interviewer selected a topic from the discipline problems listed for them to discuss. The discipline problem selected was that which was rated most difficult by both parents (i.e., that which had the highest average severity rating). If there were no common discipline problems listed by both the mother and father, then the discipline problem rated as most difficult by the mother was chosen. The parents were then told the following:

> "Now I'd like the two of you to talk about how you might handle the following better as a couple: (restatement of problem). You have ten minutes to come to an agreement on how you will handle that problem in the future. I am going to record your discussion but I will leave the room so that you can talk more comfortably."

The interviewer then turned on the tape recorder and left the room for 10 minutes while the parents discussed the problem. In their study comparing direct and audio recorded observations of parent-child interactions, Hansen, Tisdelle, & O'Dell (1985) found little variance due to differences between the two methods of observation, except for behavior categories which were primarily nonverbal. Thus, audio recorded observation proved cost-effective, reliable, and comparable to direct observation.

Preparation and Coding of the DPT (Appendix C). Each of the DPT discussions were transcribed from the audiotapes. Transcriptions were then segmented according to Penman's (1980) definition of coding units as follows: "there

may be more than one unit per utterance, a change in unit being signified by a change of (a) information or meaning, (b) intonation, and/or (c) syntax" (p. 136).

Once the speech units were divided on the transcripts, one of two raters assigned each speech unit to a Latent category. A few adaptations were made to Penman's system in accordance with the suggestions made by Hakim-Larson and Hobart (1987), and in order to better suit our purposes in this study. First, a default category was used (utterance-UT) for those segmented utterances which were not meaningfully scorable according to Penman's categories (e.g., "Hmmmm...well"). This also includes all utterances which coders were unable to transcribe with confidence, due to mumbling, background noise, interruptions, etc. Second, a "laugh" (LA) category was created to include all utterances which consist of laughing without any other codable utterance. This included nonreciprocated laughter and nervous laughter. This category excludes any instances of shared laughter which was coded as "collaborate" as specified by Penman's (1980) coding manual. Both default categories were excluded from all but the sequential data analyses. Finally, to alleviate confusion in category assignment when dual classification seemed possible, a prioritized ordering of the categories was used so that the negative categories received the highest priority followed by the positive, and then the more neutral categories (Hakim-Larson & Hobart, 1987). Because coding from both the tape and the transcript has been found to be a more reliable procedure (Hakim-Larson & Hobart, 1987; Penman, 1980), the raters independently coded the segmented transcripts that they read while listening to the tapes.

Proportions based on frequencies of a particular category of response divided by total number of utterances were calculated for each latent category for each individual. In addition, proportion frequencies were calculated for each of Penman's four cells. Each category or type of response was also weighted for power assertion and affective involvement, based on its relative position along the dimension axes. For example, "reject" received a power assertion score of 4 and an involvement score of 1, whereas "share" received a power assertion score of 4 and an involvement score of 4. All weighted categories were then summed and divided by the individual's total number of utterances to get a total weighted power assertion score and a total weighted affective involvement score. These separate scores allowed for the analysis of the unique and shared contributions of power assertion and affective involvement to the parenting alliance and problem solving.

The Quality of Parental Problem Solving. Two problem solving scores were then assigned to the protocols after reading them through thoroughly. These scores included: a) type of outcome and b) quality of the solution. Criteria for each rating are shown in Figure 5. The type of outcome score is based on the distinctions made by Vuchinich, Emery, & Cassidy (in press). The quality of solution score was developed for this study, based in part on clinical observation and on the problem solving literature. This score required that a the rater make a judgement of how likely the solution was to solve the problem, and of how developmentally appropriate the solution was, given the age and psychosocial maturity of the child.

Figure 5. Problem Solving Scores

a) Type of Outcome

3= Compromise: Each parent gives in a little to accept a position that falls between the extremes in the conflict.

2= Submission: One parent gives in to the other.

1= Standoff: There is no resolution to the conflict.

1= Withdrawal: One parent refuses to continue to talk or withdraws from the discussion (physically or emotionally).

b) Quality of the Solution

4= Solution likely to resolve the problem and developmentally appropriate.

3= Solution somewhat likely to resolve or alleviate the problem and mostly developmentally appropriate.

2= Solution somewhat unlikely to resolve problem, e.g., a solution which proposes to "let child grow out of it", and/or not very appropriate.

1= No solution proposed.

Finally, a problem solving total score was assigned by adding the two scores above (i.e., total= outcome + quality).

Inter-rater Reliability

Segmenting: The investigator divided all 52 transcribed protocols into speech units based on Penman's (1980) criteria. An undergraduate psychology major divided a randomly selected subset of 15% of the protocols into speech units to check the reliability of the primary segmenter. Segmenting reliability was computed using the following formula suggested by Hakim-Larson and Hobart (1987): number of perfect agreements/one-half the sum of Rater A's total segments plus Rater B's total segments. Inter-rater agreement on this subset of 8 protocols was 85%.

Coding: The investigator and a second psychology graduate student used

Penman's (1980) latent level coding system to code all speech units. A randomly selected subset of protocols was used for training purposes until reliability reached adequate levels (Cohen's, 1960, Kappa $>.70$), as suggested by Dorsey, Nelson, and Hayes (1986) and Landis & Koch (1977). The two raters then independently coded another randomly selected subset of 6 protocols. Inter-rater agreement on this subset was 75% (Kappa=.71). After establishing adequate reliability, the investigator coded all of the remaining protocols, while the second graduate student coded every fifth protocol (10% of all protocols) to check the reliability of the first coder. Periodic meetings were held after coding each set of 5 reliability protocols to prevent observer drift. Inter-rater agreement on this subset of 10 protocols was 80% (Kappa=.77).

Problem Solving Quality and Outcome: The investigator also rated all subjects on a scale of 1 to 3 for the type of outcome and on a scale of 1 to 4 for quality of the solution arrived at by each couple at the end of the discussion period. In addition, the second rater above scored a randomly selected subset of 18 protocols on these dimensions to check the reliability of the first coder. Correlations indicative of inter-rater agreement were .74 ($p<.001$) for problem solving outcome and .73 ($p<.001$) for quality of the solution.

Results

General findings

As in Frank et al.'s (unpublished manuscript) prior sample, paired t-tests revealed significant differences in fathers' and mothers' perceptions of the parenting alliance, with fathers reporting more positive alliances than mothers ($t(104)=5.18$; $p<.001$). Fathers and mothers did not differ in their feelings of denigration, nor did they differ significantly in their use of each category of problem solving behavior. In addition, there were no significant differences between fathers and mothers in their overall power assertion or affective involvement (see Table 1).

The problem solving quality and outcome scores were moderately correlated ($r=.52$, $p<.001$). In addition, the problem solving outcome score was correlated with mothers' perceptions of the parenting alliance ($r=.30$, $p<.05$). No other significant relationships were found between the parenting alliance and the problem solving outcome variables. Pearson correlations also demonstrated several significant associations among the behavior categories both within persons and couples (see Table 2). Positive correlations between fathers' aggressing (cell 1) and mothers' aggressing ($r=.54$, $p<.001$), fathers' aggressing and mothers' avoiding (cell 3)($r=.49$, $p<.01$), and fathers' avoiding and mothers' aggressing ($r=.39$, $p<.01$) lend some support to the reciprocity of negative affect hypothesis. Fathers' avoiding and mothers' avoiding behaviors were not significantly correlated however. An additional pattern was that when one partner responded negatively, the other was also less positive. In

particular, mothers' aggressing behaviors were negatively correlated with fathers' obliging (cell 4) behaviors (r=-.35, p<.05). In addition, fathers' aggressing and avoiding behaviors were both negatively correlated with mothers' initiating (cell 2) behaviors (r=-.54, p<.05 and r=-.33, p<.05, respectively). However, mothers' negative behaviors were not significantly correlated with any of fathers' initiating behaviors. Finally, mothers' and fathers' overall affective involvement was significantly correlated ($r(52)$=.31, p <.05), whereas parents' overall power assertion was not related.

Table 1.

Fathers' and Mothers' Mean Proportion Scores for the Interaction Variables

Interaction Variables		Fathers (N=52)	Mothers (N=52)
Aggress (Cell 1)			
	M	.08	.09
	SD	.14	.13
Initiate (Cell 2)			
	M	.56	.56
	SD	.19	.19
Avoid (Cell 3)			
	M	.03	.01
	SD	.07	.03
Oblige (Cell 4)			
	M	.21	.21
	SD	.14	.13
Total Involvement			
	M	2.80	2.71
	SD	.50	.42
Total Power			
	M	2.71	2.67
	SD	.71	.44

Table 2. Univariate Correlations for Behavior Categories

	Fathers (N=52)				Mothers (N=52)			
	Aggress	Initiate	Avoid	Oblige	Aggress	Initiate	Avoid	Oblige
Fathers								
Aggress		-.68***	.38**	-.36**	.54***	-.34*	.49**	-.04
Initiate			-.39**	-.18	-.19	.14	-.24	-.09
Avoid				-.24	.39**	-.33*	.12	.10
Oblige					-.35*	.23	-.10	.21
Mothers								
Aggress						-.54***	.24	-.23
Initiate							-.29*	-.48***
Avoid								.04
Oblige								

Note: Aggress= Cell 1 behaviors, Initiate= Cell 2 behaviors, Avoid= Cell 3 behaviors, Oblige= Cell 4 behaviors.

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001, two-tailed tests.

Relation between problem solving behaviors and outcome variables

Correlations showing the relationships between fathers' and mothers' problem solving behaviors on the one hand, and the problem solving and parenting alliance outcome variables on the other hand, are shown in Table 3. For fathers, aggressing, avoiding, and obliging behaviors were significantly correlated with the problem solving sum and type of problem solving outcome variables. In addition, fathers' avoiding and obliging behaviors were related to the quality of the solution. For mothers, aggressing and initiating were significantly correlated with each of the problem solving outcome variables.

Fathers' initiating behaviors correlated significantly with only one of the parenting alliance variables (a negative correlation with overall denigration), and mothers' aggressing behaviors were significantly and negatively correlated with the combined general parenting alliance score. In addition, both mothers' aggressing and initiating behaviors correlated significantly with mothers' feelings about the alliance.

Overall, significant correlations between the various types of problem solving behaviors and the outcome variables were very close in magnitude. Hence, the ordering hypothesis was not supported. For this reason the hierarchical analysis which was planned to assess the contribution of weaker relationships after controlling for stronger ones was deemed inappropriate. Rather, partial correlations, performed separately for mothers and fathers, assessed whether each of the significant correlates independently related to the outcome variables after controlling for all other significant correlates (see Table 4).

Table 3. Univariate Correlations for Behaviors and Outcome Variables

	Fathers' Behaviors				Mothers' Behaviors			
	Aggress	Initiate	Avoid	Oblige	Aggress	Initiate	Avoid	Oblige
Problem Solving Scores								
Total	-.42**	.21	-.46***	.43**	-.57***	.58***	-.14	.07
Outcome	-.47***	.26	-.43***	.41**	-.58***	.60***	-.14	.00
Quality	-.25	.11	-.36**	.34*	-.41**	.42**	-.11	.12
Parenting Alliance Scores								
Gen PA	-.22	.24	-.05	-.06	-.39**	.23	-.12	.04
Denig	.09	-.27*	.05	.24	.14	-.03	.15	.05
F Gen PA	-.13	.18	-.05	-.04	-.21	.03	.09	.08
M Gen PA	-.22	.21	-.03	-.05	-.41**	.33*	-.26	-.01
F Denig	.12	-.18	.10	.17	.17	.01	.04	.00
M Denig	.00	-.24	-.05	.19	.02	-.05	.19	.08

Note: Problem Solving Total= Mean (Outcome + Quality of Solution)

Gen PA= Mean General Parenting Alliance Score

Denig= Mean Denigration Score

F Gen PA= Father's General Parenting Alliance Score

M Gen PA= Mother's General Parenting Alliance Score

F Denig= Father's Denigration Score

M Denig= Mother's Denigration Score

N=52 for all pairwise correlations.
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001, two-tailed tests.

Table 4. Partial Correlations for Behaviors and Problem Solving Variables

	Fathers' Behaviors			Mothers' Behaviors	
	Aggress	Avoid	Oblige	Aggress	Initiate
Problem Solving Scores					
Total	$-.21_a$	$-.34^*_b$	$.31^*_c$	$-.37^{**}_d$	$.40^{**}_e$
Outcome	$-.30^*_a$	$-.30^*_b$	$.27_c$	$-.38^{**}_d$	$.42^{**}_e$
Quality	$-.05_a$	$-.28_b$	$.25_c$	$-.24_d$	$.26_e$

Note: $_a$= controlling for Avoid & Oblige

$_b$= controlling for Aggress & Oblige

$_c$= controlling for Aggress & Avoid

$_d$= controlling for Initiate

$_e$= controlling for Aggress

N= 52 for all pairwise correlations

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001, two-tailed tests.

For fathers, avoiding behaviors were negatively and obliging behaviors were positively and independently correlated with the problem solving total score. In addition, fathers' avoiding and aggressing behaviors were independently and negatively associated with the problem solving outcome. However, neither avoiding nor obliging behaviors correlated independently with the quality of the solution after partialling out the effects due to each other.

For mothers, the partial correlations indicated that aggressing and initiating behaviors both accounted for significant variance in the problem solving scores, whereas only mothers' aggressing behaviors accounted for significant variance in mothers' perceptions of the parenting alliance. Both aggressing and initiating behaviors proved to independently correlate with both the problem solving total and type of outcome. Whereas aggressing behaviors had more negative problem solving implications, initiating behaviors had more positive problem solving implications. Neither aggressing nor initiating behaviors continued to make independent contributions to the quality of the solution after controlling for the effects due to each other. Finally, after partialling out the effects of initiating behaviors, aggressing behaviors were still independently associated with less positive reports of mothers' parenting alliance. However, initiating behaviors no longer significantly correlated with mothers' parenting alliance after controlling for aggressing behaviors.

In order to determine the relative contributions that fathers' versus mothers' behaviors made to the outcome measures, two sets of hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed. In the first regression analysis, all of the fathers' behaviors

were entered simultaneously in the first step. Then, all of the mothers' behaviors were entered simultaneously in the second step of the analysis. In the second regression analysis, all of the mothers' behaviors were entered in the first step, followed by all of the fathers' behaviors in the second step. As can be seen in Table 5, after controlling for the variance due to fathers' behaviors, mothers' behaviors still predicted a significant amount of variance in all of the problem solving scores and in mothers' perceptions of the parenting alliance. However, after removing the variance due to mothers' behaviors, fathers' behaviors failed to significantly account for any additional variance in the problem solving variables. Fathers' behaviors however, were associated with mothers' feelings of denigration (which mothers' behaviors did not predict).

Table 5.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses Comparing Fathers' and Mothers' Contributions to the Outcome Variables

		Outcomes (R^2/ch)				
Step	Predictors	PS TOT	PS OUT	PS QUAL	M Gen PA	M Denig
1.	Fathers' behaviors	.35***	.35***	.20*	.07	.12
2.	Mothers' behaviors	.25***	.23***	.17*	.24	*.13
1.	Mothers' behaviors	.51***	.49***	.31**	.21*	.04
2.	Fathers' behaviors	.09	.09	.06	.10	.21*

Note:

PS TOT= Problem Solving Total Score (Outcome + Quality of Solution)

PS OUT= Type of outcome

PS QUAL= Quality of the solution

M Gen PA= Mothers' general parenting alliance score

M Denig= Mothers' denigration score

Note: Neither fathers' nor mothers' behaviors significantly predicted the variance in any of the other parenting alliance variables (general parenting alliance, general denigration, fathers' parenting alliance, fathers' denigration).
*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

The effects of maternal dominance

Multiple regression analyses were also used to test the hypothesis that mother dominance would be particularly detrimental when combined with negative affective involvement. Differences in overall power assertion within couples were calculated from mothers' and fathers' weighted power scores (i.e., mother's minus father's weighted power score). Multiple regressions were then performed in which the power difference scores, mothers' weighted overall involvement score, and the interaction of the two were regressed onto the problem solving and parenting alliance scores. The hypothesis was not consistent with the data in that none of the interaction effects were statistically significant. There were some notable main effects however. Firstly, greater overall affective involvement on the part of the mother was associated with better problem solving outcomes (betas for problem solving sum, type of outcome, and quality of the solution were .72, .64, and .60, respectively; p's < 001.). Secondly, mother dominance tended to be associated with parents' reports of being more denigrated by each other (B= .30, p=.058).

Because the relationships between mother-father power differences and the outcome variables could be curvilinear in nature, the distribution of power difference scores was divided into three groups. A power difference score of zero was considered to be indicative of an egalitarian power structure (the mean power difference score for this sample was -.04 and the standard deviation was .57). The distribution of power difference scores was thus divided into the following three groups : father dominant (difference scores < -.50), egalitarian (-.50 < difference

scores < +.50), and mother dominant (difference scores > +.50). Approximately 63% (N=33) of all subjects fell into the egalitarian group, while the rest of the subjects were about equally distributed in the upper and lower quartiles (father dominant; N=9 and mother dominant; N=10). A series of one-way analyses of variance were then executed to test for differences between the three groups in the outcome measures. Although most of the F-values were not significant at conventional levels, a number were significant at at least the $p < .100$ level. Because between-group differences were expected from a priori hypotheses, it was deemed reasonable to interpret these between-group differences when significant at the $p < .05$ level, even though the overall F-test might not be significant.

According to these criteria, significant between-group differences were found for each of the problem solving variables and for the denigration variable (individual scores for mothers' and fathers' perceptions of denigration were in the same direction) (see Tables 6 & 7). The results are partly consistent with the hypotheses: egalitarian power distributions were associated with the most positive problem solving outcomes and father dominant distributions were associated with the poorest problem solving outcomes. Outcomes associated with mother dominant patterns were in between and did not differ from the other two. In addition, the greater mothers' power relative to fathers', the more denigrated both parents reported feeling in the parenting alliance, whereas the greater fathers' relative power, the less denigrated both parents reported feeling. Feelings of denigration in egalitarian couples were in between those of mother- and father-dominant couples and were not significantly different from the

two. This pattern is similar for both parents' reports of denigration. Taken together, these results suggest a competing process in which assertive behaviors on the part of the father are associated with less effective couple problem solving (especially in comparison to an egalitarian pattern), but also with lesser feelings of denigration for both parents (especially in comparison to a pattern of mother dominance).

The cumulative effects of mothers' and fathers' aggressing (cell 1) behaviors

A series of regression analyses was performed in which the effects of the interaction (cross products) between mothers' and fathers' aggressing behaviors on the problem solving outcomes and parenting alliance variables were tested after controlling for the main effects. These analyses resulted in non-significant interaction terms. Hence, the hypothesis that the cumulative effect of parents' aggressing behaviors would be especially detrimental to the outcome variables (beyond the individual effects of either parent's aggressing behaviors) was not supported.

Table 6.

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) for Power Differences and Problem Solving Variables

		Problem Solving Variables					
		Total		Outcome		Quality	
Power Difference	N	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Father > Mother	9	-1.21[b]	1.40	2.11[b]	.78	2.33[b]	.87
Father = Mother	33	.34[a]	1.58	2.64[a]	.65	3.09[a]	.84
Father < Mother	10	-.02[a,b]	2.17	2.60[a,b]	.70	2.80[a,b]	1.2
F		2.99[t]		2.13		2.43[t]	

Note: Column means with different superscripts (a,b,c) are significantly different from one another at the .05 level.

t=trend at $p < .05$.

*$p < .05$

Table 7.

One-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) for Power Differences and Parenting Alliance Variables

		Parenting Alliance Variables			
		Gen PA		Denig	
Power Difference	N	M	SD	M	SD
Father > Mother	9	3.21	.25	1.58[b]	.24
Father = Mother	33	3.20	.27	1.72[a,b]	.27
Father < Mother	10	3.03	.24	1.90[a]	.20
F		1.67		3.95*	

Note: Column means with different superscripts (a,b) are significantly different from one another at the .05 level.

t=trend at $p < .05$.

*$p < .05$

Gen PA= Mean general parenting alliance score.

Denig= Mean denigration score.

Reciprocation of negative problem solving behaviors

Reciprocation of a partner's negative behaviors was expected to be strongly and negatively correlated with positive problem solving outcomes and positive feelings about the parenting alliance. It was additionally expected that when mothers reciprocate fathers' negative behaviors, this would have more detrimental effects on the outcome variables than when fathers reciprocate mothers' negative behaviors. To test this hypothesis, all mothers' and fathers' behaviors were collapsed into two categories: positive and negative. Positive behaviors consisted of initiating and obliging (cell 2 and 4) behaviors, while negative behaviors included aggressing and avoiding (cell 1 and 3) behaviors. Pairs of behavior codes (mother negative-father negative; father negative-mother negative) were used to summarize the patterned sequences obtained from the problem solving task. Sequential analyses produced measures of lagged dependency (z scores) for each couple at the first lag, which were then correlated (using Pearson correlations) with the outcome variables. The z statistics indicate the influence of the first behavior on the second, or stated otherwise, "the degree to which prediction of the second behavior is improved by knowledge of the first behavior" (Phelps & Slater, 1985, p. 689). Because of the nature of the program used to analyze the sequential data (Bakeman, 1985), z-scores are not assigned when either the antecedent or consequent behavior never occurs.

The data were partially consistent with the hypothesis. A pattern in which mothers' negative behaviors followed fathers' negative behaviors was associated with a poorer parenting alliance (as reported by both parents combined) ($r(21)=-.44$,

$p < .05$), and greater feelings of denigration ($r(21) = .47$, $p < .05$), (findings for fathers' and mothers' individual parenting alliance and denigration scores were in the same direction as the combined scores). In contrast, fathers' negative behaviors following mothers' negative behaviors ($N = 22$) did not significantly relate to any of the parenting alliance outcome variables. Sequences of lagged behaviors were not associated with any of the problem solving outcomes for either fathers or mothers.

Fathers' submission to mothers' aggressing (cell 1) behaviors

To assess the effects of fathers' submitting with avoiding or obliging behaviors to mothers' aggressing behaviors, fathers' avoiding and obliging behaviors were combined into one behavior category. A sequential analytic procedure (as explained above) was employed to derive a z-score for lag one for the mother aggress-father submit pair of behaviors for each couple. The z scores were then correlated with the outcome variables using Pearson correlations. The hypothesis that fathers' submitting to mothers' negative power assertions would be associated with poorer outcomes proved inconsistent with the data. Although this analysis was based on 28 couples, none of the correlations were significant. Thus, fathers' taking a less powerful role in response to mothers' negative power assertions did not prove detrimental nor beneficial in regard to the parenting alliance scores or problem solving outcomes.

Discussion

Relation between problem solving behaviors and outcome variables

In general, the results of this study provide some support for the underlying assumption that parents' problem solving behaviors are related to the outcomes of their interactions and to their perceptions of the parenting alliance. However, univariate correlations indicated that the significant correlations between the problem solving behaviors and outcome variables were relatively similar. Hence, the ordering hypothesis was not supported by the data. Partial correlations, performed to assess the independent relationships of each problem solving behavior with the outcome variables, demonstrated that the predictive power of each behavior category varied with the sex of the parent and with the individual outcome variable.

For mothers, both initiating and aggressing behaviors were independently correlated with the problem solving sum and outcome variables. However, only mothers' aggressing behaviors independent related to mothers' perceptions of the alliance. Both of these predictive behaviors have high power assertion in common. Thus, it appears that the most important behaviors for mothers are those which involve a significant assertion of power.

For fathers, avoiding and obliging behaviors, and avoiding and aggressing behaviors were independently correlated with the problem solving sum and outcome scores, respectively. Fathers' initiating behaviors however, failed to independently relate to the outcome variables.

Mothers' versus fathers' behaviors

Overall, these findings support the general hypothesis that mothers' behaviors have more salient implications for parental problem solving outcomes and the parenting alliance than fathers' behaviors. Although most of the conflict resolution literature stresses the importance of mothers' negative problem solving behaviors, this data indicates that in general mothers' behaviors (both positive and negative) make more independent contributions to problem solving and parental relationship outcomes than fathers' behaviors.

First, after controlling for all of fathers' problem solving behaviors, mothers' behaviors still predicted a significant amount of the variance in all of the problem solving outcome scores and in mothers' perceptions of the parenting alliance. However, after controlling for all of mothers' problem solving behaviors, fathers' behaviors did not account for any additional variance in the outcome variables, except for mothers' feelings of denigration. Second, the parenting alliance was mostly related to mothers' behaviors. Overall, mothers' problem solving behaviors were more strongly correlated with the parenting alliance than fathers' behaviors. Third, sequential analyses demonstrated that mothers' reciprocation of fathers' destructive behaviors was significantly related to the parents' overall perceptions of the parenting alliance and feelings of denigration. In contrast, fathers' reciprocation of mothers' negative problem solving behaviors failed to significantly relate to any of the outcome variables. Fourth, father dominance was associated with the poorest problem solving outcomes, whereas the best outcomes were associated with egalitarianism.

Furthermore, mother dominance was associated with problem solving outcomes which did not differ from and were more similar to those associated with egalitarianism. Thus, it appears that mothers' behaviors in general are more strongly related to positive outcomes than fathers' behaviors. The finding that mothers' reciprocity of fathers' destructive behaviors was related to reports of a poorer alliance and greater feelings of denigration is consistent with the results of Levenson & Gottman (1983; 1985) and Gottman & Levenson (1986). These investigators found a pattern in which a decline in marital satisfaction was associated with greater reciprocity of the husband's negative affect by the wife and less reciprocity of the wife's negative affect by the husband. They suggest that these results may be indicative of a vicious cycle in which dissatisfaction causes husbands and wives to produce those behaviors which lead to further dissatisfaction --"emotional withdrawal on the part of the husband, making the wife less satisfied; increased affect and negative affect reciprocity on the part of the wife, making the husband less satisfied" (Levenson & Gottman, 1985; p. 91). A similar cycle may be related to parents' behaviors and their feelings about the parenting alliance. When mothers reciprocate father's negative behaviors, fathers are more likely to withdraw from active involvement in parenting, which in turn is likely to lead to greater negative reciprocity on the part of the mother, and greater mutual feelings of denigration and reports of a poor alliance.

Alternatively these data are inconsistent with the hypothesis that negative behaviors would be more strongly associated with the outcome variables than positive behaviors, and that destructive behaviors would be especially detrimental when

utilized by mothers. This discrepancy may be due to differences in the samples studied. This sample of parents is a normal (i.e., non-clinical) one in which destructive behaviors are relatively infrequent. In contrast, couples studied in the conflict resolution investigations typically reported in the literature usually include distressed as well as nondistressed couples. Hence, there is a greater range and frequency of occurrence of negative affect in these samples.

Mother dominance

Failure to find significant maternal dominance X maternal affective involvement interactions was unexpected. Inferences made from previous studies in the conflict resolution literature suggest that it is not mother dominance in itself which is necessarily related to negative outcomes, but rather mother dominance when paired with negative affect. Perhaps it is more difficult to demonstrate these effects in a normal sample where both parents are relatively equal in power and positive affect is far more prevalent than mother dominance and negative affect. What these data did reveal however, was that egalitarianism was associated with better problem solving outcomes, especially in comparison to father dominance. In addition, a pattern emerged in which the greater fathers' power relative to mothers', the more both parents reported a positive alliance and less denigration. These results indicate that for this sample, a tension exists in which a more traditional (husband dominant) distribution of power was more facilitative of the positive valuing of each partner's parenting role and skills, but detrimental to effective problem solving. Hence, while parents appear to be able to maintain more positive feelings about their alliance in

father dominant systems, the cost is less effective parental problem solving.

These data are only partly consistent with results obtained in Kolb & Straus' (1974) study linking marital power and marital happiness with problem solving ability. These authors found that husband dominant families were highest in marital happiness, with no differences in marital satisfaction between more egalitarian or wife dominant couples. However, the association between problem solving ability and mother dominance differs in Kolb & Straus' (1974) and the current sample. In the present study, mother dominance was associated with more positive problem solving outcomes than father dominance, whereas wife dominant couples in the Kolb & Straus sample had relatively poorer problem solving skills than husband dominant couples. These differences in problem solving ability and power distribution may be in part due to the nature of the problem being resolved. Perhaps it is especially important for mothers to take a more active role in problem solving issues related to parenting, such as in the discipline problem task utilized in this study. Because mothers still spend more time with their children than fathers, it is most likely the mothers who have more information related to and more positive suggestions for resolving discipline problems. On the other hand, for problems related more to general family functioning (e.g., figuring out how to play a game in the Kolb & Straus study), it may be important for families to assume a more traditional (father dominant) power structure. Kolb & Straus suggest a number of factors which may explain the greater marital happiness associated with husband dominance, including the fact that "despite the evolving equalitarian family values which they have presumably adopted, most

Americans seem to have remained committed to a hierarchical (though democratic) family system" (p. 765). The present data diverge from these results in that the majority of couples in this sample were egalitarian rather than father dominant. This may be due to numerous societal changes which have occurred in the 16 years since the publication of the Kolb & Straus study (e.g., more women working outside the home and the continued struggle for equal rights). The interaction pattern characteristic of these egalitarian families often took the form of mothers taking an initiating role while fathers largely facilitated mothers' discussion through a non-avoiding and active listening role.

However, those couples that did adopt a father dominant system in this study did have more positive feelings about the parenting alliance, but were also least effective in problem solving. Thus, it appears that the price of maintaining a more traditional (father dominant) power structure is less positive problem solving of parenting issues. There are two alternative ways of interpreting these data in father dominant families. First, mothers in a sense may be allowing fathers to take the lead, as indicated by Beitel's (1989) "mother as gate-keeper" hypothesis. Similarly, Clarke-Stewart (1978) suggests that mothers may have the tendency to let fathers "take center stage" in certain aspects of parent-child interactions (especially play). A second interpretation of these findings is that those fathers who predominate the discipline discussion may be fathers who are truly more actively involved in parenting. This is congruent with the more positive parenting alliances reported by both parents in father dominant couples.

Finally, the hypothesis that fathers' submitting (obliging or avoiding) to mothers' aggressing behaviors would be associated with poorer outcomes was not supported by the data. Thus, fathers' submission to mothers' aggressing proved neither beneficial nor detrimental to the outcomes. As discussed above, the overall power difference between mothers and fathers is much more important to the outcomes than this single response pattern. Altogether, these results indicate that fathers' assertive behaviors may serve as a double-edged sword, in that they are associated with more positive feelings about the parenting alliance and less positive problem solving. This also suggests that fathers may not be as effective when they do lead in solving parenting problems, although both parents appear to be comfortable with this more traditional arrangement. This highlights the importance of mothers' taking an active and equally powerful role in problem solving, yet in a manner which does not threaten fathers' sense of leadership, and perhaps the couples' sense of security. It also underscores the importance of enhancing fathers' problem solving skills.

Gender differences in behavioral repertoires

There were no significant differences in the behaviors of mothers and fathers during the problem solving task utilized in this study. In addition, mothers and fathers did not differ in their overall affective involvement or assertion of power in the discussion. Both mothers and fathers employed initiating (cell 2) behaviors most frequently, followed by obliging (cell 4) behaviors. Behaviors which were used less frequently were aggressing (cell 1) and avoiding (cell 3).

The similarity in behaviors exhibited by mothers and fathers in the discussion task is consistent with Penman's (1980) data. He found that initiating behaviors (cell 2) were most frequently used in all dyads, and that obliging behaviors (cell 4) also comprised a large proportion of all speech units. Penman (1980) also found few intra- or inter-couple differences in communication styles. This similarity between mothers' and fathers' use of problem solving behaviors is inconsistent with Rusbult et al.'s (1986) and Gottman & Levenson's (1986) data which revealed clear gender differences in communication styles. In the Rusbult at al. (1986) study, women had a greater tendency to use more constructive problem solving behaviors than men (cells 2 and 4) and men used more "neglectful" (cell 3) behaviors. Similarly, according to Gottman & Levenson's (1986) escape conditioning model, men avoid situations associated with high autonomic nervous system arousal by withdrawing.

The discrepancy in gender differences found between the Rusbult et al. (1986) and Gottman & Levenson (1986) data on the one hand, and Penman's (1980) and the present data on the other hand, may be due to differences in the samples studied and in the modes of measurement utilized. First, the Rusbult et al. (1986) sample consisted of college student dating couples, whereas Penman's and the current sample both consisted of couples who had a more extensive relationship history (in the former, couples had lived together at least a year; in the latter, parents had been married an average of 7 years). Gottman & Levenson (1986) fail to report on marriage length in their sample (Levenson & Gottman, 1983; 1985). Thus, the lack of gender differences in the behavior of Penman's and the present nonclincial samples

may be due to a growing similarity in response style over time in the relationship, as well as a greater tendency to reciprocate similar problem solving behaviors. The significant and positive intra-couple correlations in problem solving behaviors lends support to this explanation. Belsky, Gilstrap, and Rovine (1984) found comparable results in their sample of new parents, in that differences in parental behaviors declined over time.

Another reason for the disparate results from the different samples may be due to the fact that the Rusbult et al. (1986) data was gathered by self-report whereas Penman's and the present study used direct behavioral observation. Therefore, these gender differences may in part be due to a tendency for subjects to report that they behave in a manner that is inconsistent with the way they actually behave. In addition, when completing self-report measures, subjects may be responding to cultural stereotypes. In this case, males might feel greater liberty than women to report that they behave negatively toward their partners, as women have historically taken the more affiliative role.

Finally, Gottman & Levenson (1986) report on longitudinal data from a sample of distressed and non-distressed couples followed for 3 years (Levenson & Gottman, 1983; 1985). Gender differences in this sample are primarily examined in terms of declining marital satisfaction over time, rather than separately for satisfied and dissatisfied couples. Therefore, it is likely that some of these differences are due to the greater negative affect experienced by distressed couples, and the differential responses that high levels of affective arousal elicit in men and women.

Research Limitations and Future Directions

One obvious limitation of this study is its cross-sectional and correlational design which render it unable to address the direction of causality between parents' perceptions of their parenting alliance and the behaviors they exhibit in their interactions together. It seems reasonable, however, to speculate that the relationships between parents' behaviors, the outcomes of their behaviors, and their feelings about the parenting alliance are reciprocal. In addition, other factors in the etiology of parental behavior patterns and perceptions of their parenting relationship remain to be clarified.

Another weakness of this data is that the raters of the problem solving scores also assigned the behavioral codes to the speech units, and therefore may have been somewhat biased by their knowledge of the behavioral codes. Caution was taken however, to assign the behavioral codes and problem solving scores at two different points in time. In addition, the different patterns of correlations (e.g., the greater strength of mothers' versus fathers' behaviors in predicting the outcomes) are unlikely to be merely the artifact of rater bias.

One final possible limitation of this data is related to the sequential analytic program used to determine the z-scores for lagged events (Bakeman, 1985). Where either an antecedent or a consequent event never occur in the sequence of behaviors, a missing value is assigned to the z-score for that sequence. Hence, this may have reduced or in some other way altered the correlations between the existing z-scores and the outcome variables by dropping participants exhibiting the antecedent but not

the consequent behavior (i.e., those where the consequence has a 0 probability of occurrence).

This work has a number of strengths also worth noting. First, it includes multiple modes of measurement--both self-report and behavioral observation. The behavioral interaction was one which was personally relevant to the subjects, and hence fairly likely to evoke affective involvement. It was also conducted in the privacy of the subjects' homes, and thus less likely to be influenced by observer effects. In addition, the behavioral data lend support to the construct validity of the self-report measure used to assess the parenting alliance. For example, mothers' destructive problem solving behaviors in general were negatively related to the parenting alliance, whereas their constructive behaviors in general were positively related to the parenting alliance. In addition, mothers' reciprocity of fathers' destructive behaviors was associated with weaker parenting alliances and with parents' feelings of denigration.

Another strength of this study is the use of categorical and sequential data in the analyses which permits the assessment of different aspects of the behavioral interaction. In addition, the sample is one in which the parenting alliance is especially salient and more differentiated from the marital relationship than in older couples. Thus, self-report measures assessing perceptions of the parenting alliance rather than the marital relationship may be more relevant when studying a discussion involving parenting issues. However, future studies need to compare parents' perceptions of the parenting alliance and marital adjustment with observed

interactions.

Future research should also include longitudinal studies aimed at examining more closely the directions of causality between parents' perceptions and their behaviors. In addition, longitudinal data need to address how a positive parenting alliance develops early in the family life cycle, and how it is maintained. The research should also be extended to include more heterogeneous samples of parents including those with a lower socioeconomic background as well as clinic populations with more "dysfunctional" parenting alliances so that the interparental behaviors distinguishing a more from a less positive alliance may be more clearly defined. This will lead us toward a greater understanding of how one might prevent difficulties in the alliance and what interventions might be effective in enhancing weaker alliances.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

THE FAMILY EXPERIENCES QUESTIONNAIRE

INSTRUCTIONS: Using the scale described below circle the letter(s) that indicate how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

SD= Strongly Disagree D= Disagree A= Agree SA= Strongly Agree

Example item:

Ex: My spouse and I like to play baseball. SD D A SA

The circle around the D shows that you DISAGREE with this statement. If you STRONGLY DISAGREE you would circle the SD, if you AGREE you would circle the A, and if you STRONGLY AGREE you would circle SA.

Now complete each of the following items in the same way:

1. My spouse and I are as well adjusted as any two persons in this world can be. SD D A SA

2. I am not pleased with the personality characteristics and the personal habits of my spouse. SD D A SA

3. I often overreact when my child misbehaves. SD D A SA

4. I live for my children. SD D A SA

5. Parenting has brought my spouse and me closer together. SD D A SA

6. My spouse tries to have the last word in how we raise our children. SD D A SA

7. I want my children to behave in public so that people will know that I am a good parent. SD D A SA

8. I know that I am doing a good job as a parent. SD D A SA

9. Having children makes me feel like I am contributing to the future of society. SD D A SA

10. As a parent, I never stop enjoying seeing the world through my children's eyes. SD D A SA

11. I try to give my children direction but mostly I let them grow by themselves. SD D A SA

12. Being a parent makes me feel more important because I know that I am the center of someone's world. SD D A SA

13. My spouse and I understand each other completely. SD D A SA

14. Being a parent turned out not to be as difficult as I thought it would be.	SD	D	A	SA
15. My spouse thinks that I am a bad influence on the children.	SD	D	A	SA
16. Parenting has taught me not to get too upset about little frustrations.	SD	D	A	SA
17. I feel very good about how my spouse and I practice our religious beliefs and values.	SD	D	A	SA
18. My spouse is a good parent.	SD	D	A	SA
19. My spouse appreciates how hard I work at being a good parent.	SD	D	A	SA
20. Knowing that my children will carry on in my place is the most important reward of being a parent that I know.	SD	D	A	SA
21. My spouse backs me up as a parent.	SD	D	A	SA
22. Being a parent makes me feel drained and depleted.	SD	D	A	SA
23. My spouse and I feel we are growing and maturing together through our experiences as parents.	SD	D	A	SA
24. I intend to push my children in order to make sure that they achieve the things I never got to do myself.	SD	D	A	SA
25. My spouse is willing to make some personal sacrifices in order to help with the parenting.	SD	D	A	SA
26. I am able to be consistent with my children so that they do not have to wonder what I am going to do next.	SD	D	A	SA
27. My spouse tries to make sure I get some time for myself away from the children.	SD	D	A	SA
28. I am overly protective of my children; it is better to be safe than sorry.	SD	D	A	SA
29. I have the knowledge I need to be a good parent.	SD	D	A	SA
30. When there is a crisis with the children my spouse doesn't help me as much as I would like.	SD	D	A	SA
31. If my spouse has any faults I am not aware of them.	SD	D	A	SA
32. I have learned that if my kids need something important I can rely on my spouse to help provide it.	SD	D	A	SA
33. I am dissatisfied about the relationship my spouse and I have with my parents, in-laws, and or friends.	SD	D	A	SA

34. My spouse does not really enjoy being alone with the children.	SD	D	A	SA
35. I get a feeling of pride from watching my children accomplish a goal that they are proud of.	SD	D	A	SA
36. After my spouse or I have handled a difficult situation with the children we discuss it and try to figure out what we could have done better.	SD	D	A	SA
37. I am a very strict parent.	SD	D	A	SA
38. I should have read more books on parenting because I often feel like I don't know what I am doing.	SD	D	A	SA
39. My children are reflections of myself.	SD	D	A	SA
40. My spouse likes to play with the children, but then leaves the dirty work to me.	SD	D	A	SA
41. I appreciate how much my spouse tries to be a good parent.	SD	D	A	SA
42. My spouse completely understands and sympathizes with my every mood.	SD	D	A	SA
43. My children get on my nerves.	SD	D	A	SA
44. I am very happy with how my spouse and I handle role responsibilities in our marriage.	SD	D	A	SA
45. Every new thing I have learned about my spouse has pleased me.	SD	D	A	SA
46. One of the things I like most about being a parent is that my children are so tuned in to what I do and say.	SD	D	A	SA
47. If I could do it over again I would raise my children the same way I am raising them now.	SD	D	A	SA
48. What I find most satisfying about being a parent is showing my children the difference between right and wrong.	SD	D	A	SA
49. I am not satisfied with the way my spouse and I each handle our responsibilities as parents.	SD	D	A	SA
50. My spouse resents that I have to give so much of my time to the children.	SD	D	A	SA
51. I often worry that I am letting my children down.	SD	D	A	SA

52. My spouse and I like to imagine together what our children will be like when they grow up.	SD	D	A	SA
53. My spouse makes me look like the "bad person" in the eyes of our children.	SD	D	A	SA
54. My kids are always trying my patience.	SD	D	A	SA
55. When the children are sick I can turn to my spouse for support.	SD	D	A	SA
56. What I most enjoy about being a parent is watching my children grow and change in ways that I never imagined.	SD	D	A	SA
57. I see to it that my children are only exposed to things that I want them exposed to.	SD	D	A	SA
58. I am going to make sure that my children accomplish the things in life that are important to me.	SD	D	A	SA
59. Whenever I start feeling comfortable as a parent something goes wrong and the doubts start all over again.	SD	D	A	SA
60. My spouse and I agree on our ideas, guidelines, and rules for raising our children.	SD	D	A	SA
61. My spouse forgets that kids are kids, not little adults.	SD	D	A	SA
62. My spouse has a good feel for the kids and what they might need.	SD	D	A	SA
63. Because my children are a part of me, I find it difficult to let them be independent.	SD	D	A	SA
64. I worry that I am not doing the right thing as a parent.	SD	D	A	SA
65. As a parent I really enjoy the feeling that I am molding another human being.	SD	D	A	SA
66. I did not know how much anger I had inside of me until I became a parent.	SD	D	A	SA
67. I like watching my children's personalities develop even when they turn out differently from what I expected.	SD	D	A	SA
68. My spouse and I do not agree on when to punish and how much to punish.	SD	D	A	SA
69. My spouse does not live up to my idea of a good parent.	SD	D	A	SA

70. My spouse and I have conflicts about how much we should do for our children. SD D A SA

71. I have learned to accept that I cannot shelter my children from everything I do not like. SD D A SA

72. Parenting has given my spouse and me a focus for the future. SD D A SA

73. I want my children to do the same things I did when I was a child. SD D A SA

74. When I make a mistake with the kids I can talk it over with my spouse. SD D A SA

75. I try not to box my children in with too many rules. SD D A SA

76. My spouse helps out with the parenting whenever possible. SD D A SA

77. No matter how hard I try, I never seem to be a good enough parent. SD D A SA

78. My spouse enjoys me both as a parent and a lover. SD D A SA

79. When I get short with my children, I usually can catch myself before I do something I regret. SD D A SA

80. As a parent, I cannot seem to do anything right in my spouse's eyes. SD D A SA

81. My spouse and I work closely together as parents. SD S A SA

82. I am very pleased with how my spouse and I express affection and relate sexually. SD S A SA

83. I get a great deal of pleasure out of shaping and molding my children so that they grow up to be the kinds of people I want them to be. SD D A SA

84. My spouse makes too many demands on me as a parent. SD D A SA

85. There are times when I do not feel a great deal of love and affection for my spouse. SD D A SA

86. I often worry that I don't know enough to be a good parent. SD D A SA

87. What I most enjoy about being a parent is that my children make it possible for me to get a new perspective on the world and myself. SD D A SA

88. I feel my spouse does not understand me and I am not happy with our communication. SD D A SA

89. I feel too ashamed about my mishaps with the children to talk them over with my spouse. SD D A SA

90. I want my children to be interested in the things I was interested in as a child. SD D A SA

91. I have to be on guard with my children all the time to keep them from getting into trouble. SD D A SA

92. I get a thrill watching my children discover new things all by themselves. SD D A SA

93. I am afraid of my spouse's anger when I do something wrong with the kids. SD D A SA

94. I often think my children would be better off with one parent (me) than with the both of us. SD D A SA

95. I do not feel that parenting is as much of a sharing experience with my spouse as I hoped it would be. SD D A SA

96. Compared to most parents I know, I seem to have less difficulty disciplining my children. SD D A SA

97. I feel closer to my children than to my spouse. SD D A SA

98. My spouse and I agree on how much time we each should spend with the children. SD D A SA

99. I often feel guilty about neglecting my children. SD D A SA

100. My marital relationship is not a perfect success. SD D A SA

101. One of the things I most enjoy about parenting is seeing myself in my child. SD D A SA

102. My spouse and I get on each others' nerves when the children are difficult or act up. SD D A SA

103. I work hard at shaping my children's lives rather than just letting them grow up as they would. SD D A SA

104. I bite my lip when my spouse disciplines the children because if I say what I think it causes too much tension. SD D A SA

105. I am very happy with how my spouse and I handle our leisure activities and the time we spend together. SD D A SA

106. I often feel torn between my loyalties to my spouse and my loyalties to my children. SD D A SA

107. I do not mind that being a parent makes my life less orderly. SD D A SA

108. Sometimes I feel like my spouse is one of the children instead of my partner.	SD	D	A	SA
109. I don't think any couple could live together with greater harmony than my spouse and I.	SD	D	A	SA
110. My spouse overreacts when the children act up.	SD	D	A	SA
111. I am unhappy with our financial position and the way my spouse and I make financial decisions.	SD	D	A	SA
112. My spouse pays too little attention to the children.	SD	D	A	SA
113. I find it difficult to find the right balance between discipline and love in raising my children.	SD	D	A	SA
114. I don't think anyone could possibly be happier than my spouse and I when we are with one another.	SD	D	A	SA
115. I am very happy with the way my spouse and I make decisions and resolve conflicts.	SD	D	A	SA
116. My spouse still wants to "do his or her own thing" instead of being a responsible parent.	SD	D	A	SA
117. When I am around my children, I usually find myself thinking "Why do they have to be so difficult?"	SD	D	A	SA
118. My spouse does not trust my abilities as a parent.	SD	D	A	SA
119. I have some needs that are not being met by my relationship with my spouse.	SD	D	A	SA
120. Juggling all the responsibilities of being a parent is one of my talents.	SD	D	A	SA
121. There are times when my spouse does things that make me unhappy.	SD	D	A	SA
122. If every person in the world of the opposite sex had been available and willing to marry me, I could not have made a better choice.	SD	D	A	SA
123. When my children show their will, I make sure they know who is boss.	SD	D	A	SA
124. I have never regretted my relationship with my spouse not even for a moment.	SD	D	A	SA
125. My spouse preaches alot about how to be a good parent but rarely puts it into practice.	SD	D	A	SA
126. When I tell my children to do something, they will	SD	D	A	SA

do it, no "ifs", "ands", or "buts".

127. Having children has helped me to see positive qualities in my spouse that I never noticed before. SD D A SA

128. Parenting means a lot of responsiblities and problems, but I always feel that I can cope with the difficulties that come along. SD D A SA

129. My spouse has a lot of patience with the children. SD D A SA

130. I often feel that I have no control over my children. SD D A SA

131. My spouse sees parenting as my responsibility. SD D A SA

132. When my kids do something I do not like I blow up first and ask questions later. SD D A SA

133. I worry about the children's safety when they are alone with my spouse. SD D A SA

134. My spouse expects too much from the children. SD D A SA

135. My spouse is too self-centered to be a good parent. SD D A SA

136. When there is a crisis with the children, I know that I will do what needs to be done. SD D A SA

137. I feel over-burdened as a parent because my spouse is often too involved with other things to carry a fair share of the load. SD D A SA

138. My marriage could be happier than it is. SD D A SA

139. When I feel at my wits end as a parent my spouse gives me the extra support I need. SD D A SA

140. I have learned to accept that sometimes my kids will not do what I want no matter how hard I try. SD D A SA

141. My spouse and I often talk together about what is best for our children. SD D A SA

142. My spouse makes me feel that I am the best possible parent for our children. SD D A SA

143. When my child misbehaves or breaks a rule I try to find out the reasons why. SD D A SA

APPENDIX B

DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS TASK

We would like to learn more about the kinds of decisions and difficulties that you as parents deal with in disciplining _____.

First we would like you to complete this brief questionnaire without consulting your spouse.

A. How difficult is it for you and your spouse to agree on how and when to discipline _____?

Rarely a problem	Sometimes a problem	Often a problem	Almost always a problem
1	2	3	4

B. Now think about specific times within the last few weeks when you and your spouse had the most difficulty agreeing on how and when to discipline _____. Pick three examples that were especially difficult and describe them briefly in the spaces below. List them with the most difficult example first and the least difficult last.

1.

2.

3.

DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS TASK (CONT'D.)

For the interviewer:

Pick a problem both report. If more than one, pick the one with the highest average rating for difficulty. If no problems are reported by both parents, pick mother's highest rated problem.

Say: Now I'd like the two of you to talk about how you might handle the following problem better as a couple.

(Restate the problem.)

You have ten minutes to come to an agreement on how you will handle that problem better in the future. I am going to record your discussion, but I will leave the room so that you can talk more comfortably.

(TURN ON THE TAPERECORDER BEFORE YOU LEAVE. RETURN IN TEN MINUTES AND TURN IT OFF.)

APPENDIX C

LATENT LEVEL CLASSIFICATION SCHEME
ABBREVIATED CODING MANUAL

(Adapted from: Robyn Penman (1980). Communication Processes and Relationships. N.Y.: Academic Press.)

Offer (OF):
Indicators: Actor sustains own position and tentatively approaches the other.
Intent: to explore the situation without fully committing self to involvement with the other.
Tactics: offers tentative proposals or suggestions; informs other; acknowledges information from other; oriented toward task rather than other; hospitable but not committed.
Examples: Mother suggests, "Perhaps that's something that we both could do."
Father informs mother, "Well, she didn't take her nap that day."

Seek (SK):
Indicators: Actor allows other to approach and plays down self by temporarily ignoring own options.
Intent: to obtain assistance from the other.
Tactics: requests for action/information/clarification; allows other to start, seeks confirmation of own activity; indicates other has something to offer.
Examples: Father begins discussion with, "Well, what do you think we should do about it?"
Mother asks father, "How much did she eat for her snack?"

Abstain (AB):
Indicators: Actor ignores the possibility of exerting self and avoids involvement in current exchange.
Intent: to temporarily avoid a move which will commit self; or to discourage other from continuing in present direction.
Tactics: actor shows indecision at point in interaction; actor reserves decision; delaying tactics may be used, such as inflected "hmm?", unfinished sentences, or joking to avoid commitment.
Examples: Mother asks father what he thinks they should do when the kids are dirty and father replies, "Hose 'em down."
Father makes suggestion and mother replies, "Hmm, could be...I don't know."

Resist (RS):
Indicators: Actor temporarily blocks other from movement towards him/her and maintains own position.
Intent:to counteract position/statement of other to establish or maintain own position.
Tactics: arguing for own case without discrediting other or imposing self; is cynical about other's position; shows unwillingness to accept other's suggestion; querying as a way of indicating nonacceptance; setting up obstacles for other.
Examples: Father offers suggestion and mother says, "I can't imagine how that would work."
Mother gives a possible solution and father replies, "Why would that work any better?"

Control (CN):
Indicators: Actor asserts self and temporarily blocks move towards greater involvement.
Intent: to take over and manipulate interaction for elevation of self without commitment of self.
Tactics: direct, controlling ordering of other; indirect manoeuvering to gain control of situation; challenging other to defend position; questioning without commitment; taking charge of situation without reference to other and not allowing other to interact.
Examples: After clear lack of agreement father states, "So, we're done then, we're going to ...(gives own solution)."
Mother repeats her position after father has made other suggestions, "Well, I still say my way would work."

Initiate (IN):
Indicators: Actor affirms self and approaches other in move towards further involvement.
Intent: to lead without control; to offer possibilities for involvement.
Tactics: suggests actions; constructively challenges other to move towards; makes a stand without control or imposition of self.
Examples: Mother suggests, "I think we both need to be more consistent in how we handle that."
Father states, "So we have to talk about what we're going to do about it tonight."

Share (SH):
Indicators: Mutual affirmation of self and other in a total involvement.
Intent: To commit self to joint enterprise of mutual benefit.
Tactics: Shows acceptance of self and other; engages other; positive open confrontation; reciprocated honest amusement; displays of undemanding affection.
Examples: Mother states, "I think we just worked together beautifully on that one."
Father states, "I really appreciated that you had stepped in then."
Couple laughs together about mutual joke.

Collaborate (CB):
Indicators: Actor sustains own position while joining the other in action.
Intent: to contribute positively to interaction.
Tactics: strong affirmation of other's proposal; reciprocation of other's move; adds to/expands on/ other's action; consents to cooperate.
Examples: Father makes suggestion and mother replies, "Yeah, that's a good suggestion, and then we should explain to her why we are upset."
Father responds to mother, "You're right, that really bothered me too."

Oblige (OB):
Indicators: Actor plays down self position or ignores other options and merges with the other.
Intent: to go along with other rather than impose own position
Tactics: willingly accepts other's suggestions; concurs with move of other; acquiesces to other.
Examples: Mother and father discuss options and mother states, "OK we'll do it your way."
Father states, "I think you're right about that."

Cling (CL):
Indicators: Actor nihilates self and merges into other in parasitic manner.
Intent: to go along with anything other wants in order to remain involved in the relationship.
Tactics: seeks directives from other; indicates he/she cannot move without guidance from other; willingly accepts any directives from other.
Examples: Father states sincerely, "I'll do whatever you want me to."
Mother proposes solution father disagrees with and then accepts father's suggestion with, "No, I don't think it will work either."

Submit (SB):
Indicators: Actor nihilates own framework and allows other to approach.
Intent: to indicate to other that actor is willing to abdicate own position to prevent other from moving away.
Tactics: acts suggesting actor wants support; gives responsibility for moving to other; defers to other; takes path of least resistance.
Examples: Mother suggests, "I think it would be better if you started."
Mother proposes view that father disagrees with, so mother says, "I guess you're right, that was in the back of my mind."

Relinquish (RL):
Indicators: Actor negates self options but avoids other and keeps at a distance.
Intent: to abandon position that actor can no longer defend.
Tactics: concedes defeat; unwillingly allows other to take over; backs away form confrontation.
Examples: After father restates his position, mother says, "OK then, have it your way."

Remove (RM):
Indicators: Actor separates self from other and negates self by non-participation.
Intent: to completely dissociate self from the current exchange and other.
Tactics: refusal to participate in exchange as is, not replying to direct questions or directives; distracted by events outside the current exchange.
Examples: Father responds "I don't know" to a simple question from mother.
Mother does not like the way conversation is going so states "I need to go check on the kids."

Evade (EV):
Indicators: Actor separates self from other and ignores possibility of exerting power over other.
Intent: to manoeuver out of present situation or to discontinue it.
Tactics: doesn't respond to other; attempts to change subject after uncomfortable exchange; indicates to other that he/she is not listening or involved; vague wordy abstractions.
Examples: Mother asks father what he thinks they should do and father replies, "Why ask for my opinion now, it never mattered to you before."

Counter (CT):
Indicators: Actor severs relationship temporarily by refusing to accept other and attempts to maintain own position.
Intent: to distance self from other or de-emphasize effect of other in order to stand for self.
Tactics: defense of own position at expense of other; rationalization or justification of own position; defying or refusing to accept other's position.
Examples: Mother rejects father's statement and father responds, "She would too respond to that if you'd approach it that way."
After agreement to cooperate, mother maintains, "But I still think my first suggestion would have worked best."

Reject (RJ):
Indicators: Actor severs relationship and affirms self at other's expense.
Intent: to assert self and to hurt/discredit/reject other and to completely sever the relationship at that point.
Tactics: engages in aggressive acts with destructive consequences for other; denigrates task as way of discrediting other or way of displacing anger at other; shows hostility towards other.
Examples: Father says to mother, "I already told you I don't think it's a problem-you're just trying to find a problem for this study."
After disagreement, mother states "You always have to ruin it when things are going OK."

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