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Coparenting among Mexican-American and non-Latino white couples

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in structural family theory, the present study examined how positive coparenting relates to couple satisfaction and to positive parenting for predominantly low-income Mexican American and non-Latino white heterosexual couples. The sample was selected as a subset from the Supporting Father Involvement study, based in California. Participants included 73 mono-racial/ethnic families (56.2% Mexican American and 43.8% non-Latino white), each including a youngest child under age 11. Couple Discussion Task ratings from observed coparenting interactions were tested for associations with: 1) self-reported couple satisfaction, and 2) Parent-Child Interaction scales derived from observed parent-child interactions. Results indicated that the connection/cohesiveness aspect of coparenting is associated with both couple satisfaction and positive parenting. In addition, race/ethnicity was found to moderate relationships between coparenting and a) couple satisfaction and b) positive parenting. As such, agreement and teamwork among couples was associated with higher couple satisfaction for non-Latino white participants, but not for Mexican American couples. Associations between coparenting and positive parenting for the two groups were more similar than not, but coparenting was related to some aspects of positive parenting for non-Latino white fathers that it was not for Mexican American fathers. Further examination of these results is detailed and the need for future studies to examine the role that race/ethnicity plays in relationships between coparenting, couple satisfaction and parenting is emphasized.

COPARENTING AMONG MEXICAN AMERICAN

AND NON-LATINO WHITE COUPLES

A project based upon an independent investigation
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Social Work.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

For years, investigators from the fields of psychology, social work, and family social sciences have been systematically shining spotlights on various aspects of couple relationships, marriage, parenting and family life. Since the mid-1990's, researchers have begun to broaden their focus from parenting (the relationship between parent and child) to an area of study referred to as coparenting (aspects of the couple relationship specific to childrearing). Coparenting is defined as the coordination and support between two or more adults who share responsibility for the care and upbringing of children (McHale, Lauretti, Talbot, & Pouquette, 2002; McHale, 2007). Although coparenting adults are not necessarily coupled, couple relationships do tend to be a primary context within which the task of childrearing is undertaken. Initially, there was more attention paid in the literature to coparenting among separated or divorced couples. In more recent years, the coparenting focus has broadened to also focus on coparenting among intact families.

The current review will examine coparenting and its relationship to parenting and couple satisfaction among married and cohabiting couples. First a distinction between coparental, parental, and couple subsystems will be provided. Second, an exploration of coparental subsystems will be presented, including further definition of the construct, as well as a description of what constitutes positive coparenting. Third, connections between coparenting and parenting, and between coparenting and couple satisfaction will be examined. Fourth, the limited coparenting research on Latinos and Mexican Americans will be discussed, placing the

previous literature in this context, as the vast majority has been conducted on non-Latino whites. Finally, the current study will be introduced to help fill the gaps in the previously reviewed literature.

This line of inquiry is widely applicable to social work and related fields, with respect to psycho-education, prevention, legal, policy and clinical work with both low-income Mexican American and non-Latino white couples. First, the current study contributes to the body of literature which may be drawn upon by clinicians and organizations working with families on coparenting, child, and family issues. Second, it may also inform professionals developing programs aimed at building positive coparenting, couple, and parenting communication in the respective communities. More broadly, this study could be taken into consideration when deciding on law, policy, and funding related to coparenting-related programming and services for intact, separated, and divorced families. Finally, the most practical and immediate clinical implications of this work include that it enables clinical social workers and other therapists, to develop a broader understanding of the intricacies of coparenting as it relates to the couple and parenting relationships among low-income Mexican-American and non-Latino white couples. This knowledge can serve to aid clinicians in the assessment of problematic coparenting patterns in families, as well as in the provision of effective interventions to increase positive coparenting. It is hoped that as a result of this study, clinicians may develop greater sensitivity to coparenting differences among the populations in question, thereby enhancing the capacity for a strengths-based approach and reducing the risk of culturally pathologizing Mexican American parents, should there be differing coparenting and parenting practices found.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Structural Family Theory: Understanding Family Systems

Current investigations of coparenting frequently trace their conceptual roots to Salvador Minuchin's structural family theory (e.g., *see* McHale & Lindahl, 2011). As such, additional clarity can be gleaned by first exploring the theoretical framework from which the concept of coparenting emerged. Minuchin largely concerned himself with the ingredients necessary for adaptive family functioning (1974). He emphasized that one such ingredient enabled families to adjust to challenges with greater ease: when a supportive partnership existed between the adults responsible for the care of the family's children. This supportive partnership, also known as a coparenting alliance, serves to ensure that the adult responsibilities in the family system are appropriately upheld by the adults, a concept that Minuchin referred to as hierarchy. Hierarchy refers to the generational boundaries maintained by parents, which prevent the children from feeling the weight of responsibility and decision-making related to their care (Minuchin, 1974; McHale & Lindahl, 2011). Provided that these generational boundaries are maintained, the family's children are then able to attend to the developmental tasks appropriate and necessary for healthy development. Minuchin argued that this clarity of roles and boundaries among adults and children leads to more adaptive family functioning by supporting normative child development.

Minuchin noted that a clear hierarchy is less likely to be maintained in families with a great deal of conflict, and a variety of problems can occur for both parents and children when

these generational boundaries are not upheld. One of the coparents may completely disengage from all parenting and coparenting tasks, roles, and responsibilities (McHale, with Kuersten-Hogan, 2007). Another common scenario is for one of the coparents to undermine the parenting efforts of the other. For example, if the coparents are not in agreement, one coparent may set the expectation that the children's bedtime is 8:00pm and the other coparent may undermine that expectation by allowing a later bedtime in a routine basis. This undermining may be an overt negation of the coparent's efforts by countering them in front of the children. The coparent may also engage in more covert undermining, where coparenting agreements are reached, but then a coparent takes the opportunity when alone with the child to not uphold the mutually agreed upon coparental expectations. Either way, this undermining behavior sends conflicting messages to the child, adds unnecessary stress to their accomplishment of developmental tasks, and gives the child power to work the cracks in the coparenting alliance.

Over a decade of research on coparenting and child outcomes has largely substantiated these ideas, demonstrating that the quality of the coparenting relationship predicts child outcomes (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). When children are not protected from feeling the weight of adult caregivers' responsibilities, emotional and behavioral problems can begin to emerge. These problems can be of an internalizing (e.g. depression) or externalizing (e.g. acting out, angry outbursts) nature. When this occurs, it can be tempting for caregivers to identify the source of the problem as located within the individual child, as the child's problems appear to be causing difficulty for the family. However, often the child's symptomatic behaviors are signals of the family's greater distress, including ruptures in the coparenting alliance. The child's apparent problems are therefore a manifestation of the coparenting dysfunction (McHale &

Lindahl, 2011).

Distinguishing Between Coparental, Parental, and Couple Subsystems

Structural family theory proposes that families are made up of various subsystems (Minuchin, 1974). The subsystems which comprise a family system commonly include coparental, parental, couple (or marital), and sibling subunits. The key to understanding coparenting is the recognition that the coparental subunit is a distinct, yet interrelated subsystem, distinguishable from the parental and couple subsystems.

Distinguishing between subsystems is best accomplished by focusing on the subsystem's function, rather than on the composition of its membership. This can be illustrated using the example of a three person nuclear family consisting of a couple and one child. Although both the coparenting and couple subunits may be comprised of the same individuals, these subsystems optimally vary by function. The coparenting subsystem serves a triadic function, involving the couple and the child, and refers to the functions of the couple's relationship that pertain to raising the child. In contrast, the couple subsystem is dyadic, between the two adult members of the family, and refers to their romantic, financial, sexual, and other relations not directly associated with parenting (McHale et al., 2002). The parental subsystem is also dyadic, but involves the parenting practices that occur in individual interactions between each parent and each child. Parental subsystems vary according to each parent and child dyad, because parents typically parent each child differently within the same family.

Coparental Subsystems

Defining coparenting: A multidimensional construct. Coparenting is defined as "an enterprise undertaken by two or more adults working together to raise a child for whom they share responsibility" (Talbot & McHale, 2004). Coparenting subsystems may be made up of

biological parents, non-biological parents, extended kin, or any number of other significant adult figures responsible for childrearing. Regardless of their composition, coparenting subsystems are distinguishable by their function, and may be made up of virtually any individuals who collaborate to socialize and nurture the child (McHale & Irace, 2011).

As McHale and Irace poignantly state, rather than attempting to determine for others who is appropriate to make up the coparenting subsystem, the primary concern for all should be that, regardless of composition, these systems meet the needs of children. All coparenting units are legitimate, whether a group of adults or a couple; whether married, never married, or divorced; and regardless of sexual orientation or whether the child is biologically related to the parents (Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). Coparents might not be the legal caregivers for the child, but may still be coparents that serve as attachment and socialization figures in the child's life. A majority of children are coparented in some capacity, regardless of who serves in the coparenting role or whether it is continuously or periodically throughout their lives.

The task of fully understanding coparenting through research has yet fully developed. As a multidimensional construct, coparenting's exact components have not been solidified (Feinberg, Kan, & Hetherington, 2007). Although its conceptualization varies somewhat by researcher, themes have certainly emerged in the coparenting literature. Many studies have suggested evidence for coparenting consisting of three to four, often overlapping dimensions.

McHale and Kuersten-Hogan (2007) suggest four overarching facets of coparenting. These include solidarity, antagonism, division of labor, and mutual engagement. Solidarity is referred to as cohesion, harmony, or positivity in the coparenting relationship. It is also sometimes captured as warmth, connection, validation, or positive regard. Their antagonism dimension can be summarized as conflict about the children, to include verbal arguing,

competitiveness in influencing the child or receiving the child's affection, as well as undermining the other parent's efforts to do so. Despite its title, the third component, division of labor, is less focused on who does what parenting tasks (e.g. cooking dinner for or disciplining the children), and rather attends to how the couple arrived at this agreement and how satisfied they are with it. Finally, the mutual engagement aspect of coparenting is based on Minuchin's ideas of enmeshed and disengaged family dynamics (Minuchin, Montalvo, Guerney, Rosman, & Schumer, 1967). An example of a disengaged dynamic is when a parent is emotionally withdrawn and under-involved in a child's life. In contrast, an enmeshed dynamic is when a parent becomes overly involved with their child, fostering a closeness that serves to meet the parent's emotional needs, and perhaps substitutes for the lack of closeness in the parent's relationship. These two dynamics can occur simultaneously in a family, with one parent enmeshed with the children and the other parent disengaged from the family. The concept of mutual engagement is used to capture the extent that both parents are involved in the family.

In comparison, a recent meta-analysis examining 59 coparenting studies arrived at a similar conclusion, with four parallel dimensions. Roughly comparable to McHale's work, this analysis referred to solidarity as agreement, antagonism as conflict, division of labor as cooperation, and triangulation as mutual engagement (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Feinberg (2002, 2003) also subscribed to four interrelated, however slightly varying, coparenting dimensions including: 1) agreement/disagreement on shared and non-shared values), 2) perceptions of equality and satisfaction with division of labor, 3) support/undermining between coparents, and 4) joint management of family interactions, including balance of involvement, interparental conflict, and alliances versus triangulation. Finally, a factor analysis conducted by

Margolin, Gordis and John (2001) found evidence for coparenting consisting of only three categories, to include cooperation, conflict, and triangulation.

Positive coparenting. Given these different descriptions of coparenting, it can be somewhat challenging to definitively state what constitutes positive coparenting. In the literature, some authors describe the quality of the coparenting relationship in holistic terms, as either positive or negative (Talbot & McHale, 2004; Feinberg & Sakuma, 2011). Others describe the strength of the coparenting alliance (Solmeyer, Killoren, McHale, & Updegraff, 2011; Gable, Crnic & Belsky, 1994), with positive coparenting also referred to as supportive coparenting (Gable et al., 1994; Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch, & McHale, 2004) or cooperative coparenting (Hohmann-Marriott, 2011). Gable and colleagues (1994) described coparenting alliance as "the extent to which spouses function as partners or adversaries in their parenting roles." Similarly, Feinberg and Sakuma (2011) stated that a coparenting relationship's valence (positivity or negativity) can be determined by whether the coparenting behaviors support or undermine the harmony and well-being of family members. A positive coparenting alliance includes a couple working together as a team toward common goals, as opposed to competing with or undermining one another's efforts.

Researchers have extrapolated from studies with positive outcomes that particular coparenting configurations are more desirable than others. Coparenting appears to be a unique predictor of children's externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors (Johnson, Cowan, & Cowan, 1999; Kolak & Vernon-Feagans, 2008), and to account for additional variance, beyond parenting, in numerous child outcomes (Belsky, Putnam, & Crnic, 1996; Caldera & Lindsey, 2006; Karreman, Van Tuijl, Van Aken, & Dekovic, 2008). A meta-analysis examining 59 studies further confirmed that coparenting impacts child outcomes related to internalizing and

externalizing symptoms, as well as social functioning and attachment (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Additional studies have shown that intervention programs targeting the coparenting relationship have a positive impact -- not only on child behavior, but also on the couple relationship (Feinberg, Kan, & Goslin, 2009; Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009). Findings from these studies confirm that positive coparenting can serve as a protective factor for children, and is associated with positive outcomes for couple relationships, as well.

There is evidence that coparenting feelings and behaviors demonstrated by one partner (e.g. communicating respectfully, supporting the other's parenting judgments, undermining, etc.) are likely to draw out those of a similar valence from his/her partner (Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). Specifically, mothers' and fathers' experiences of the four dimensions of coparenting (solidarity, support from partner, undermining from partner, and shared parenting) were all significantly and positively associated. This speaks to the dynamic and bidirectional nature of coparenting, suggesting that positive coparenting from one partner begets positive coparenting from the other.

Factors that have been considered as predictors of coparenting include family characteristics, parent characteristics, marital characteristics, and child characteristics (Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jessee, 2011). Thus far, family characteristics research on birth order has found no major effect (McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, Lauretti, & Rasmussen, 2000); on family size has found less undermining, and therefore more positive coparenting for mothers when there was more than one child in the family (Lindsey, Caldera, & Colwell, 2005); and on stress and support has found that mothers with greater social support showed more supportive coparenting (Lindsey et al., 2005) and families with more stress are more likely to show negative coparenting (Belsky, Crnic, & Gable, 1995).

Of the many parent characteristics considered as potential predictors of coparenting, some of the most promising areas of research have included those pertaining to the role of parent gender. One study found that maternal characteristics played a stronger role in determining the coparenting relationship than paternal characteristics (Van Egeren, 2003). Another found that coparenting relationships between parents were better when mothers offered more encouragement and less criticism with respect to fathers' parenting (Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008). These types of coparenting behaviors have been termed "gatekeeping," referring to the extent that one parent (typically the mother) includes or excludes the other parent from actively participating in childrearing. Much remains to be explored with regards to the reciprocal nature of maternal gatekeeping and fathering behavior.

Other parental factors such as parent's age, educational attainment, family of origin, personality, psychological security and well-being have shown little or inconsistent findings. For instance, some studies have found that parents' educational level was positively correlated with supportive coparenting (Stright & Bales, 2003; Van Egeren, 2003), while one study found that educational compatibility was more important than level, such that smaller differences in education between parents resulted in more supportive coparenting (Belsky et al., 1996). On another front, very few results have been found for family of origin, except two studies that demonstrated positive coparenting in family of origin was related to positive coparenting in the current family for mothers (Stright & Bales, 2003) and fathers (Van Egeren, 2003). The research in these areas has been sparse, and is therefore inconclusive, due to insufficient replication of and expansion on the few studies that exist.

Connection between Coparenting and Couple Satisfaction

It has been well established that the couple's overall relationship quality is one of the most clearly linked factors to coparenting (Mangelsdorf et al., 2011). In studies that have examined the relationship between coparenting and couple relationship quality, numerous correlates of unsupportive and undermining coparenting have been found. Early coparenting difficulties have tended to correlate with marital distress (McHale, 1995). Later investigations of causality revealed that early coparenting predicted later marital behavior, but the reverse was not true; early marital behavior did not predict later coparenting (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). The correlates of unsupportive coparenting in studies focusing primarily on non-Latino white couples have included couple relationship factors such as anxiety, distress and hostility, low self-reported marital quality, defensiveness during child-related disagreements, and low engagement in marital discussions (Belsky et al., 1995; McHale, 1995; Katz & Gottman, 1996; Gordon & Feldman, 2008; McHale, 1997; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2004; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). In addition, undermining coparenting has been linked to difficulty with intimacy, marital distress and hostility, husband withdrawal, low self reported marital quality, defensiveness and low positive engagement (Belsky et al., 1995; McHale, 1995; Katz & Gottman, 1996, McHale, 1997; Margolin et al., 2001; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004).

Despite their interrelated nature, coparenting and the couple relationship have also been demonstrated as quite distinct from one another. Many studies have suggested that coparenting was more closely linked to child outcomes than the quality of the couple's relationship (e.g. Feinberg et al., 2007; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998). Evidence solidifying the independent nature of coparenting and the couple's relationship includes a cross-sectional study conducted by Katz and Low (2004), which revealed that children suffered less in families with a history of

marital violence when the coparenting process was kept clear of the aggression. They speculated that greater emotional disengagement and perhaps physical distance in the coparenting relationship may serve as protective factors, preventing couples from reaching heightened emotional states and enacting physical violence and limiting children's exposure to conflict and violence. A subsequent longitudinal study determined that couples' relationship quality mediated associations between couple violence and coparenting; when relationship quality was included in the analysis, the relationship between violence and coparenting became non-significant (Kan, Feinberg, & Solmeyer, 2012). Both of these studies strengthen the argument that coparenting ought to be considered in conjunction with, but separate from, the couple relationship. First, family-level variables, partner violence, and coparenting were each shown to independently predict child outcomes. Second, couple relationship quality was shown in association with, but not fully overlapping with the coparenting relationship.

With respect to research conducted on marital satisfaction, a meta-analysis revealed correlation between self-reported marital satisfaction and several potentially coparenting-related factors (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003). A significant negative correlation between the number of children in a family and marital satisfaction was reported. Other such factors linked to lower marital satisfaction included younger birth cohorts and having children in more recent years. In addition, gender differences arose, which revealed that fathers tended to be more similarly satisfied across the ages of the children, and mothers of infants reported the least amount of marital satisfaction.

Previous Supporting Father Involvement research demonstrated that after participants attended 16 weekly meetings where they received information, completed exercises on and engaged in discussion related to parenting, communication and social support, couple

relationship satisfaction remained stable for mothers and fathers in the experimental group, compared with declining satisfaction in the control group (Cowan et al., 2009). This being one of few studies conducted involving Mexican American couples, much remains to be discovered regarding coparenting among this population.

Connection between Coparenting and Parenting

Historically, developmental psychology emphasized the study of mother-child relationships. Researchers and theorists alike tended to focus on mother-infant bonds. Fathers were largely overlooked as parents in family research until around the mid-1970s, when a shift began to take place which gave more credence to the family systems perspective (Parke, Schulz, Pruett, & Kerig, 2010). Fathers were increasingly viewed as having a potentially equal role in the marital dyad and coparenting system. Father-child relationships were shown to be particularly vulnerable to marital quality (Belsky, 1981; Parke, 1981; Cowan, Cowan, Cohen, Pruett, & Pruett, 2008). By the late 1970's the impact of the transition to parenthood on couples' relationships and children's development was being investigated and interventions were being designed to focus on the couple's relationship as a means of improving family functioning (Cowan, Cowan, Coie, & Coie, 1978).

Shortly thereafter, Belsky's (1981) call for interdisciplinary work focusing on the relationship between the marital relationship and parenting was compelling and contributed to a shift in the field. Belsky referred to this need as for an integration of the family sociology discipline's attention to the infant's effect on the marital relationship with developmental psychology's focus on parenting and infant development. He pushed for increased awareness of a multi-directional relationship between the marital relationship, parenting, and child

development. In other words, parenting impacts the child, who impacts and is influenced by the couple's relationship, which itself is impacted by and affects parenting.

Although the studies that immediately followed still had not yet teased out the coparenting-related aspects of the couple relationship as distinct from the overall relationship, they did begin to move from non-experimental and correlational studies in their examination of the overall couple relationship, to those of increasing sophistication which allowed for potential causal factors to be considered. These inched the field closer to grasping at further complexity and an increased sense of the multifaceted nature of these relationships.

Broadly, the overall relationship between parents is strongly associated with parenting and child's well-being (Emery, 1982). Studies of what was previously referred to as the marital relationship increasingly moved to consider the coparenting relationship as distinct from the overall couple relationship. At first, the consideration of coparenting was a primary focus in divorce literature, examining how parents who are no longer romantically involved handle the sharing and distribution of child-rearing. Then researchers began to recognize that coparenting was also relevant for intact families as well. Increasingly, coparenting was studied as separate from the couple relationship. In addition, because couple relationships can also occur between never married couples who are heterosexual or homosexual, the use of marital relationship has increasingly been replaced by "couple relationship" to be more inclusive.

The coparenting relationship has proven to be more closely related to parenting than other aspects of the couple relationship (Bearss & Eyberg, 1998; Feinberg et al., 2007), and more predictive of parenting and child outcomes, than the overall couple relationship (Feinberg reviews in 2002, 2003). Prevention programs continue to establish the integral nature of the relationship between coparenting, parent involvement, and parenting. In one study, the greatest

impact was made on families when a prevention program was delivered to the coparenting couple, rather than to just one parent. However, fathers' engagement with children and involvement in daily child-care tasks 18 months after baseline had positively increased for parents in both the father-only and couples groups, when compared to a control group (Cowan et al., 2008). The same coparenting initiative focused on building supportive coparenting relationships among low-income families demonstrates the value for children of having two or more adults coparenting cooperatively, for both parent involvement and parent-child relationship quality (Pruett, Cowan, Cowan & Pruett, 2009).

Numerous studies have now demonstrated that coparenting is related to parenting quality (Feinberg et al., 2007; Margolin et al., 2001; McHale et al., 2000; Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001; Van Egeren, 2004; Feinberg, Brown, & Kan, 2012). The influence of the coparenting relationship on parenting and parent–child relations has been considered across the span of childhood within families, from infancy through adolescence (Feinberg et al., 2007; Schoppe et al., 2001). There has been demonstrated longitudinal importance of the quality of coparenting relationship in predicting parenting, couple relationships, and child outcomes during infancy and toddlerhood (McHale & Rasmussen, 1998; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004), as well as during middle childhood or preadolescence (Forehand & Jones, 2003).

Relatively few, but more recent studies, have focused on unmarried parents and some families of color. It has been shown that coparenting quality impacts the quality of mother's parenting and father's parenting also among unmarried parents (Dorsey, Forhand, & Brody, 2007; Feinberg et al., 2007; Waller & Swisher, 2006), and that in African American families with dyadic and polyadic relationships involving extended kin, the quality of coparenting relationships between any combination of kin, custodial parent, or noncustodial biological parent

impacts the quality of parenting and parent involvement (Aronson, Whitehead, & Baber, 2003; Kalil, Ziol-Guest, & Coley, 2005; Krishnakumar & Black, 2003). Another study showed that regardless of a couple's relationship status (never married, separated, or divorced), the quality of the father-mother relationship was shown to be a strong predictor of father-child relationship quality (Cowan et al., 2008). A coparenting-focused intervention for expecting parents demonstrated that positive father involvement can be fostered (especially relevant for low-income, young, and/or unmarried parents) by increasing mother's support for father involvement (Feinberg & Sakuma, 2011).

Clarity on coparenting's exact role in relation to parenting has been furthered by experimental and longitudinal studies. These have shown, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally, that coparenting has a mediating role between the overall couple relationship and parenting (Floyd, Gilliom, & Costigan, 1998; Gonzales, Pitts, Hill, & Roosa, 2000). In several studies, coparenting partly mediated the link between the couple's relationship quality and warm, sensitive parenting (Floyd et al., 1998; Gonzales et al., 2000; Belsky & Hsieh, 1998), and mediated the influence of couple conflict and hostility on parenting quality (Floyd et al., 1998; Margolin et al., 2001; Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006). Further, a study on intimate partner violence demonstrated that the disruption of the coparental alliance may be an underlying mechanism linking intimate partner violence to negative parenting and child maladjustment (Kan et al., 2012).

Inclusivity in Coparenting Research

There is a dearth of coparenting literature focused on LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, queer) couples, adolescent parents, couples of mixed race/ethnicity (two individuals with differing mono-racial/ethnic backgrounds, or couples with at least one partner of mixed

race/ethnicity), and monoracial/ethnic African American, Latino, Asian, or Native American couples. The majority of coparenting studies thus far have been primarily focused on heterosexual, monoracial non-Latino white families. This is in part due to coparenting being a relatively new field of research, but it also reflects the standard of white heteronormative engrained in U.S. society.

Many researchers are certainly working to reconcile this, taking recent steps in an inclusive direction toward establishing racial and ethnic representativeness in the coparenting literature. Some of these studies have tended to focus on areas where people of color are thought to differ from whites. For instance, a disproportionate number of coparenting studies on families of color have focused on extended kinship arrangements. Many other potentially relevant coparenting topics not related to cultural practices or racial/ethnic identity (e.g. socioeconomic status), and for which coparenting similarities are likely to be found across racial/ethnic groups, still remain in need of investigation. Additionally, the grouping together of people of color can certainly allow studies to account for a broader range of human experience, but there also remains the need to continue accounting for important distinctions between specific racial/ethnic groups. The field's capacity to account for between- and within-group similarities and differences will be greatly enhanced by studies that continue to appropriately honor and validate the experiences of all couples and families.

Coparenting among Latino populations. There are very few previous studies which have examined coparenting among people of color in general, and Latinos, more specifically. (The term *Latino* will be used because it refers to any person of Hispanic or Latin American ethnicity. *Hispanic* technically includes only those who can trace their family lineage back to Spain, and therefore excludes descendents of African slaves and Indigenous people of the

Americas). Some studies which have examined coparenting among Latinos to date have used "Latino" as an umbrella term which encompasses numerous subgroups of individuals who vary greatly in their cultural norms, beliefs and practices. These studies have also tended to focus exclusively on areas for which there is reason to believe that Latinos may differ culturally from non-Latino families (Goodman & Silverstein, 2002; Roy & Burton, 2007; Fagan, 2008; Goodman & Silverstein, 2006; Moore, Florsheim, & Butner, 2007).

A common theme among coparenting studies involving Latinos (and African Americans, for that matter) includes examining the role of extended kinship systems and kinscription (Jones & Lindahl, 2011; Goodman, & Silverstein, 2002; Goodman & Silverstein, 2006; Roy & Burton, 2007). Goodman and Silverstein conducted two quantitative studies (2002, 2006) comparing well-being and life satisfaction among African American, Latina, and white grandmothers responsible for raising versus helping to raise their grandchildren (custodial versus coparenting arrangement, respectively) (2002; 2006). Findings related to Latina grandmothers entailed greater well-being when in coparenting families than in custodial arrangements, and higher life satisfaction than African American or White grandmothers when engaged in coparenting. A third study involving families of color and extended kin included a longitudinal ethnographic investigation of kinscription, which referred to the mothers' recruitment of nonresidential fathers, intimate partners, family and friends, to support the needs of young children (Roy & Burton, 2007). This study compared low-income African American, Latino (including Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans, and Central Americans), and non-Latino white families. It sought to define the context of kinscription and determined it as shaped by immigration status, the fluctuations of romantic relationships, and fathers' caregiving responsibilities. One race/ethnicity-related finding included that twice as many Latino and African American mothers

recruited paternal kin compared with non-Latino white mothers. As suggested by all three of these studies, differing cultural expectations regarding caregiving roles (the cultural lens through which grandparenthood is viewed, as well as how roles of extended family are viewed) seem to impact grandmothers' adaptation to custodial or coparenting family structures, grandmothers' life satisfaction, and mothers' kinscription behaviors.

Although the involvement of extended kin and the kinscription of father-figures in coparenting may be extremely culturally relevant for many Latino families, there also remains a great deal of value in examining coparenting at the level of the couple relationship for Latinos, as this subsystem remains a primary context within which the task of childrearing is realized. Exclusively pursuing research on the aspects of coparenting where there is reason to believe that Latinos may differ culturally from non-Latino white couples can overemphasize racial or ethnic differences, resulting in blind spots in areas where there are more similarities than differences between groups, or where there are unexpected differences which do not immediately correspond with a known cultural difference.

Two studies have focused on young Latino parents; the first was a transition to parenthood study that investigated predictors of relationship outcomes and the second tested the impact of a coparenting and a childbirth intervention on father engagement. In the first study, young Latino couples (ages 14-24) were found to be more likely than non-Latino whites and African American couples to be warmly engaged and to remain romantically involved across the transition to parenthood (Moore et al., 2007). The second study examined the effects of prebirth coparenting and childbirth interventions delivered to young African American and Latino fathers. This was done by comparing three groups; a coparenting intervention group, a childbirth intervention group, and a no-intervention comparison group (Fagan, 2008). The study's

coparenting intervention was associated with changes in fathers' positive perceptions of their coparenting behavior, and fathers' improved coparenting behavior (when compared with a no-intervention control group (n=64). In addition, fathers who participated in the coparenting intervention reported higher levels of engagement with their infants compared with fathers who participated in the childbirth intervention. These studies demonstrate the relevance of further investigating the connections between coparenting, the couple relationship, and parenting for Latino parents.

Coparenting among Mexican American couples. In contrast to the previous studies, which often have not distinguished between the national origins of participants who identify as Hispanic/Latino, four coparenting studies were found that focused specifically on Mexican American couples. The first was a qualitative study involving 14 couples who engaged in audio-recorded group discussions (Caldera, Fitzpatrick, & Wampler, 2002). Six coparenting dimensions emerged from the analysis, four of which involved how the parents decided to manage their coparenting (joint decision making, support, coordination, and compensation) and two of which reflected the ongoing process of negotiation involved (cooperation and conflict). The two dimensions of coordination (how the couple divides coparenting tasks) and compensating for each others' shortcomings (e.g. the father has all of the driving duties because the mother does not drive) have not received much focus in the coparenting literature on non-Latino white couples. Some themes suggested traditionally held gender roles among the participants. Others emerged as evidence contrary to some traditionally held beliefs about Latino families. These included that the couples valued the involvement of both of the parents in childrearing (not just the mother) and also valued joint decision making and teamwork (rather than a more unilateral, patriarchal model).

The remaining three studies involving Mexican American families examined the connections between coparenting, parenting, and child outcomes. First, the Supporting Fatherhood Involvement study had a sizeable sample of Mexican American participants (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, 2007; Cowan et al., 2009). This study involved a randomized clinical trial examining the effectiveness of interventions aimed at increasing positive involvement of low-income Mexican American and non-Latino white fathers with their children by strengthening the coparenting relationship. Participants were assigned to a 16-week couples group, a 16-week fathers group, or a single session control group. Results indicated that couples in both intervention groups fared better than the control group participants in terms of father involvement, couple relationship quality, and children's problem behaviors. In fact, regardless of ethnicity, income level, or family structure, participants in the couples' groups had more consistent and longer term positive effects than those in fathers-only groups (Cowan et al., 2009). These findings strongly support the notion that coparenting relates to parenting and couple relationship quality for both Mexican American and non-Latino white couples.

The second study looked at Mexican American mothers' and fathers' differential treatment of their adolescent children, including affection and discipline toward them (Solmeyer et al., 2011). The study's premise was based on previous work suggesting that differential treatment may indicate problems in the coparenting alliance (Reiss et al., 1994; Kan, McHale, & Crouter, 2008). Results from Solmeyer and colleagues (2011) indicated that parents who exhibited equal patterns of affection toward their children also tended to report higher levels of coparenting satisfaction, higher familism values, more traditional gender role attitudes, and relatively stronger orientations to Mexican than Anglo culture. Several potential explanations were offered for these patterns. Perhaps the values of familism and collectivism in traditional

Mexican culture (placing the family's needs above those of the individual's) were associated with equal treatment of children because maintaining family harmony is a top priority. In contrast, perhaps the emphasis on individuality and achievement among parents oriented toward Anglo culture resulted in differential treatment because of the desire to meet each child's individual needs in order to promote their success as individuals. Most noteworthy here is that equal patterns were linked with positive results. Parents reported higher coparenting satisfaction when equally affectionate towards their children, more marital love with equal patterns of affection and discipline, and both children displayed less risky behaviors and depressive symptoms when parents disciplined them equally, rather than differentially. This study certainly reinforces that the parenting and coparenting subsystems are interrelated, but distinctly operating for Mexican American parents, as they do among non-Latino white parents.

The third study examined the effects of coparenting behaviors on parenting and infant adjustment (Cabrera, Shannon, & La Taillade, 2009). Findings indicated that couple conflict was more predictive of coparenting conflict than was level of acculturation, parents' mental health, or family support. Coparenting conflict was not predictive of infant social development but was indicative of father engagement (higher coparenting conflict was associated with more acculturated fathers engaging in more caregiving than the less acculturated fathers). Despite the relevance of these findings to the current study, it should be noted that this study only examined the conflict aspect of coparenting, and that this was accomplished by asking one question about the couples' levels of conflict with their partners about issues regarding their children. Although this and the other previously mentioned studies are certainly taking steps in the right direction by including Latinos in their study of the relationships between coparenting, couple relationship, and parenting, a great deal still remains to be discovered in this regard.

Diversity among Mexican American populations. Mexican Americans are an extremely diverse group, who vary greatly in many regards. A few aspects of identity that contribute to the diversity of Mexican Americans include language, level of urbanity, and level of acculturation. There is often greater complexity with regards to language than is often perceived by many non-Latinos in the United States. At the most basic level, Mexican Americans may be fluent only in English, only in Spanish, or may be bilingual in both English and Spanish. Even within families, there may be differing language levels between individual members. Children born in the U.S. to Spanish-speaking parents sometimes understand Spanish and speak only English, while their parents may speak mostly Spanish.

Mexican Americans individuals may also vary according to the level of urbanity of their home community (how rural versus urban it is), as well as their level of acculturation. A Mexican American individual who grew up in Los Angeles is likely to differ culturally from someone brought up in a rural farming community in Northern California. Acculturation level may vary within the same family as well. Mexican-born parents may be less acculturated than their U.S.-born children, or entire families may be more acculturated than others, regardless of the number of years spent in the United States.

The only truly universal trait shared among all Mexican Americans is the ability to trace family lineage to Mexico. Many Mexican American families have resided on former Mexican territory since it was taken over by the U.S., further complicating the conception of what signifies being "from" Mexico, versus the United States. Until research exists which accounts for the various and numerous differences among individuals within the Mexican American population (e.g. socioeconomic status, U.S.-born versus foreign-born, level of urbanity of home community, level of acculturation, language), there remains little alternative but to report on this

group as a whole. This will be done in the present study while simultaneously attempting to not lose sight of the fluidity and diversity of this group of individuals.

Purpose of the Current Study

The studies described above demonstrate that coparenting is complex, and distinct from but interrelated with couple satisfaction and parenting. The coparenting and couple satisfaction literature has demonstrated that more positive coparenting tends to be linked with higher couple satisfaction. The coparenting and parenting literature suggests that positive coparenting serves as a moderator between the couple's relationship and positive parenting. However, there has been little investigation into if these connections are relevant for Mexican American couples.

Although it is clear conceptually that coparenting is a relevant construct across race/ethnicity, few studies have examined coparenting relationships for couples of racial/ethnic groups other than non-Latino whites. The relatively small body of research that has focused on the coparenting dynamics of African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian, and Native American families has tended to delve into areas in which these racial/ethnic groups are thought to differ from whites. For instance, emphasis on coparenting research among minority families tends to focus on mothers and extended family members (Murray, Bynum, Brody, Willert & Stephens, 2001; Phares, Lopex, Fields, Kamboukos & Duhig, 2005). The basis for this line of research is that ethnic minorities tend to be more likely to subscribe to culturally rooted collectivism and reliance on extended family systems (Gaines et al., 1997). Although these extended kin coparenting systems may be particularly relevant areas of study for ethnic minority families who subscribe to more collectivist cultural ideals (Jones & Lindahl, 2011), many coparenting fundamentals also require attention, as these still remain far from established for racial/ethnic minority populations. As such, most of the studies reviewed on coparenting were conducted on

predominantly White, middle-class families, and these findings cannot be generalized to other groups.

Because Latino individuals have yet to be represented in both the theoretical and empirical literature on coparenting, the current investigation aims to complete an in-depth exploration of coparenting and the couple relationship, including a subset of the Latino population. The broad question framing the current investigation relates to the relationship between coparenting and couple interactions among European American and Mexican American couples. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to the base of knowledge related to understanding the particulars of the relationship between the couple relationship and the coparenting alliance, and to determine if these function similarly for each group.

An additional factor to take into consideration is the methodology of the studies which have been conducted to examine coparenting and couple relationship. The vast majority of studies on coparenting have been approached by using either direct observation or self-report (McHale & Kuersten-Hogan, 2007). Direct observation enables trained, independent, and objective observers to code the interactions between couples. It does, however, only capture one moment in time, and given that this moment is being videotaped, parents may be less likely to engage in what could be considered negative coparenting behaviors. On the other hand, self-report measures may tend to elicit responses governed by sentiment override, the reporting of global, rather than context-specific, relationship sentiment (Weiss, 1980). Additionally, the dilemma of self-report includes that participants are unable to report on that which they are unaware. As such, one of the major strengths of the current study is the mixed-method design. Studies which use a single method to study two sets of variables tend to get inflated correlations because their results are derived from the same type of source. This study, however, will avoid

common method variance, in that it will utilize multiple instruments and observers to evaluate coparenting and couple interactions.

The present study was designed to investigate how positive coparenting relates to 1) couple satisfaction, and 2) positive parenting, for predominantly low-income Mexican American and non-Latino White couples. The questions guiding this research and their corresponding hypotheses are: 1) Is positive coparenting related to couple satisfaction differently between Mexican American and non-Latino white couples, and 2) Is there an association between positive coparenting and positive parenting, and does this association differ between Mexican American and non-Latino White couples? Given the distinctiveness of coparenting and couple subsystems, positive coparenting dimensions are only expected to be low to moderately related to couple satisfaction. However, a strong association is expected between positive coparenting and positive parenting. Then, moderating effects of race/ethnicity will be explored in relation to how positive coparenting is associated with: couple satisfaction and parenting. These questions of whether the associations will differ between Mexican American and non-Latino white couples will serve as exploratory questions, for there is too little research to date to make specific hypotheses in this respect.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

Formulation

The present study will explore how positive coparenting (measured as observed level of agreement on how to solve a problem, connection and cohesiveness, and teamwork during a couple discussion task) relates to self-reported couple satisfaction and to observed positive parenting (during a parent-child interaction task). Differences in these associations will be examined for Mexican American and non-Latino white couples. The current study will test and examine hypotheses and additional exploratory questions listed below.

Hypotheses:

1. Given the distinctiveness of the coparenting and couple subsystems, positive coparenting dimensions are expected to be significantly, but only low to moderately related to couple satisfaction.

2. Given the interconnectedness between the coparenting and parent-child subsystems, a strong and significant association is expected between positive coparenting and positive parenting.

Exploratory Questions:

As data are scarce and inconclusive with respect to coparenting-related differences between Mexican American and non-Latino white couples, the following questions will also be explored:

1. Does the association between positive coparenting and couple satisfaction differ for Mexican American and non-Latino white couples?

2. Does the association between positive coparenting and positive parenting differ for Mexican American and non-Latino white couples?

Procedure

The present study is imbedded within the Supporting Father Involvement (SFI) project, which is currently underway in California. SFI entails the use of randomized clinical trials of preventive interventions for low-income Spanish- and English-speaking families (Pruett, Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, & Wong, 2009). The project's stated goals are to promote healthy family development and to effect positive change in the following five family domains: 1) couple relationships, 2) parent-child relationships, 3) family-of-origin relationships (the inter-generational transmission of expectations and relationship behavior patterns), 4) individual factors (personality characteristics, mental health, well-being), and 5) life stress/social support balance. The participants are randomly assigned to one of three conditions: 1) a 16-week intervention group for couples, 2) a 16-week intervention group for fathers, or 3) a low-dose comparison condition in which couples attended one 3-hour group session. The study allows for the systematic comparison between different types of interventions aimed at increasing father involvement and coparenting, as well as the evaluation of their capacity for positive preventive effects.

The SFI project includes a sample of over 800 families from urban and rural, primarily low-income communities in five California counties (San Luis Obispo, Santa Cruz, Tulare, Contra Costa, and Yuba). The study's sample consists of approximately two-thirds Mexican American and one-third non-Latino white families. Participants were widely recruited by program staff case managers into family resource centers in each of the five counties. Snowball sampling was used, with some direct referrals from the resource centers, and the majority from

other county service agencies. In addition, some families were referred by friends who were former participants and had already completed the study, and others were recruited through talks at community organizational meetings, ads in the local media, and information tables at public events and locations (see Cowan et al., 2009 for further details).

Following referral to the SFI study, potential participants underwent a brief screening interview administered by case managers. The interview served both as part of the recruitment process and to determine eligibility. Eligibility criteria included: (a) both partners agreed to participate (relationship status was not a criterion for inclusion), (b) the father and mother were biological or adoptive parents of their youngest child who was between birth and seven years old, (c) neither parent suffered from a severe mental illness or substance abuse such that these interfered with daily functioning at work or in caring for their children, and (d) there was not a current open child or spousal protection case with Child Protective Services or an instance within the past year of spousal violence or child abuse.

Each eligible couple was then scheduled for a joint 1.5-hour initial interview with the group leaders, which acquainted couples with the topics and issues to be addressed in the intervention and assessments. In the interview, couples were informed that the study involved a randomized clinical trial. Those who agreed to accept random assignment to one of the three conditions became SFI participants. Baseline assessments and participation in the ongoing groups took place in either Spanish or English. After the baseline assessment, subsequent assessments were given after the intervention at 6 and 18-month intervals.

Sample

With the overall SFI study serving as the sampling frame, purposive sampling was then used to narrow in on the subsample of participants for the current study. Families were selected

from phase IV of SFI, including families from four of the five California counties (excluding Contra Costa). Selection was determined in part by the race/ethnicity of participants. A total of 73 mono-racial/ethnic couples were selected, 56.2% were Hispanic/Latino (all of Mexican descent) and 43.8% were non-Latino white. Couples of mixed race/ethnicity were not included in the sample of the present study.

Income and relationship status data for the parents were obtained at baseline. Mothers' incomes ranged from $0 to $80,000 and fathers' incomes from $0 to $85,000, with means of $12,711 (SD = 1.4) and $21,177 (SD = 2.1), respectively. Relationship status (married/non-married and cohabiting/non-cohabiting) was obtained, and almost all couples (both married and the non-married) were living together. Of the 60% married couples, all but one couple was living together, and of the 40% non-married couples, all but three lived together.

Information regarding age was collected for all participants, including mothers, fathers, and target child (if the couple had more than one child, the youngest served as the target child). The mothers' ages ranged from 17 to 54 years, and the mean age at baseline for mothers was 31 years (SD= 7.5). For fathers, the range was from 18 to 71 years, with a mean baseline of 33 years (SD = 8.7). The age range for the target child in the families was from 0 to 10 years, with a mean age of 3.2 years (SD = 3.0).

Additional descriptive data, collected only for Mexican American parents, included the number of years they had been living in the United States. Mothers had lived in the U.S. for a mean of 13.2 years (SD = 6.8), with a range of 3 to 35 years. For fathers, the mean was 15.7 years (SD = 9.2), with a range of 0 to 47 years.

Measures

SFI utilizes a mixed-methods research design that includes both qualitative and quantitative measures, enabling the present study to draw from both observational and self-report questionnaire data. Direct observation of two different types of videotaped task interactions by trained coders yielded behavioral ratings, each capturing a separate familial subsystem. The first task was the Couple Discussion Task (CDT), capturing the coparental subsystem. The second task was the Parent-Child Interaction (PCI), involving the parent-child subsystems (made up of each parent-child dyad). The final measure utilized in the present study was a self-report questionnaire of couple relationship satisfaction, called the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI).

Positive coparenting. Information about the quality of coparenting relationship was obtained via videotaped Couple Discussion Tasks (CDTs), in which the couple identified and then discussed an unresolved issue in their relationship as parents. Couples were asked to complete CDTs twice: once as a part of the baseline assessment, and again around 18 months later (and subsequent to the intervention). First, parents each filled out a checklist of coparenting issues and rated the extent that they disagreed on these topics in relation to the target child. Case managers then assisted the parents in identifying an issue for them to discuss during the task by guiding them toward those topics that yielded the highest scores for both parents or that had the greatest discrepancy between parents' ratings. Examples of topics included the division of workload in childrearing, curfews/bedtimes, the relationship between the child and his/her siblings, the child's social activities (e.g., friends' visits, parties), childcare choices, and the child's education.

Once the couple selected a topic, and with both partners present, the case manager briefly interviewed one partner at a time in order to clarify each partner's perspective and provided a

brief summary of the issue, highlighting the differences between the partners' points of view. The case manager then ensured that the video camera was focused and recording, and left, instructing the couple to try to make some progress on the issue. The couple's coparenting discussions continued unstructured and uninterrupted until either they determined they were finished or the Case Manager re-entered the room, approximately 10 minutes later. The case manager returned for debriefing, whether or not the couple felt they had made any progress. During debriefing, participants are asked about their experiences during the task, and case managers provided supportive listening and normalized the couples' difficulties.

The videotaped CDT interactions were then rated by trained coders across 19 different dimensions (9 couple and 10 individual codes). Coders worked in teams of two and had no prior contact with or knowledge about the family. Ratings were made using one of three approaches: (1) *consensus*, in which two coders *together* through discussion issued a single set of ratings; (2) *composite*, in which the ratings made separately by two coders were later averaged; (3) *single rater*. In the present study, three couple dimensions were utilized as a measure of coparenting: a) level of agreement about how to solve the problem, b) teamwork, and c) connection and cohesiveness (see Appendices A.1, A.2, A.3, respectively, for full descriptions). Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs; two-way random model, absolute agreement) revealed that estimates of inter-rater reliability for the three dimensions were very high: a) .97, b) .97, c) .80.

Couple satisfaction. Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983) is a six-item self-report questionnaire administered to quantify a couples' level of relationship satisfaction (α =.93 for fathers and .94 for mothers). One global estimate and five specific questions about relationship satisfaction are used to measure each partner's satisfaction with the couple relationship and create a single factor scale (Cowan et al. 2009). QMI scores were obtained at

baseline for each individual spouse and were used to determine the couple's overall level of relationship satisfaction.

Positive parenting. Information about positive parenting behavior was obtained via the Parent-Child Interaction (PCI), which entails the videotaped recording of mother-child and father-child interactions. During the interactions, parents with a target child over 30 months were asked to make up a story with their child, talk with their child about an enjoyable and a difficult time they had, and sing a song together. Parents with a target child under 30 months were asked to read a story to their child and sing a song. All parents were also asked to do one or more exploratory play activities with their child (i.e., infant activity arch with hanging toys, stacking rings, blocks, Ball of Whacks). Trained coders then viewed the videotapes and rated the parents using a coding scheme adapted for SFI.

The original PCI coding scheme was designed by Cowan and Cowan (1992) and was adapted by Ebling and Pruett (2009) for SFI. The adapted version entails thirteen dimensions, rated on either 4- or 5-point Likert scales (e.g., 1 = *very low* to 5 = *extremely high*). The dimensions pertaining to parent behavior included warmth, coldness, limit setting, parent's maturity demands, confidence in parental role, anger, anxiety, sadness, happiness, sensitivity to child's developmental level, and collaborativeness. Two additional dimensions pertained to the interaction as a whole (rather than one individual's behavior); these were ease of parent-child interaction and playfulness/humor.

Trained coders viewed the videotaped parent-child interactions and rated them, recording both the typical and highest level of the behaviors corresponding to each dimension observed in the session. As with rating the Couple Discussion Task, coders worked in teams of two and had no prior contact with or knowledge about the family. Across all parent-child interactions that

were conducted for SFI, approximately 45% were rated by consensus, 35% by composite, and 20% by a single rater. The overall estimate of inter-rater reliability was very high (ICC = .94) based on intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs; two-way random model, absolute agreement).

Construction of the Positive Parenting Scales. A principal component analysis was conducted to reduce the number of ratings of observed parenting behaviors into a smaller number of scales that hung together empirically and thematically. Highest level and typical level ratings were combined, and orthogonal (varimax) rotation was used because it yielded the clearest, more interpretable solution. To define each factor, an item-to-factor loading cutoff of .35 was adopted. Variables with loadings between .35 and .55 were examined; those that did not fit conceptually with a dimension were eliminated. When a variable loaded onto two dimensions (.35 or higher), the dimension with the best conceptual fit (and typically, also with the higher loading) was selected. This yielded seven parenting behavior scales, each composed of one to three dimensions as follows. The present study utilized the following three scales:

1. Positive Affect (alpha = .89): happiness, ease of interaction, playfulness/humor

2. Limits and Expectations (alpha = .87): limit setting, maturity demands

3. Positive Responsiveness (alpha = .88): warmth, sensitivity to child's developmental level, collaborativeness

Scale scores were computed by averaging the raw ratings that composed each scale. Again, both highest level and typical level ratings for a given dimension (e.g., warmth, anxiety) were included in the scale scores.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted to test the association between positive coparenting and couple satisfaction, between positive coparenting and positive parenting, and to test if these

associations differ for Mexican American and non-Latino white couples. Pearson correlations were utilized to examine the associations between coparenting (CDT dimensions) and couple satisfaction, and between coparenting and positive parenting (PCI scales). A regression-based approach for testing moderator effects was employed to test for race/ethnicity as a potential moderator in the relationships between coparenting and couple satisfaction, and between coparenting and positive parenting.

CHAPTER IV

Findings

Hypothesis 1: Given the distinctiveness of the coparenting and couple subsystems, positive coparenting dimensions are expected to be significantly, but only low to moderately related to couple satisfaction.

As shown in Table 1 below, Pearson correlations between the three Couple Discussion Task dimensions and couple satisfaction were generally low. Hypothesis 1 was supported in that the correlation between couple's connection/cohesiveness and couple satisfaction reached significance for fathers, and the corresponding correlation was approaching significance for mothers.

Table 1
Correlations between Coparenting Behaviors and Couple Satisfaction (QMI)

Coparenting Behaviors	QMI at Baseline	
	Fathers	Mothers
Agreement on How to Solve the Problem	.03	- .19
Teamwork	.03	- .20
Connection and Cohesiveness	.33**	.23 [t]

[t] p < .06; ** p < .01.

Exploratory Question1: Is there an association between positive coparenting and couple satisfaction, and does this association differ for Mexican American and non-Latino white couples?

Interactions between couple coparenting behaviors and race/ethnicity in the prediction of couple satisfaction were tested. Procedures followed those recommended for testing moderated

effects with a regression approach (Aiken & West, 1991; Baron & Kenny, 1986; Holmbeck, 1997). First, to eliminate problems of multicollinearity, coparenting predictor variables were centered by subtracting the sample mean from all individuals' scores on the variable. Race/ethnicity was coded as a dichotomous variable (0 = non-Latino white; 1 = Mexican American).

The predictor variables were entered in the first step of a stepwise regression, followed by their interaction on the second step. This procedure was repeated for each combination of coparenting behavior and race/ethnicity. As shown in the table below, couple's race/ethnicity significantly moderated the relationship between Agreement and couple satisfaction, and the relationship between Teamwork and couple satisfaction. A significant moderator effect is indicated when the interaction on Step 2 produces a statistically significant change in R^2.

Table 2
Regression Results Showing Significant Coparenting X Race/Ethnicity Interactions in Predicting Couple Satisfaction

Step	Variables Entered	Fathers			Mothers		
		β	R^2	R^2_{change}	β	R^2	R^2_{change}
1	Race/ethnicity	.33			- .60		
	Agreement (CDT)	.03	.00		- .15	.04	
2	Race/ethnicity X Agreement	- 4.5**	.13**	.13**	- 4.9**	.19**	.15**
1	Race/ethnicity	.07			- .54		
	Teamwork (CDT)	.02	.00		- .16	.04	
2	Race/ethnicity X Teamwork	- 3.7**	.10**	.10**	- 3.6*	.13*	.09*

Note: N = 73 couples.
* p < .05; ** p < .01. A significant moderator effect is indicated when the interaction on Step 2 produces a statistically significant change in R^2.

Next, for each of the significant moderator effects, the slope of the relationship between CDT rating and couple satisfaction was examined separately for the two race/ethnicity groups. (See Holmbeck, 2002 for post-hoc probing procedures of significant moderator effects). In

every case, the slope for non-Latino white participants was positive and significant, but the slope for the Mexican American participants did not differ from zero. In other words, Agreement and Teamwork were positively associated with couple satisfaction, but <u>only</u> for non-Latino white participants. The slopes (unstandardized *b*) were as follows:

Table 3
Slopes for Discrete Racial/Ethnic Groups in Relationships between Coparenting Behaviors and Couple Satisfaction

Race/Ethnicity	Coparenting Behaviors	Fathers	Mothers
Non-Latino White	Agreement	4.5**	4.7**
	Teamwork	3.7**	3.4*
Mexican American	Agreement	.01, p = ns	- .17, p = ns
	Teamwork	.00, p = ns	- .18, p = ns

* p < .05; ** p < .01.

Hypothesis 2: A strong and significant association is expected between positive coparenting and positive parenting.

Pearson correlations between the 3 Couple Discussion Task ratings and positive parenting (PCI scales) were generally low. However, the correlation between couple's connection/cohesiveness and parents' positive affect was significant for both fathers and mothers. The correlation between couple's connection/cohesiveness and father's positive responsiveness approached significance.

Table 4

Correlations between Coparenting Behaviors and Positive Parenting Behaviors (PCI Scales)

| PCI Scales | Parent | Coparenting Behaviors | | |
		Agreement on How to Solve the Problem	Teamwork	Connection and Cohesiveness
Positive Affect	Fathers	.09	.11	.26*
	Mothers	.04	.04	.28*
Limits & Expectations	Fathers	- .14	- .15	- .03
	Mothers	- .13	- .14	.11
Positive Responsiveness	Fathers	.12	.13	.23 [t]
	Mothers	.10	.09	.21

[t] $p < .06$; * $p < .05$.

Exploratory Question 2: Is positive coparenting related to positive parenting differently for Mexican American vs. non-Latino white couples?

Next, interactions between couple coparenting behaviors and race/ethnicity in the prediction of positive parenting (PCI scales) were tested. The same regression-based procedures for testing moderator effects as described above were used. For predictions of each parent's Positive Affect (PCI Scale 1), there was only one significant moderator effect: race/ethnicity significantly moderated the relationship between couples' Connection/Cohesiveness and *fathers'* Positive Affect. For predictions of each parent's Limits and Expectations (PCI Scale 2), there were no significant moderator effects. For predictions of each parent's Positive Responsiveness (PCI Scale 3), again there was only one significant moderator effect: race/ethnicity significantly moderated the relationship between couples' Teamwork and *fathers'* Positive Responsiveness.

Table 5
Regression Results Showing Significant Coparenting X Race/Ethnicity Interactions in Predicting
Fathers' Positive Parenting

		Predicting Father's Positive Affect		
Step	Variables Entered	β	R^2	R^2_{change}
1	Race/ethnicity	.11		
	Connection (CDT)	.10	.08	
2	Race/ethnicity X Connection	- .16*	.14*	.06*

		Predicting Father's Positive Responsiveness		
Step	Variables Entered	β	R^2	R^2_{change}
1	Race/ethnicity	.11		
	Teamwork (CDT)	.10	.08	
2	Race/ethnicity X Teamwork	- .16*	.14*	.06*

Note: N = 73 couples.
* $p < .05$. A significant moderator effect is indicated when the interaction on Step 2 produces a
statistically significant change in R^2.

Next, for each of the significant moderator effects, the slope of the relationship between
CDT rating and PCI scale was examined separately for the two race/ethnicity groups. Again, in
every case, the slope for non-Latino white fathers was positive and significant, but the slope for
the Mexican American fathers did not differ from zero. In other words, Connection and
Cohesiveness was positively associated with Positive Affect and Positive Responsiveness, but
only for non-Latino white fathers. The slopes (unstandardized *b*) are provided below:

Table 6
Slopes for Discrete Racial/Ethnic Groups in Relationships between Coparenting Behaviors and
Fathers' Positive Parenting Behaviors

Race/Ethnicity	PCI Scales	Fathers
Non-Latino White	Positive Affect	.20**
	Positive Responsiveness	.15**
Mexican American	Positive Affect	.03, *p* = ns
	Positive Responsiveness	.02, *p* = ns

** $p < .01$

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Coparenting and Couple Satisfaction

The present study explored connections between coparenting, couple satisfaction and positive parenting among Mexican American and non-Latino white couples. Hypothesis 1 was confirmed in that there appears to be some connection between coparenting and couple satisfaction (generally low correlations) for parents in the sample. Specifically, connection and cohesiveness stood out from the other coparenting variables (agreement on how to solve the problem and teamwork) as linked with couple satisfaction. The correlation between connection/cohesiveness and couple satisfaction reached significance for fathers and approached significance for mothers. Most likely, given similar trends in a larger sample, the correlation would have reached significance for mothers as well. Overall, it appears that both Mexican American and non-Latino white couples who show more connection/cohesiveness tend to also be more satisfied with their relationship. The lack of significant findings for the teamwork and agreement aspects of coparenting was somewhat surprising, as overlap between these and marital satisfaction has been linked empirically by McHale (1997). Although primarily focused on non-Latino white couples, his study clearly demonstrated a positive correlation between marital satisfaction and supportive coparenting, which contained elements of teamwork and agreement (McHale, 1997).

The current findings beg the question of what it is about a couple's connection/cohesiveness (and *not* agreement or teamwork) that links it to the couple's level of

relationship satisfaction. One possible explanation could be that the connection/cohesiveness rating used in the present study may more accurately capture an element of the couple subsystem, rather than the coparenting subsystem from which it was intended to draw. Whereas agreement and teamwork focus on the couple's process of solving a coparenting-related problem with one another, the rating of connection and cohesiveness taps into the couple's sense of unity, intimacy, warmth and closeness during that process. Perhaps the unity and closeness being detected during the discussion more truly signifies connection and cohesiveness in the couple's overall relationship, rather than the intended aspects specific to the couple's coparenting relationship.

The lack of correlation between couples satisfaction and the agreement and teamwork variables could also be due to the possibility that the agreement and teamwork variables correlated differently among couples differing in satisfaction levels (e.g. teamwork was correlated differently for participants with high couple satisfaction than it was for couples low couple satisfaction), such that when these differences were averaged across the sample, they cancelled each other out. It is possible then that separately testing the more and less satisfied participants' agreement and teamwork may yield additional results.

In order to more fully understand why there were no positive correlations for agreement or teamwork with couple satisfaction, we must also turn to the first exploratory question and its corresponding moderator effects. At first glance, the couple's level of agreement about how to solve the problem and teamwork do not appear to be associated with level of relationship satisfaction. However, further analysis revealed that the relationships between each of these individual variables (agreement and couple satisfaction; teamwork and couple satisfaction) varied depending upon the race/ethnicity of participants. For non-Latino white participants,

increases in agreement and teamwork were associated with increases in couple satisfaction. This did not, however, hold true for Mexican American participants. In essence, the two groups differed in that only for the white participants were demonstrations of agreement and teamwork in the couple relationship related to higher relationship satisfaction. No previous studies were found that examined the relationship between coparenting and couple satisfaction for Mexican American couples. As noted previously, trends of interrelatedness between couple satisfaction and the teamwork and agreement aspects of coparenting have been previously demonstrated for non-Latino white couples, which align with these results (McHale, 1997).

This finding that race/ethnicity moderated the relationship between these coparenting dynamics and couple satisfaction gives rise to an alternative explanation for the lack of association between these two coparenting variables (agreement and teamwork) with couple satisfaction when initially examined for the entire sample. In essence, given that further analysis revealed statistical significance for one group and not the other, perhaps no significant findings were found in the initial analysis because it included both groups and the lack of association for Mexican American participants' could have offset the correlations for the white couples, rendering them insignificant. Upon further inspection, the two variables that appeared to have no association with couple satisfaction in the initial analysis were relevant for one of the two racial/ethnic groups.

The fact that agreement and teamwork were not associated with couple satisfaction for Mexican American participants certainly requires further exploration. Examining these results requires the use of gross generalizations and the reader is asked to keep in mind that there is a tremendous amount of difference between individuals within each racial/ethnic group. That said, it is also equally important to recognize and make attempts to contextualize differences in

coparenting and couple satisfaction that have arisen between the Mexican American and non-Latino couples in this sample. One possible explanation for these differences could be that relationship satisfaction may be more reliant upon partners' coparenting expectations than it is on the extent that couples agree on how to solve problems or whether they work as a team in doing so. For instance, if Latino couples in this sample tended toward coparenting expectations that involved adhering to more traditional gender roles (i.e. mothers serve as caregivers and fathers as providers and disciplinarians), the couple may still have been able to remain satisfied with their overall relationship due to their coparenting expectations having been fulfilled, despite little teamwork or agreement on how to solve the problem. In contrast, perhaps non-Latino white couples tended toward more egalitarian coparenting expectations, resulting in lower relationship satisfaction when these expectations were not met. This argument essentially posits that overall couple satisfaction is more wedded to coparenting expectations being met than it is to the coparenting approach taken by the couple. This would need to be examined in future research, alongside a thorough exploration of the extent of each partner's adherence to traditional gender roles.

In order to draw out this line of reasoning further, the role of acculturation in coparenting must also be considered. More acculturated Mexican American couples would be expected to have more egalitarian coparenting expectations (Solmeyer et al., 2011). Relationship satisfaction for these couples would then be expected to positively correlate with agreement and teamwork, as was found for the non-Latino white couples in the current study. A necessary step to contextualizing these between-group differences would be to measure and control for acculturation, seeking to support or disprove this possible explanation for agreement and teamwork impacting the white couples' relationship satisfaction, but not that of the Mexican

American couples. It may also serve to test for gender differences, as it has been previously found that level of acculturation was related to marital distress for Mexican American wives, but was unrelated to relationship satisfaction for Mexican American husbands (Negy & Snyder, 1997). This finding was speculated as potentially due to acculturation requiring a renegotiation of traditional marital and parental roles that may be particularly stressful for Mexican American wives and mothers.

Coparenting and Positive Parenting

Couple's connection/cohesiveness seems to be an essential ingredient for not only couple satisfaction, but for positive parenting as well. This same coparenting dimension, which was associated with couple satisfaction, also appears to be related to the way that couples parent. Analysis of the entire sample revealed that couple's connection/cohesiveness is mapping onto two elements of positive parenting, parent's positive affect (significant correlations for both mothers and fathers) and positive responsiveness (approaching significance for both mothers and fathers). The fact that these results arose from analysis of the whole sample somewhat negates the previous postulation that connection/cohesiveness may be capturing a quality of the couple relationship more than the coparenting subsystem, as intended. Couples' connection/cohesiveness does overlap with quality of parenting, and may be connected with other positive behaviors that were not examined in the present study. However, using SFI data, this idea could be tested with other variables.

The study's second hypothesis was partially supported in that correlations were generally low between coparenting (Couple Discussion Task ratings for connection/cohesiveness, agreement, and teamwork) and positive parenting (PCI scales of positive affect, limits/expectations, and positive responsiveness). Significant correlations were found between

couple's connection/cohesiveness and parents' positive affect for both fathers and mothers, and an additional near significant correlation was found between couple's connection/cohesiveness and father's positive responsiveness. This is consistent with studies (with primarily white participants) which have found that fathers' parental behavior is differently determined than that of mothers. One such study also found that the spillover from the couple relationship to the parent-child relationship was significantly stronger for fathers' responsiveness than mothers' responsiveness (Stroud, Durbin, Wilson, & Mendelsohn, 2011). A study involving observed triadic interactions found that fathers' supportive coparenting was predicted by fathers' marital satisfaction, mothers' relational behavior during mother-infant interactions, and infant difficult temperament, whereas mothers' supportive coparenting was only predicted by father's relational behavior (Gordon & Feldman, 2008). As speculated by Gordon and Feldman, it may be that fathers' coparenting is more reliant on factors stemming from multiple levels of the family system (child, couple, and parenting factors). The idea that fathers' parenting is more triadically dependent than mothers has been discussed by others as well (Pruett & Pruett, 2009). Mothers viewing fathers as competent and motivated has been connected with more father involvement in childrearing (McHale, 2007), and it has been argued based on research that fathers are essentially better parents when there is closeness and teamwork in the couple relationship (Pruett & Pruett, 2009).

It may be that the similar trends in differences between fathers and mothers found in prior research and the current study could also be explained by these studies having been focused on the coparenting of younger children. The present study involves children under 11 years and the other two include children ages 3-6 (Stroud et al., 2011) and infants (Gordon & Feldman, 2008). Perhaps there are differences in the extent of interaction between younger children and their

fathers versus their mothers in these early stages of family life (e.g. in families with younger children, mothers may be home more than fathers). This could explain differences in the factors that influence or correlate with how mothers and fathers parent and coparent their children. Were this to be the case, these patterns might also change over time, as the family shifts and grows.

The generally low correlations, combined with the fact that the third positive parenting scale of limit-setting was not found to be at all related to coparenting variables for either parent, leads to speculation regarding whether the CDT ratings utilized in the current study are in fact as true of measures of the coparenting subsystem as they purport to be. The PCI scales (positive affect, limits and expectations, and positive responsiveness) are pure measures, in that they consist of scales of individual parenting dimensions that were tested and determined to hang together statistically. The CDT ratings (agreement, teamwork, and connection/cohesiveness) are not scales, but rather consist of individual dimensions directly used to rate observed behaviors. Therefore, it is possible that the CDT ratings touch on overlapping elements with coparenting, but perhaps are a less pure measure of the construct than are the PCI scales for positive parenting. As such, the individual CDT dimensions of agreement and teamwork were not related to the parenting variables examined. It is possible, however that the testing of agreement and teamwork with parenting variables may have yielded results if the individual coparenting dimensions had first been incorporated into scales that better capture the complexity of the construct of coparenting.

In examining the final exploratory question, moderator effects again help explain the nature of the overlap between positive coparenting and positive parenting. Out of 18 possible moderator effects, only two were found to be significant. This speaks to the predominant

similarities among Mexican American and non-Latino white couples with respect to the associations between coparenting and positive parenting. Nevertheless, race/ethnicity was found to moderate the relationships between: 1) couples' connection/cohesiveness and fathers' positive affect, and 2) couples' teamwork and fathers' positive responsiveness. For non-Latino white fathers, positive affect and positive responsiveness in father-child interactions was greater when there was greater connection/cohesiveness in the couple's coparenting interaction. In contrast, the coparenting and parenting subsystems appeared to be less connected for the Mexican American fathers in the sample, such that their positive parenting interactions were not related to the couple's coparenting communication. Given that it has been previously established in studies with primarily non-Latino white couples that fathers' parental behavior appears to be differently determined than that of mothers (Stroud et al., 2011; Gordon & Feldman, 2008), this latest finding gives rise to new questions regarding the nature of how gender and race/ethnicity relate – separately and interactively - to coparenting and parenting.

Perhaps fathers are more triadically dependent (mothers-father-child), regardless of race/ethnicity. One study that focused on Mexican American couples examined the relationship between coparenting and parenting, but did so differently for mothers and fathers (Cabrera et al., 2009). For mothers, the relationship between coparenting conflict and maternal sensitivity in mother-child interactions was explored. For fathers, the associations between coparenting conflict and frequency of father engagement (i.e., literacy, caregiving, and warmth) were tested. Findings showed that when mothers reported coparenting conflict, they were *less* sensitive in mother-infant interactions. However, when fathers reported coparenting conflict, mothers were *more* sensitive and fathers were *less* warm when interacting with their child. It was also found that more acculturated fathers engaged in more caregiving amidst high coparenting conflict than

did less acculturated fathers. Although these findings address father and mother parenting-related differences associated with coparenting conflict for Mexican American couples, a truer exploration of gender-related differences would require that the same parenting measures be applied to both the mothers and fathers in the study. This limitation prevents conclusions from being drawn related to the differences found, placing further emphasis on the importance that future studies examine gender-related differences in the relationship between coparenting and parenting among Mexican American couples.

Limitations of the Current Study

The nature of the current study's sample is somewhat limited. First, because the current study's sample was derived from the Supporting Father Involvement intervention study, a sample of convenience was used, rather than a locally or nationally representative random sampling of families. That said, it was a large sample compared to previous research and included Mexican Americans from four different sites across California. Second, there was some lack of uniformity in the sample, which could have affected the results (i.e. couples were either married or not married and cohabiting or not cohabiting). However, all of the previously outlined analyses were repeated excluding the sample's non-cohabitating couples and the pattern of results did not change.

The current study's sample included heterosexual, mono-racial/ethnic couples from two groups: Mexican Americans and non-Latino whites. First, it remains unclear if the results found for Mexican Americans would hold true for other Latino couples, or to what the extent the overall results may be applicable to other racial/ethnic groups. Second, given the complexity of overlapping identities, future studies should examine coparenting dynamics in samples that include couples and individuals of mixed races/ethnicities - referring to couples where there are

racial/ethnic differences between the two partners, as well as couples made up of one or more individuals of mixed racial/ethnic identities. Third, the consideration of overlapping identities not only pertains to race and ethnicity, but also to gender and sexual orientation. Additional progress in the field will include the consideration of this overlap, as a portion of coparenting couples of any race or ethnicity may also identify as LGBTQ. Future studies that include these and other participants will continue to flesh out the coparenting literature, increasing its capacity to represent the diverse range of couples who engage in this important family function.

Some potential limitations related to the current study's measures have already been discussed. The individual nature of CDT dimensions may be limited as coparenting measures, especially relative to the scales that exist for positive parenting. Future examinations of SFI study data should conduct a preliminary analysis of CDT dimensions in order to first generate scales, which could result in a measure that more purely taps into the coparenting subsystem. Also, SFI's overall approach to measuring coparenting involves couple discussions of coparenting conflict. Perhaps other approaches to obtaining coparenting data would yield differing results (e.g. couple discussions of how they cooperate in childrearing), and should be considered for future coparenting studies.

Finally, conclusions about the direction of causality cannot be drawn due to the correlational design of the current study. Longitudinal studies are needed to track how the dynamics of these overlapping family subsystems interact over time. This would also allow for greater understanding of predictors of positive coparenting, couples satisfaction, and positive parenting.

Conclusion

There is not an abundance of coparenting literature to date, and a number of studies focusing on intact families are relatively recent on the forefront. Coparenting studies on low-income populations and people of color are particularly few and far between. The current study contributes to the literature in that is one of very few studies to examine coparenting among intact Mexican-American families, and to explore how the associations between coparenting, parenting, and couple satisfactions differ for Mexican American versus non-Latino white families. The present study's focus on primarily intact and low-income families with young children builds upon previous studies which have focused primarily on non-Latino white families.

Several significant gaps in the literature are being addressed by focusing on coparenting relationships among non-Latino white and Mexican-American couples. First, this study includes a sizeable sample of Mexican Americans, a population that is significantly underrepresented in the coparenting literature. A sizeable sample of Latinos in a coparenting study would itself be noteworthy, but by narrowing in on a specific subset of the Latino population and not lumping Latinos together into one group, the current study reduces the potential for skewed results due to unaccounted for between-group differences related to varying ethnic backgrounds or nationalities. Second, the present study is relatively rare in that it incorporates both self-report and observation measures. The current study moved beyond self-reported phenomenon to also capture observable coparenting and parenting processes. The study's mixed methods eliminate the concern for shared method variance, as is likely to be produced when studies utilize the same types of measures for all variables. Had the relationship satisfaction, coparenting, and parenting measures all consisted of self-report questionnaires, there would likely be exaggerated results

resulting from the similarity in method, as opposed to purely capturing effects for the actual constructs. Third, the current study has demonstrated that although coparenting may differ somewhat culturally, its relevance is not at all culture specific. It is an important aspect of family life for Mexican-American families as it is for non-Latino white families.

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Appendix A.1

Level of Agreement on How to Solve the Problem

This dimension assesses the extent to which the coder believes that each member of the dyad truly agrees with his/her partner about how to solve the topic being discussed. In assigning this code, coders should ask themselves the following question: To what extent does this person agree with his/her partner about how to solve the problem?

Coders should use couple discourse beginning when the interviewer is still in the room, and the process of the interaction after the interviewer leaves the room in assigning this code. Note that it is possible for couples to agree about how important the topic is AND the nature of the problem, but have different thoughts about how to solve the problem, and still score low (less agreement) on this code. Note also that some individuals may truly not agree about how to solve the issue (as judged from the time when the interviewer is in the room), but may not persist in presenting their side of the disagreement during the interaction. These couples should still be scored low in agreement about how to solve the problem if the coder believes the individual really has different ideas about how to solve the problem.

Some couples may not identify much of a problem to begin with, and thus not address how to solve the problem. Unless you get a sense that the couple is in agreement about how to solve the problem (regardless of the size of the problem), the couple gets a low score on this code. Some couples will spend most of the discussion discussing the nature of the problem, rather than how to solve the problem. Again, these couples will score low in terms of agreement about how to solve the problem, unless you get a sense that they are in agreement.

Range of Scale

0 - Very Low. No agreement about how to solve the problem (because the couple disagrees or because how to solve the problem is not addressed) OR both members of the dyad clearly want the other person to change his/her behavior/thoughts.

1 - Low. There is low agreement about how to solve the problem (e.g., the partner has quite a few different thoughts about how to solve the issue). At this level the couple disagrees about the major points about how to solve the topic, but agrees about a few mild points surrounding the topic.

2 - Moderate. At this level there is slightly more disagreement than agreement about how to solve the problem. The couple might disagree about how to solve the problem over all, but agree on the tangential aspects of how to solve the problem.

3 - Moderately High. At this level there is more agreement than disagreement about how to solve the problem. There a few points that the couple does not totally agree with his/her partner about, but for the most part he/she is in agreement with his/her partner.

4 - High. Almost total agreement about how to solve the problem. The couple sees eye to eye with his/her partner on how to solve the problem.

Appendix A.2

Teamwork

This dimension represents the sense that the couple is working together toward solving the problem. In low teamwork couples, progress is not being made on the topic. Low teamwork couples will often be disengaged, either individually throwing out ideas but not really getting anywhere as a couple, or one person dominating the conversation. A couple that is high in teamwork will be openly expressing and collaborating on ideas and problem solving. You get the sense that the couple is making progress on the topic being discussed.

Note that there are three main phases of problem solving: <u>Phase 1</u>: Building a foundation of mutual understanding. In this phase individuals are sharing their ideas and feelings about their own side of the disagreement. <u>Phase 2</u>: Making suggestions about how to solve the problem. At this phase individuals are offering suggestions and compromises about how to solve the issue.
<u>Phase 3</u>: Solution. At this phase the couple comes up with possible ways to resolve the issue.

<u>Range of Scale</u>

0 - Very Low. At this level the partners appear disengaged (not saying much, or saying a lot but not really hearing one another).

1 - Low. There are moments of sharing ideas, thoughts, and feelings, and building a foundation of mutual understanding (phase 1); however, these moments are infrequent and do not characterize the interaction OR there are some suggestions made about how to solve the problem (phase 2) but these suggestions feel disconnected, and the couple is doing this without a foundation of mutual understanding (phase 1).

2 - Moderate. For this level, there must be observable moments of building a foundation of mutual understanding. Some moderate progress is made in understanding one another's sides (phase 1).

3 - Moderately High. At this level the couple is building a foundation of mutual understanding. The partner's are each sharing their own ideas and feelings about how to solve the problem (phase 1). In addition, the individuals are making suggestions and compromises about how to solve the problem (phase 2).

4 - High. At this level the couple has built a foundation of mutual understanding (phase 1), made suggestions about how to solve the problem (phase 2) and comes up with at least one possible way to resolve the issue (phase 3) that would satisfy both partners.

Appendix A.3

Connection & Cohesiveness

Cohesiveness represents the sense of unity and closeness within a couple. A highly cohesive couple has a clear sense of connection, where even if the conversation is difficult, the intimate connection between the partners is never broken. Partners will appear to be comfortable and close and you get the sense that there is an emotional bond between the two. In low cohesiveness couples, partners will often appear disengaged from one another. The interaction will be marked by interpersonal distance, stiffness, awkwardness, and/or a lack of closeness.

When coding connection and cohesiveness keep in mind the following:
(1) Intimacy between the couple
(2) The partners' understanding of one another
(3) The amount of warmth between the partners
(4) The amount of caring expressed

<u>Range of Scale</u>

0 - Very Low. At this level, the partners appear disengaged from one another and do not appear to have a real sense of connection; interpersonal distance, aloofness, awkwardness, or stiffness may characterize the relationship. Little warmth or closeness is seen in most of the interaction. This rating may be given if the interaction is stilted and extremely awkward, as if the partners are strangers to one another.

1 - Low. For the most part, the couple does not seem very cohesive. There are moments of connection; however, these moments are infrequent and do not characterize the interaction.

2 - Moderate. For this code, there must be observable moments of closeness. However, there are times when the couple appears stiff, rather than cohesive. Moments of tension, distance and awkwardness may be observed. The main difference between a code of 2 and a code of 3 is that for a couple to achieve a code of 2, it should appear that the couple has moments of cohesion, but often does not.

3 - Moderately High. For a 3, it should appear that the couple basically appears to function as a unified system, but the depth of the closeness and unity is sometimes difficult to ascertain. Partners appear to be relatively close with each other. There is a sense of underlying connection in the couple, even when struggling with difficult issues. Difficult moments never reach a level that would be labeled not connected. The interaction may not always be smooth, but the unity between the partners is consistent.

4 - High. The strength of the connection is obvious. The interaction is likely to run very smoothly. They appear to be comfortable and close with each other. This rating should be given if the above are true, with the understanding that the interaction may not be always positive, given the difficult nature of the task.